A CONDUCTOR’S GUIDE TO AARON COPLAND’S EIGHT POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON FOR VOICE AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

by

THOMAS TAYLOR Dickey

(Under the Direction of Mark Cedel)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to identify the unifying elements of text, phrase structure, pitch content, tempos, meters, and orchestration that bind together Aaron Copland’s Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson as a structurally cohesive orchestral song cycle. This study provides a complete formal analysis of each of the eight songs. The poems are examined in terms of structure and perceived meaning of the text through the composer’s setting. The pitch content of both the vocal line and the orchestra is analyzed using referential collections. Chapter Three discusses the setting of each poem, noting relationships among the text, phrase structure, pitch content, tempos, meters, and orchestration within the song. The final chapter is devoted to observations made about the large-scale relationships that provide cyclic unity within each song and, more importantly, across the entire song cycle. Brief summaries of the lives of Aaron Copland and Emily Dickinson, as well as the compositional background of the song cycle, precede the detailed analysis of Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson.

INDEX WORDS: Aaron Copland, Emily Dickinson, Conductor’s Guide, Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson
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May 2010
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this document is to identify the unifying elements of text, phrase structure, pitch content, tempos, meters, and orchestration that bind together Aaron Copland’s *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* as a structurally cohesive orchestral song cycle. The composer once noted, “The poems center about no single theme, but they treat of subject matter particularly close to Miss Dickinson: nature, death, life, eternity. Only two of the songs are related thematically, the sixth and eighth.”¹ I shall argue that there are many large-scale relationships both within each song and across the entire song cycle. This document focuses on the text, phrase structure, pitch content, tempos, meters, and orchestration. These compositional tools create a web of musical connections that bind the individual songs’ sections and create meaningful associations with the text throughout Copland’s orchestral song cycle.

Although this document will be written from a conductor’s perspective, the analyses could be useful to singers and orchestral musicians, as well. The study will provide a complete formal analysis of each of the eight songs. The poems will be examined in terms of structure and perceived meaning of the text through the composer’s setting. The pitch content of both the vocal line and the orchestra will be analyzed using referential collections, rather than describing the music in terms of diatonic idioms, bitonality, or polytonality, as has been argued by other music analysts.² The third chapter will discuss the settings of the poems, noting relationships

among the text, phrase structure, pitch content, tempos, meters, and orchestration within the song. The final chapter will be devoted to observations made about the large-scale relationships that provide cyclic unity within each song and, more importantly, across the entire song cycle. Brief summaries of the lives of Aaron Copland and Emily Dickinson, as well as the compositional background of the song cycle, will precede the detailed analysis of *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

**Need for the Study**

In 1950, Copland published a setting of twelve poems of Emily Dickinson for soprano and piano. Between 1958 and 1970, he arranged some of those songs for voice and chamber orchestra and published them as a freestanding set. Although several vocalists and music theorists have written on Copland’s original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* for voice and piano, no comprehensive study of the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* has been published. The majority of the poems have never been discussed in detail, especially from a conductor’s perspective. A detailed analysis of the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* that provides a historical framework of the composer and poet, a complete formal analysis of the song cycle using referential collections, and a thorough examination of Copland’s uses of orchestration, tempos, and meters will indicate different levels of compositional unity within and across the song cycle. An analysis of this nature may encourage conductors to program this work more often, helping Copland’s orchestral song cycle achieve a permanent place in the canon of twentieth-century orchestral song repertoire.

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\(^2\)Many analyses of Copland’s music make only passing references to tonal centers and to the function of tonal changes. Using referential collections is useful in analyzing Copland’s music because its themes and sections have tonics. More importantly, most large-scale formal divisions in Copland’s music are supported by a change of tonic. That Copland reinforces thematic and textural contrasts by shifts in tonics suggests that tonal centers (and referential collections, consequently) play an important role in his music. This also suggests that there may be large-scale relationships in Copland’s music between referential collections, formal divisions, and other musical components, such as orchestration, tempos, and meters.
Delimitations

This study will not be a performer’s (i.e. singer’s and orchestral musicians’) guide to Copland’s *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Issues related to vocal production, suggested bowings, alternate fingerings, and alternative orchestrations will not be addressed. There will be no suggestions about how a conductor should prepare, rehearse, and perform the work. In addition, suggestions about additional repertoire that could be programmed on the same concert will not be made. This document will not provide a discography of the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* or the original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* for voice and piano.

There will be no speculation as to why Copland chose the eight songs that were orchestrated, instead of orchestrating all of the original twelve. The individuals to whom each song is dedicated and possible reasons why Copland did so will also not be addressed in this study.

---

3Bowings and fingerings are very personal issues for conductors and performers. Both bowings and fingerings are often adjusted to suit the needs and performance levels of the orchestra. Also, re-orchestrating music to suit a conductor’s needs and/or personal tastes is a practice that is not new. For many conductors, however, it is a very sensitive issue. Therefore, it, along with bowings and fingerings, will not be addressed in the study.

4Suggestions about rehearsal techniques will not be made because of the wide variety of amount of rehearsal time and number of rehearsals per concert that varies from orchestra to orchestra. Programming will not be addressed because outside restrictions, such as budgetary concerns, often determine what repertoire can be performed on a given concert.

5Aaron Copland dedicated each of the twelve poems to a different friend of his, many of whom were close to him and were also composers. In 1988, as part of a master’s thesis in American Studies, Helen Didriksen wrote a letter to each dedicatee who was still alive at the time. She also examined contemporary letters, written by some of the dedicatees, that are housed in the Copland files at his home in Peekskill, New York. In the end, she found that each dedicatee was vague as to why any particular song in the cycle was dedicated to him/her. No one indicated any feeling of specificity for the song dedicated. More importantly, at least for the sake of the study, no new information about compositional unity or information that may inform a performance of the song cycle was discovered. All the details of her research can be found in “Aaron Copland’s *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*: New Research on the Dedications,” *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 7-10.
**Definition of Terms**

Diatonic Collection: any transposition of the seven “white notes” of the piano. The collection’s interval normal form is (1221222).\(^6\) There are twelve diatonic referential collections. In this document, the collections will be assigned neutral labels based on their associated key signatures using “+” for sharps and “−” for flats. See the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Pitch classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-6})</td>
<td>C(_b), D(_b), E(_b), F, G(_b), A(_b), B(_b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-5})</td>
<td>C, D(_b), E(_b), F, G(_b), A(_b), B(_b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-4})</td>
<td>C, D(_b), E(_b), F, G, A(_b), B(_b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-3})</td>
<td>C, D, E(_b), F, G, A(_b), B(_b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-2})</td>
<td>C, D, E(_b), F, G, A, B(_b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{-1})</td>
<td>C, D, E, F, G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_0)</td>
<td>C, D, E, F, G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+1})</td>
<td>C, D, E, F(_#), G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+2})</td>
<td>C(<em>#), D, E, F(</em>#), G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+3})</td>
<td>C(<em>#), D, E, F(</em>#), G(_#), A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+4})</td>
<td>C(<em>#), D(</em>#), E, F(<em>#), G(</em>#), A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+5})</td>
<td>C(<em>#), D(</em>#), E, F(<em>#), G(</em>#), A(_#), B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIA(_{+6})</td>
<td>C(<em>#), D(</em>#), E(<em>#), F(</em>#), G(<em>#), A(</em>#), B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 – Diatonic Collections

Acoustic Collection: a collection of seven notes whose interval normal form is (1212222). There are twelve acoustic referential collections. In this document, the collections will be assigned neutral labels based on their associated key signatures using “+” for sharps and “–” for flats. See the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Pitch classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-6&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, E&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, F&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, G&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, A&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-5&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, D&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, E&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, F, G, A&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-4&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D, E&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, F, G, A&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-3&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, E&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, F, G, A, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D, E, F, G, A&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;-1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D, E&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;, F, G, A, B</td>
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<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;0&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D, E, F&lt;sup&gt;#&lt;/sup&gt;, G, A, B&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;+1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, D, E, F, G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;+2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C, D, E, F&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, G&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;+3&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, D&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, E, F&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, G, A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC&lt;sub&gt;+4&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>C&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, D, E, F&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, G&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, A&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, B</td>
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<td>C&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, D&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, E, F&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, G&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, A&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;, B&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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Figure 2 – Acoustic Collections
Methodology

The study will discuss the movements of the song cycle in the order in which they appear in the score. The following aspects will be included in the analysis of each movement: (1) structure and perceived meaning of the text through the composer’s setting; (2) phrase structure; (3) pitch content using referential collections; (4) tempos; (5) meters; (6) orchestration; and (7) relationships between the text and the way it is set to music.

The analysis of the songs will be preceded by: (1) a brief summary of the life of Aaron Copland, focusing on the 1950s and 1970s, and the location of the song cycles in the composer’s body of works; (2) a brief summary of the life of Emily Dickinson; and (3) a brief summary of the compositional background of the original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* for voice and piano and the eight poems of the original twelve that Copland later orchestrated.

According to the literature review, there is only one edition of the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*. It is published by Boosey & Hawkes and was copyrighted in 1978 by The Aaron Copland Fund for Music.
Organization of the Study

The study will be divided into four chapters as follows:

Chapter

1. Introduction

   Purpose of the Study

   Need for the Study

   Delimitations

   Definition of Terms

   Methodology

   Organization of the Study

   A Survey of the Related Literature

2. Historical Background

   Biography of the Composer

   Biography of the Poet

   Compositional Background of the Song Cycles

3. Analysis of the Songs

   I. Nature, the gentlest mother

   II. There came a wind like a bugle

   III. The world feels dusty

   IV. Heart, we will forget him

   V. Dear March, come in!

   VI. Sleep is supposed to be

   VII. Going to Heaven!
A Survey of the Related Literature

Thus far, there are numerous biographies of Aaron Copland and Emily Dickinson, as well as critical commentaries on Copland’s music and Dickinson’s poems. As this document is intended to be an analysis written from a conductor’s perspective, the primary source material will be the score to *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*. This work is published by Boosey & Hawkes and was copyrighted in 1978 by The Aaron Copland Fund for Music.\(^8\)

One of the most exhaustive and more recent Copland biographies is Howard Pollack’s *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*. As an elucidation on Copland’s background, beliefs, affiliations, and achievements, the narrative mixes two kinds of chapters. Some pursue themes over time, while others concentrate on describing and analyzing groups of

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Another useful compendium on Copland is Peter Dickinson’s *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews*. This book contains essays about Copland and his music that were contributed by pre-eminent scholars, such as Vivian Perlis, Howard Pollack, Larry Starr, Stephen Banfield, William Brooks, Mark DeVoto, David Schiff, and Arnold Whittall, among others. This book stands out from others like it because of the transcriptions of two previously unpublished interviews that Copland gave to Peter Dickinson at Keele University in 1976. In these interviews, the reader gains personal insights about Copland’s compositional processes and creative outlets.\(^9\)

Copland’s song cycle has received much analytic attention relative to many of his other compositions. It is an object of several theses and dissertations, chief of which is that by Robert Daugherty. Although Daugherty’s dissertation concerns large-scale relationships within and across the original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*, the insights and analytical commentaries that he provides will be useful for this study on the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*.\(^11\)

In his 2002 monograph on the twelve songs, Larry Starr considers the songs individually, as well as their cyclical interrelationships. Starr attempts to address Copland’s approach to pitch centricity through a discussion of specific musical details. It is important to note that Starr devotes a chapter of his monograph to the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* and that the aspects of cyclic unity to which he points are derived more from the text of the poems. In fact, he specifically states, “There seems to be no consensus on the matter of just how the Dickinson


song actually function as a cycle or even if they do so in any but the broadest sense of that term.”¹² This document will build on the work of these scholars, among others, and seek cyclic unity both within individual songs and across the entire song cycle by means of observations concerning referential collections, phrase analysis, meter, tempo, and orchestration.

Not surprisingly, several of the master’s theses and doctoral dissertations that examine the original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* are written from a vocalist’s perspective. Instead of focusing on pitch content and phrase structure, more attention is given to poetry analysis and text painting. None of the analyses addresses relationships among pitch content, phrase structure, text, tempos, meters, and orchestration. It is presumed that this document will be the first analysis to examine large-scale relationships within and across the song cycle.

Because the song cycle is such a major addition to the American art song literature, and by a composer who previously had been known mostly for his instrumental works, it attracted a great deal of comment in print during the dozen years that followed its publication. Harsh remarks, such as Hans Nathan’s judgment of “unconvincing text interpretation”¹³ and Joseph Kerman’s dissatisfaction with some of the chord construction¹⁴, were the exceptions. Most of the critical opinions aligned with William Flanagan’s citing of the work as “probably the most important single contribution toward an American art song literature that we have to date.” He also praised its surpassing originality, varied emotional range, and a “vocal-instrumental fusion which […] is one of the most satisfactory in any contemporary music.”¹⁵


Approximately nine articles concern Copland’s original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Most of these articles are very brief and have to do with the ways that the song cycle was perceived by critics and audiences. The analytical commentaries offered are neither exhaustive nor detailed, especially in terms of phrase structure and pitch content. These early criticisms leave much to be desired because they were published before the publication of the majority of criticism on Emily Dickinson’s poetry. An example of this can be seen in the remarks of Irving Fine: “The text for the songs have been selected at random. The sequence into which Copland has arranged them is cyclical in the broadest sense only. […] Similarly in the music, numbers nine and twelve are thematically related. Beyond this, the composer employs none of the customary cyclical devices that are supposed to guarantee musical unity.”\(^{16}\)

Edited by Thomas H. Johnson and published in 1960, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* is the first critical edition of her poetry.\(^{17}\) Also published in 1960 was the first widely recognized book that attempts criticism of Dickinson’s works as a whole, Charles R. Anderson’s *Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise*.\(^{18}\) Because they precede the Dickinson studies, early criticisms of the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* do not show that Copland had a very clear understanding of Dickinson’s poetry when he wrote his song cycles.

A more contemporary article is Beverly Soll’s and Ann Dorr’s “Cyclical Implications in Aaron Copland’s *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*.” The authors provide background information on the song cycle; analytical commentaries about the textual and musical

\(^{16}\)Irving Fine, “*Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson,*” *Notes*, Second Series 11, no. 1 (December 1953): 159.


organization of the cycle; descriptions of compositional techniques and devices; and observations about relationships between cyclical structure and employment of compositional techniques and devices. Rhythmic patterns, melodic contours in the vocal part, and intervallic relationships drive their analysis.19

The eight songs that Copland later orchestrated attracted some attention in print, as well. In his two-page article “Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson,” Kevin Stephens indicates that Copland’s orchestral song cycle has not secured a permanent place in the mainstream of twentieth-century repertoire. Instead of offering analytical commentary, Stephens describes the nature of the concert on which the song cycle was performed. He praises the singer’s performance and notes that he hopes that this work will be performed more frequently one day.20

Shortly after the premiere of the orchestral song cycle, a new article by Douglas Young appeared. He notes the rarity of song cycles in America, while praising Copland’s ability in the genre. Ironically, however, he states, “the poems have a metaphysical intensity which the songs do not encompass.”21


CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Biography of the Composer

There are vast amounts of biographies and scholarly writings on Aaron Copland. Therefore, only biographical information that relates to the Dickinson songs is necessary. Without doubt, Aaron Copland (1900-1990) is one of the twentieth century’s most popular and distinguished composers. His ballets *Rodeo*, *Appalachian Spring*, and *Billy the Kid* are as admired by music lovers as his more abstract works are respected by scholars. He played a central role in helping to create a distinctive American presence in classical music. Born in Brooklyn, Copland’s parents, who were Russian Jewish immigrants, neither discouraged nor encouraged music to their five children. According to the composer, “Music as an art was a discovery I made by myself.”22 His sister Laurine first taught him how to play the piano, before his parents agreed to pay for lessons with a professional teacher. Not surprisingly, Copland decided to concentrate exclusively on music after graduating from high school, rather than seek a college education. In 1921, he enrolled in the American Conservatory of Music, a new summer school located at Fontainebleau, France, as one of the first of many Americans to study composition with Nadia Boulanger. His teacher for the next three years, Boulanger proved to be one of the major influences in Copland’s life, not only as a pedagogue but also as someone who introduced him to some of the most outstanding musical figures of the time.

Although he had been drawn to Debussy and Ravel, studied the music of Stravinsky, and once expressed an admiration of Fauré, he became preoccupied with seeking an American

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musical identity. Speaking about himself and his fellow classmates, Copland once noted, “We wanted to find a music that would speak of universal things in the vernacular of American speech rhythms […] music with a largeness of utterance wholly representative of the country that Whitman had envisaged.”23 After his return to the United States at the end of the 1920s, he began to produce works that left no one in doubt that American composers could write music equal to that of their European contemporaries.

During the 1930s and 1940s, reaching as many Americans as possible through radio, cinema, and phonographs occupied Copland’s time and energies. This era saw an abandoning of musical complexities in favor of folk-influenced melodies and rhythms. By 1950, the year during which he wrote Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson, Copland’s search for an American musical aesthetic had been fulfilled. Three defining characteristics of this new synthesis are leaping melodic lines, diatonic dissonances, and rhythmic ingenuity. One could argue that Copland’s harmonic vocabulary is the crux of this new aesthetic, as evidenced in Joann Skowronski’s belief that “Copland was the first serious composer to establish tonalities that are identified as distinctly American.”24

Regarded as a key architect of twentieth-century American music, his output for solo voice is quite small. Copland composed music for solo voice at various times during his career, but it was not until 1950 that he wrote a major vocal work. He left seven unpublished vocal works: After Antwerp (1917); Melancholy (1917); Spurned Love (1917); Music I heard (1920); Chanson (1921); Reconnaissance (1921); and Jazz Song (c.1924). In addition to the Dickinson


songs, Copland wrote the following thirteen works for solo voice and/or solo voice and orchestra: *Three Songs* (1918): “My heart is in the east, A Summer Vacation,” “Night,” and “Simone”; *Old Poem* (1920); *Pastorale* (1921); *Alone* (1922); *As it fell upon a day* (1923); *Poet’s Song* (1927); *Vocalise* (1928); *We’ve Come* (1938); “Song of the Guerrillas” (1943) from *The North Star; Old American Songs I* (arr.1950); *Old American Songs II* (arr. 1952); *Dirge in Woods* (1954); and “Laurie’s Song” (1954) from *The Tender Land. 25

**Biography of the Poet**

Wide varieties of studies detailing the life of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) are now available. Thus, only a few comments about her life and her writing style are necessary. Suffice it to say, Emily Dickinson has been regarded as one of the greatest American poets of the nineteenth century and as one of the greatest American female poets. She was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, where she spent most of her life, except for a brief period away at school. After a seemingly normal upbringing, she experienced a severe emotional crisis in her twenties that resulted in her self-imposed seclusion in her home. She remained a recluse until her death at the age of fifty-five.

Only a few of her over one thousand poems were published during her lifetime. In 1950, Harvard University purchased all available manuscripts and publishing rights from the Dickinson family. Then, in 1951, Thomas H. Johnson edited the complete poems and letters in three volumes. Because of these critical editions being made publically available for the first time, the magnitude of Emily Dickinson’s work and her originality of thought were finally made known. Since then, Dickinson’s poems have had a profound influence on many American composers,

primarily because “their direct expression and brevity make them eminently suitable for musical setting.”

Dickinson’s poems may be viewed as records of her thoughts on various subjects, namely life, death, love, and nature, the sources of which were the Bible and the phenomena of Nature. As she closed herself off from the world, she developed a special kinship with flowers, trees, and autumn colors that she was never able to develop with human beings. Some of her poems display a child-like wonder towards Nature. Others bear traces of foreboding and respect for Nature’s ominous power. According to Conrad Aiken, “Her real reverence was reserved for Nature which seemed to her a more manifest and more beautiful evidence of Divine Will than creeds and churches.”

Death is a central theme in many writings by other poets of comparable stature. In her poems, Emily Dickinson did so to an unusually high degree, drawing death into the texture in over five hundred of poems. Her poems on death typically fall into one of three categories: those describing the physical demise of the body; those that muse upon death or depict the face and form of the body on which the gazer’s attention is fixed; and elegies and epitaphs remembering friends or loved ones. The deaths of her parents and of her close friends triggered Dickinson’s obsession with death.

Her own struggles with religion are the subject of many of Dickinson’s poems. Throughout most of her life, she was always trying to decide whether she truly believed in the


Puritanical tenets of Heaven and Hell, of eternal life, and of salvation through prayer and religious ceremonies. Michael Daugherty states Dickinson’s position well: “She saw nature as the display of God’s creations and the real center of religion. Death was the thing which claimed those she loved most and led her to contemplate immortality. With immortality, she attacked the question of why humans must suffer death and the idea of a possible redemption after death. Finally, she asked about life itself: what value did it have when death was always so imminent?”

In terms of compositional style and technique, Dickinson’s poems abound with action verbs, run-on sentences, and unorthodox punctuation. At times, the poetry has an elusive and mysterious quality. Sometimes, the poems display a childlike, simple, and straightforward approach to the subject matter. The poems are in free verse and contain few rhyming lines. In the poems chosen by Copland, one finds all the above-mentioned characteristics. It must be noted that the poems chosen by Copland for these settings cover a twenty-five-year span of Emily Dickinson’s life, the earliest dating from 1858 and the latest from 1883. The texts are all drawn from the Collected Poems, which was edited in 1937 by Bianchi and Hampson. Also worthy of mention is the fact that Emily Dickinson did not provide titles for her poems. Over the years, it has become customary to take the opening line as the title. Aaron Copland adopted this practice, except for the last song (“Because I would not stop for Death”) which is called “The Chariot.”

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29 Daugherty, 17.


31 Butterworth, 126-7.
Compositional Background of the Song Cycles

Aaron Copland began work on what would become the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* in March of 1949. They were the first works the composer had written for solo voice and piano since 1928. These twelve songs were composed in a quiet village known as Sneden’s Landing, New York, about three quarters of an hour from New York City. According to Arnold Dorbin, Ding Dong House was the house’s nickname, for some unknown reason. It had long been a favorite of writers and theater people. Although time (and geography, to an extent) separated Aaron Copland and Emily Dickinson, Copland became quite familiar with Dickinson’s life and surroundings before he set out to compose music to her poems. In an interview in 1976 with Peter Dickinson that took place after a recital at the Centre for American Music at the Music Department, University of Keele, Staffordshire, England, the composer remarked:

I’d read a lot about Emily Dickinson before I set any of the poems. I visited her house—by chance I was in the area—in Amherst, Massachusetts. I stood in the room where she was supposed to have lived for I don’t know how many years without leaving. Apparently that’s not quite true. More recent biographers have discovered she did leave the room—on occasions! (Laughter) But I was obviously very taken with the poetry. It was a question of which of the poems attracted me most and seemed most sympathetic to musical treatment.

Copland claims to have composed eleven of the twelve songs by the end of 1949. In a letter to Irving Fine from about this time, he describes the cycle as completed “except for a fast song in the middle.” In the previously mentioned interview with Peter Dickinson, the composer also remarked, “I had no idea that I was going to write twelve songs. […] After I got

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33 *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews*, 193.

to number twelve, I decided that was about enough and so I stopped! (Laughter)"\textsuperscript{35} The twelve Dickinson songs were completed by March 1950 and they were first performed in New York City by Alice Howland and the composer at Columbia University’s Sixth Annual Festival of Contemporary American Music at the McMillin Academic Theatre on May 18, 1950. In a letter to Leonard Bernstein, dated May 27, 1950, Copland writes: “[…] I’ve just premiered a song cycle of twelve songs lasting thirty minutes at the Columbia Festival. The experts were pleased; but I was roasted in the press, especially by J.D. Bohm (‘cerebral,’ ‘no feeling,’ etc.). In fact, the reviews were so bad that I decided I must have written a better cycle than I had realized. Well, you shall see for yourself in Tanglewood.”\textsuperscript{36}

In terms of the compositional process, no commentary exists about how Copland chose the particular poems that he did or what persuaded him to set them in any particular order. The composer and his biographers have made much of the fact that the order of the songs in the cycle was accomplished after all the songs had been composed.\textsuperscript{37} Many other aspects of the song cycle remain a mystery, as well. For example, Copland offered no insight as to the ways that he achieved musical and textual unity. According to Beverly Soll and Ann Dorr, “Copland himself made no attempt to explain the cycle’s organization, except to acknowledge readily apparent thematic similarities between the seventh and twelfth songs.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35}Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews, 190.

\textsuperscript{36}The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland, edited by Elizabeth B. Crist and Wayne Shirley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 201.

\textsuperscript{37}Arranging the order of songs in a cycle after their completion is a time-honored procedure that dates back to the song cycles of Schubert and Schumann.

\textsuperscript{38}Soll and Dorr, 100.
A typical performance time of the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson for High Voice and Piano* is twenty-eight minutes. The titles of the songs are:

I. Nature, the gentlest mother
II. There came a wind like a bugle
III. Why do they shut me out of Heaven?
IV. The world feels dusty
V. Heart, we will forget him
VI. Dear March, come in!
VII. Sleep is supposed to be
VIII. When they come back
IX. I felt a funeral in my brain
X. I’ve heard an organ talk sometimes
XI. Going to Heaven!
XII. The Chariot

Between 1958 and 1970, Copland orchestrated eight songs from the cycle (numbers 1, 2, 4-7, 11, and 12) for voice and a chamber orchestra. He suggests a total of less than forty musicians, consisting of flute (alternating with piccolo in “Going to Heaven!”), oboe, E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinet (alternating with clarinet in A), bassoon, horn in F, trumpet in C, trombone, harp, and a small complement of strings. The orchestral version was first performed in a concert in honor of the composer’s seventieth birthday, given by the Juilliard School of Music on November 14, 1970, at Alice Tully Hall in New York City. Gwendolyn Killebrew sang the work with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the Juilliard Orchestra. According to

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39 The score indicates a “preferred string complement” of 10-8-6-4-2; however, a reduced string section of 8-6-4-3-2 is possible, as well.
Howard Pollack, “The chamber orchestration helps clarify the music’s contrapuntal structure and
dramatize its text painting; the colorful “Nature, the Gentlest Mother,” for instance, more fully
than the original, reveals Copland as a composer of woodlands, not only of prairies and
deserts.” Additional comments and observations about orchestration will be made in the
analysis below.

Before proceeding to the analysis, three final remarks must be made. In January of 1978,
Ruth Friedberg interviewed Carol Mayo, who was at that time a voice professor at Baylor
University and who had recently performed the full cycle with Copland as accompanist.
According to Mayo, Copland once noted that a woman should perform the cycle, with the poems
interpreted as Emily Dickinson would have interpreted them: “with a twinkle in the eye and a
very knowing manner.” He considered a mezzo-soprano voice to be the most appropriate and
preferred one that is capable of great drama. Through much of the cycle, he thought of the singer
as “talking the poetry.”

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40Pollack, 444-445.

41Ruth C. Friedberg, American Art Song and American Poetry. Vol. 1, America Comes of Age (Metuchen,
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF THE SONGS

I. Nature, the gentlest mother

Quite possibly the favorite image of Emily Dickinson comes from the more than five hundred poems that she wrote on the subject of nature, many of which affirm “the sheer joy and the appreciation that she feels in the variety and spectacle of nature.”

Nature, the gentlest mother,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest, —
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill
By traveler is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,
A summer afternoon, —
Her household, her assembly;
And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles
Incites the timid prayer
Of the minutest cricket,
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep
She turns as long away
As will suffice to light her lamps;
Then, bending from the sky,

With infinite affection
And infiniter care,
Her golden finger on her lip,
Wills silence everywhere.

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Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

The first song is a setting of “Nature, the gentlest mother.” Of the four categories of subject matter found in Emily Dickinson’s poetry, this song clearly fits into the category of nature. The poem is comprised of six four-line stanzas. The first two stanzas show Mother Nature patiently tending her wayward children: a squirrel and a bird. The next two stanzas praise her beauty in conversation, her housekeeping skills, and the sound of her voice. The final two stanzas return to Mother Nature’s treatment of her children. Copland uses the singer and orchestra to delineate the characters in the poem. While the vocal line carries the warm, smooth, slower-moving contours of Mother Nature, the orchestral counterpoint uses pictorial images to suggest the birds, squirrels, and crickets of her domain.

Phrase Structure

At just under four minutes, the first song is the longest song in the cycle. A formal label that summarizes the architecture of this movement is Introduction-A-B-A’. An exception rather than the rule among the other Dickinson settings, the song’s tripartite structure provides formal orientation in a lengthy piece and adds to its overall accessibility. The nine-measure introduction, featuring thirty-second notes and grace notes, musically suggests woodland stirrings and birdcalls, beautifully setting the pastoral mood of the song. The three sections of music after the introduction each utilize two of Dickinson’s six stanzas. In the first section (mm.10-27), calm in nature, the first stanza’s text is set in two five-measure phrases of music that move slowly and quietly. The text for the second stanza, set in two four-measure phrases, speaks of the sensitivity and responsibilities of Mother Nature to her offspring, as the orchestral accompaniment becomes more rhythmically active.
The middle section (mm.28-44) pictures Mother Nature hurrying about her household. It begins with three measures of music, for orchestra only, that lead to several phrases that are conversational in nature. The third and fourth stanzas, both set in seven-measure phrases, describe the daily life of Nature. Shorter rhythmic values and a quickly moving accompaniment help depict the hustle and bustle of the day. The last five measures of this section describe the “unworthy flower” with which Mother Nature must contend. After the music becomes progressively more excited, there is an abrupt pause in m.44, calling for a sudden change of mood to one of repose.

The final section (mm.45-68), once again calm and placid, begins similarly to the A section. The composer uses nine measures of music to set the text of fifth stanza (mm.45-53). As the sixth stanza describes the whole universe sleeping in the silence that was willed by Mother Nature (mm.54-68), Copland lengthens the phrases and rhythmically slows down the music. In addition, the composer repeats the last line of text, “Wills silence everywhere.” Although it reinforces the tranquil mood of the text and music, Copland’s straying away from Dickinson’s original words is a very shocking thing to do; yet, at the same time, this simple repetition could go unnoticed by the listener, if one were not aware of the text of the poem. According to Larry Starr, “Copland’s ending opens up vistas of seemingly limitless space. […] The repetition of Dickinson’s concluding line here is a musical master stroke—the more so since Copland utilizes such repetition sparingly in the cycle as a whole and nowhere else in this first song—and it creates an ending both locally expressive and structurally significant.”

The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “Nature, the gentlest mother.”

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43Starr, 23.
Pitch Content

Throughout this song and the other seven songs that will be discussed below, tonal centers and the function of tonal changes are important. Very often, a change of tonic supports large-scale formal divisions in the music. In the case of “Nature, the gentlest mother,” the two most important referential collections are DIA.2 and DIA.3. DIA0, DIA.1, DIA.4, DIA.5, DIA.6, and DIA.1 are employed, as well. More specifically, the nine-measure introduction is comprised of DIA.3 (mm.1-5) and DIA.2 (mm.6-9). In the A section, the collections DIA.2 (mm.10-16) and DIA.3 (mm.17-21) predominate. In the transitional measures that lead to the B section (mm.22-27), the following collections are used: DIA.5 (mm.22-23), DIA.6 (mm.24-25), DIA0 (m.26), and DIA.1 (m.27).

As previously noted, the text and rhythms of the B section are more energetic and active. One can say the same about the tonalities. Simply put, the pitch content breakdown of the B section is as follows: DIA.1 (mm.28-31), DIA.3 (mm.32-33), DIA.1 (mm.34-35), DIA.4 (m.36), DIA.6 (m.37), DIA.3 (m.38), DIA.6 (m.39), and DIA.5 (mm.40-44).

Just as the mood and text of the final section is once again calm, so too are the changes in tonal centers. Throughout the A’ section, Copland employs four tonal areas: DIA.3 (mm.45-53), DIA.4 (mm.54-55), DIA.6 (mm.56-57), and DIA.2 (mm.58-68). The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “Nature, the gentlest mother.”
A more useful way of utilizing this information is to examine the relationships between formal divisions and changes of tonics. As previously mentioned, the introduction suggests the importance of the DIA-2 and DIA-3 collections. The A section employs these same two collections. Before formally articulating the B section by a shift to a new tonal center, Copland uses the DIA-5, DIA-6, DIA_0, and DIA_{+1} collections as a means of “modulating.” The collections that define the B section are DIA_{-1}, DIA_{-3}, DIA_{+1}, DIA_{-4}, and DIA_{-6}. The DIA_{-5} collection, functioning like a pedal point, is a retransition to the A’ section. Not surprisingly, the arrival of the A’ section is supported by a return to the DIA-2 and DIA-3 collections that predominate the first A section and serve as the most important collections of the entire song. The mutual reinforcement of large-scale pitch organization, form, and text lends an additional sense of internal coherence to this song.

**Tempo**

The use of various tempos is a device that Copland uses to reinforce both the mood of the text and the structural divisions of the music. The first nine measures, marked “Quite slow” and
“espressivo,” establish the tranquil atmosphere of the first song. At m.10, the composer indicates “freely” in the vocal part. This, coupled with the long, sustained notes in the orchestra, creates a recitation-like feeling. As the text continues to describe Mother Nature’s wayward children, tempo indications such as “moving forward” and “hold back” show the composer’s desire for flexibility of movement.

The B section’s faster tempo and increased rhythmic activity parallel the subject matter of the text. Here, the conversation is lively with chatter and the indications of “Faster” and “more brightly” reinforce this. At the end of the retransition to the A’ section, a molto ritardando heightens the drama of the moment and sets up the tranquil mood that is soon to follow. The A’ section contains the same flexible tempo indications that are used in the A section. A particularly poignant moment occurs between mm.61-68, where Copland achieves a ritardando by means of longer note values. This is accompanied by reduced instrumentation and a lengthy diminuendo. Ruth Friedberg best summarizes the role of tempo in this song when she notes: “Copland’s thickly sprinkled instructions for alterations in tempo […] indicate his sensitivity to the changing mood of the text and take full advantage of the greater flexibility of musical rhythm over its poetic counterpart.”

Meter

Throughout “Nature, the gentlest mother,” the voice and orchestra, containing many ties over bar lines, weave through 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4 meters at irregular periods, giving a fluidity of movement. Because the changes in meter do not always coincide with the beginning of phrases and formal elements, there is a feeling of ceaseless motion with little repose. Particularly in the B section, the frequent changing of meters reinforces the mood of unpredictability. The cleverest

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44Friedberg, 122.
use of meter in this song occurs in the last eight measures. As the text describes the “silence everywhere” (mm.61-64), a written out ritardando begins. With the added repetition of “Wills silence everywhere” (mm.65-68), Copland employs, for the first time in the song, 5/4 and 3/2 meters. These unexpected meters completely remove all sensation of pulse and time, a perfect musical depiction of Mother Nature’s wayward children silently sleeping.

**Orchestration**

Although a chamber orchestra accompanies the singer, Copland has at his disposal a widely varying timbral pallet. In the introduction, the flute, oboe, and clarinets paint a bucolic portrait of what is about to come. Their musical materials, based on thirty-second notes and grace notes, depict birds in the forest. At the entrance of the voice in m.10, octave harmonics in the strings, supported by wide octaves in the harp, create a very stark atmosphere. As the text of the second stanza describes the forest and those living in it, the orchestration begins to thicken because of the birdcalls in the woodwinds, the moving quarter notes in the strings, and the melodic counterpoint in the horn.45

The most dramatic moment in the music occurs at the end of the B section. This is the first instance in the song cycle in which the entire orchestra is employed. In addition to chromaticism, loud dynamics, heavy accents, and tightly spaced chords in the upper registers of all the instruments reinforce the tension. Another noteworthy moment in this song occurs in the last eight measures. As the instrumentation thins, note values lengthen, and dynamics become softer, Copland calls for mutes in the horn, trumpet, and trombone parts, accompanied by the

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45Several composers of Western music have used the horn when trying to depict nature, scenes in the forest, hunting scenes, etc. Two composers who may come to the listener’s mind are Franz Joseph Haydn, especially his Symphony No. 73 in D Major (“The Hunt”), and Johannes Brahms.
indication “dolcissimo.” This supports the image of Mother Nature’s creatures falling asleep as another day turns into night. (See Musical Example No. 1.)

**Relationships between Text and Music**

Throughout “Nature, the gentlest mother,” there is a very strong relationship between the text and the way that Copland sets it. His choice of a three-part structure corresponds to organizational elements derived from the poem. Although the poem is divided into three units of two stanzas each and the musical form directly supports these divisions, a plausible explanation for Copland’s use of this musical pattern is found in the last four stanzas of the poem. The musical form supplements the implications inherent in the poetry. In addition, the composer masterfully uses the instruments of the orchestra to depict the various creatures in the forest and the voice to describe Mother Nature. Similar to the way that the poet “avoids writing a merely traditional nature poem by finding new ways to characterize the expected phenomena (‘too impetuous bird’ and ‘most unworthy flower’), so Copland utilizes his traditional musical materials here in unpredictable and expressive ways.”

**II. There came a wind like a bugle**

Although Emily Dickinson tended to treat storms casually, she often included “suggestions of terror, awe, and destruction.” Images of cosmic chaos seem to permeate “There came a wind like a bugle.”

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46 Starr, 54.
47 Ferlazzo, 117.
There came a wind like a bugle;
It quivered through the grass,
And a green chill upon the heat
So ominous did pass
We barred the windows and the doors

As from an emerald ghost;
The doom’s electric moccasin
That very instant passed.
On a strange mob of panting trees,
And fences fled away,

And rivers where the houses ran
The living looked that day.
The bell within the steeple wild
The flying tidings whirled.
How much can come and much can go,
And yet abide the world!

Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

The nature imagery of “There came a wind like a bugle” is more complicated than that in “Nature, the gentlest mother.” In terms of structure, the poem consists of three stanzas, two with five lines and one with six lines, respectively. The personification of objects affected by the storm is of great interest. For example, the speaker mentions “panting trees,” fences that fled away, etc. The poem describes a violent thunderstorm in language that sometimes suggests the ultimate destruction of the world. Copland’s musical setting attempts to create the same kind of chaos and instability seen in the poem. The overall tempo is quite fast. The composer frequently uses repetitive and sequential figures to depict the wind and rain. The music’s high levels of dissonance and chromaticism produce harmonic instability. Copland evokes lighting and thunder by means of loud dynamics with frequent sforzando accents.

Phrase Structure

This song shows a strikingly different aspect of nature. According to Sharon Mabry, “The gentleness and serenity of the first poem has been replaced by a mysterious, alien,
destructive power which ravages land and people.”⁴⁸ The music’s form and phrase structure clearly reflect this. Whereas “Nature, the gentlest mother” is divided into well-balanced sections of approximately equal length, this song is divided into four sections of unequal length and very contrasting characters. There are two ways of viewing this song’s architecture. One way, using the label A-B-C-D, suggests the through-composed quality of the piece. Another possibility, A-B-C-A’, points to the fact that a small amount of thematic material returns towards the very end of the last section.

An approximate performance time of this song is one-and-a-half minutes, making it one of the shortest songs in the cycle. The A section begins with a three-measure introduction that is comprised of a quickly moving A-major scale played in ninths, a musical depiction of a gust of wind coming up “like a bugle.” This expansive opening foreshadows the ominous and violent quality of the poem. The sections of music after this large burst of energy each utilize different combinations of lines of text. In the first section (mm.69-85), agitated in nature, the first four lines describe the awesome powers of nature and are set in three phrases of music: six measures, five measures, and six measures, respectively.

The B section (mm.86-97) is as equally accented and emphatic as the A section. Here, Lines 5 through 8 are set in three groups of four-measure phrases. Copland uses dissonant chords and trills alongside a text that portrays violence and fear, specifically the poet’s reactions to the powerful storm, as windows and doors are barred. The C section (mm.98-112) is the climax of the song, both in terms of text and music. The text of Lines 9 through 14 is set in phrases of six measures, five measures, and four measures. Although there are “panting trees,”

fences that fled away, and running houses, through all this chaos, the steeple bell is still heard. The first four measures of the D/A’ section (mm.113-126) see a return of the expansive scalar figure that begins the song. Set in one phrase of four measures and one phrase of six measures, Lines 15 and 16 seem to be reflections on the storm, noting “How much can come and how much can go.” In the end, there is hope, suggesting a survival of the Day of Judgment. The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “There came a wind like a bugle.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D/A’ Section</th>
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<td>Phrase Length</td>
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<td>4+4+4</td>
<td>6+5+4</td>
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<td>Subphrase Length</td>
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<td>(2+2)+(2+2)+(2+2)</td>
<td>(4+2)+(3+2)+(2+2)</td>
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<td>Measure Numbers</td>
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<td>86-97</td>
<td>98-112</td>
<td>113-126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>15-16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 – Phrase Structure of “There came a wind like a bugle”

**Pitch Content**

Just as “There came a wind like a bugle” is nearly the exact opposite of “Nature, the gentlest mother” in terms of subject matter, form, and phrase structure, the same can be said about pitch content. In this song, the two most important referential collections are DIA₃ and DIA₄. The pitch content does not fit neatly into any one referential collection in several measures. More specifically, the first six measures are comprised of DIA₃. Beginning in m.75 and continuing through m.85, there are many accidentals in the orchestral accompaniment. While they add to the musical tension and reflect the mood of the text, these accidentals make it
difficult to classify the pitch content of the singer and orchestra using only one referential collection.

In the B section, although clearly broken down into three groups of four-measure phrases, the pitch content is chromatically saturated and harmonically unstable. Copland uses several chromatically altered notes in both the singer’s and orchestral parts to reinforce the frantic quality of the music. The DIA+3 collection reappears in the C section, with occasional accidentals in the orchestral accompaniment. In the D section, a new referential collection is employed: DIA+4. The appearance of this collection reflects the return of the gusting wind figure that begins this song. It also musically suggests that the poet did in fact survive the storm. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “There came a wind like a bugle.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D/A’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>6+5+6</td>
<td>4+4+4</td>
<td>6+5+4</td>
<td>4+4+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>(3+3)+(3+2) + (4+2)</td>
<td>(2+2)+(2+2) + (2+2)</td>
<td>(4+2)+(3+2) + (2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2)+(2+2)+(4+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential Collections</td>
<td>DIA+3</td>
<td>Harmonic Instability</td>
<td>DIA+3</td>
<td>DIA+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>69-85</td>
<td>86-97</td>
<td>98-112</td>
<td>113-126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>15-16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 – Pitch Content of “There came a wind like a bugle”

This chart suggests that the composer uses pitch content in a slightly different way than in “Nature, the gentlest mother.” Although changes in referential collections support changes in the form, pitch content is used as a means of text painting, a compositional device that musically
depicts the images described in the poem. It also is important to observe that the boundaries of pitch content are blurred, just as the boundaries of phrases and poetic lines are, as well.

**Tempo**

The use of fast tempos is a device that Copland uses to reinforce the mood of the text and the structural divisions of the music. The first three measures, marked “Quite fast,” point to the ominous and violent quality of the music. In mm.72-74, the composer indicates “freely” in the vocal part. This allows the singer to pronounce the arrival of the wind. In m.75, there is a return to a faster tempo. The arrival of the B section in m.86 is reinforced by a tempo that is “somewhat slower.” It is prepared by a *ritardando* and a fermata marked “short.”

A few measures before the next section, there is a return to the initial tempo. As the music reaches its climax, Copland, oddly enough, indicates a slight pulling back of the tempo. The feeling of pulse is slowed down even more by the use of 6/8 meter in mm.104-112.\(^{49}\) There is no preparation in terms of tempo for the arrival of the D/A’ section. A return to the opening’s faster tempo highlights this formal division. The overall effect of Copland’s “Quite fast” tempo indications is that of a single-minded, breathless rush.

**Meter**

Nearly all measures in the A and B sections are in 2/4. There is one instance of 3/4 in m.96. Copland cleverly uses meter to add to the text painting in the C section. The use of 6/8, also marked “blurred,” is a musical illustration of the text “And rivers where the houses ran” and “The flying tidings whirled.” Throughout all the sections, Copland employs regular metric accents and an ongoing rhythmic drive.

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\(^{49}\)Because the eighth note remains constant, the unit of pulse (dotted quarter note) contains three divisions, instead of two, and sounds slower to the listener. This would not be the case, if the composer had indicated that the quarter note of the preceding section is equivalent to the dotted quarter note of the 6/8 section.
Orchestration

Throughout this very brief song, there are many moments of masterful orchestrations. As one may expect from the title, the three brass instruments figure prominently in this song, each being a musical representation of Gabriel’s bugle. The rapidly alternating sixteenth notes in the upper woodwinds and upper strings in mm.75-79 can be seen as a musical depiction of the wind quivering through the grass. Other specific images, such as trills in the bassoon, viola, cello, and bass parts in mm.91-92, possibly imitate the buzz of the “electric moccasin.” Ruth C. Friedberg sees the rapid, blurred fourths in the clarinets, violins, and violas in mm.104-112 as “reminiscent of Schubertian ‘river’ figures.” In mm.109-112, as the text describes “A bell within the steeple wild/The Flying tidings whirled,” the composer uses accented quarter notes in the horn and trombone parts to portray the booming bell in the church steeple. Mention also must be made about the use of a trombone glissando in mm.69-70 as part of the rising scalar figure, a musical suggestion of a rising gust of wind. Throughout most of the A, B, and C sections, the brass instruments are played with mutes. This piercing, metallic quality surely complements the musical chaos.

Relationships between Text and Music

In “There came a wind like a bugle,” the composer and poet destabilize the sentimental vision of nature. According to Dorothy Z. Baker, “[…] the silence imposed by the ‘gentlest mother’ is replaced by the din of a terrifying storm, and her divine order is supplanted by chaos.” To many listeners, this storm scene may be reminiscent of the storm movement of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 (“Pastoral”). Arguably, Copland’s song

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50 Friedberg, 122.

“shares a number of essential characteristics with that Beethoven movement: rapid tempo; employment of repetitive and sequential figures to suggest the actions of wind and rain; aggressive use of dissonance and chromaticism to produce harmonic instability, evoking lightning and thunder; and a tendency to utilize forte and fortissimo dynamic levels, with frequent (and sometimes sudden) sforzando accents.”

III. The world feels dusty

Being present at the bedside of a loved one about to die was considered a necessity and an honor by Emily Dickinson. “The world feels dusty” expresses her desire to be the person chosen to bring comfort during the final moments of a friend’s life.

The world feels dusty  
When we stop to die;  
We want the dew then,  
Honors taste dry.

Flags vex a dying face,  
But the least fan  
Stirred by a friend’s hand  
Cools like the rain.

Mine be the ministry  
When thy thirst comes,  
Dews of thyself to fetch  
And holy balms.

__________________________________________________

52 Starr, 57.

53 Ferlazzo, 44.

54 It must be noted that scholars now know that Lines 11 and 12 as they appear in the score are a misreading of Emily Dickinson’s original manuscript. According to Johnson’s The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, Lines 11 and 12 read “And Hybla Balms/Dews of Thessaly, to fetch.” Aaron Copland did not consider this an issue, primarily because this misreading does not affect the music. Larry Starr expounds on this in Chapter 4, “Poetic Text and Song Lyrics: The Issue of “Authenticity.”
Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

“The world feels dusty” is the first song in the cycle to consider death. Ending with a suggestion of love, Emily Dickinson expands on the idea of a dusty death with the image of dry honors. It is possible to view dust as “a Biblical symbol for man’s origin and his destiny.” At the same time, the word “dew” suggests one’s lifeblood, the moisture that separates the living from the dead. After two stanzas of dryness, there is a soothing image of rain, suggesting that the presence of a friend at the moment of death makes the entire tribulation endurable. In the last stanza, Dickinson offers friendship and love to the reader/listener, should the time of death arise.

Copland’s setting is masterfully simple. The “Very slow” and “espressivo” indications create a very solemn mood. He chiefly employs the violins, violas, cellos, and horn to create a hollow, dry sound that emphasizes the “dusty” aspect of death described in the poem. According to Ruth Friedberg, this song is “an inspired musical conception of a poem that states briefly and beautifully that love eases the moment of dying. Copland […] provides both a feeling of the inevitability of death and of the sinking of the dying consciousness into a trance-like state. Over this, a finely contoured, lyric vocal line expresses the caring and compassion of the loving observer.”

Phrase Structure

The third song of the cycle is short, only twenty-seven measures in length. A formal label that summarizes the architecture of this movement is A-B-A’. It begins with two measures of music for orchestra, consisting of a two-note rocking figure in the strings that creates the


56 Friedberg, 124.
feeling of a lullaby, a tranquil acceptance of death. This figure also can be seen as a musical representation of a slow and dying heartbeat. The three sections of music each utilize one of Dickinson’s three stanzas. In the A section (mm.127-136), the first stanza’s text is set in two four-measure phrases of music that move slowly and quietly. The text speaks of the dry, dusty aspect of dying, with no help from worldly honors or waving flags. The middle section (mm.137-142) sets the text of the second stanza in two three-measure phrases. The poem tells how a compassionate friend can bring comfort in one’s final moments. Not surprisingly, the A’ section (mm.143-153) begins similarly to the A section. After two measures for orchestra that are similar to the two measures that begin this song, nine measures are used to set the unusual turn that takes place in the third stanza. Here, Dickinson expresses her desire to take part in the death of a friend and to provide soothing balms. The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “The world feels dusty.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>2+8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>2+(4+4)</td>
<td>(3+3)</td>
<td>2+(4+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>127-136</td>
<td>137-142</td>
<td>143-153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 – Phrase Structure of “The world feels dusty”

**Pitch Content**

Throughout “The world feels dusty,” changes of tonics support the formal divisions. In this song, the most important referential collections are DIA+2 and DIA+3. DIA+5 and DIA-2 are  

employed, as well. More specifically, the A section is comprised entirely of the DIA+2 collection. The B section is supported by a slight shift to the DIA+3 collection. Without any harmonic “preparation” or “modulation,” the arrival of the A’ section is marked by the appearance of the DIA+5 collection (mm.143-146). After four measures of DIA+3 (mm.147-150), the song ends in DIA-2.

That the two closely related DIA+2 and DIA+3 collections are the only collections used throughout the first two sections can be seen as a musical parallel to the two stanzas of dryness. The soothing image of rain described in the third stanza is ushered in by a change to DIA+5. As the last stanza describes the unusual turn of events, i.e. the poet’s desire to take part in the death of a friend, so too are there unusual turns in pitch content. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “The world feels dusty.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>2+8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>2+(4+4)</td>
<td>(3+3)</td>
<td>2+(4+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential Collections</td>
<td>DIA+2</td>
<td>DIA+3</td>
<td>DIA+5, DIA+3, DIA-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>127-136</td>
<td>137-142</td>
<td>143-153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 – Pitch Content of “The world feels dusty”

**Tempo**

Similar to the other songs in the cycle, Copland uses tempo indications to reinforce the mood of the text and the structural divisions of the music. Throughout “The world feels dusty,” a solemn mood prevails. The tempo is marked “Very slowly” and “espressivo.” Two measures before the B section (mm.135-136), there is an indication to “press forward.” The arrival of the
B section is marked by a tempo that is a “trifle faster.” Just as there is a sudden change in pitch content at A’ section, there is a return to the beginning tempo, designated “very slowly.”

**Meter**

Along with slow tempo indications, Copland effectively uses meter to reflect the solemn mood. Throughout the A section, the rhythmic movement is very steady and in 3/4 meter. The *tenuto* marks on the first beat of each measure create a *berceuse*-like motion. In addition to being a “trifle faster,” the B section is the only section in this song that contains a change in meter, i.e. one measure of 4/4 (m.140). The A’ section is supported by a return of the steady rhythmic movement in 3/4 that dominates the A section.

**Orchestration**

In terms of orchestration, “The world feels dusty” is the epitome of Copland’s economy of means. In the beginning, the violins, violas, cellos, and horn create a hollow, dry sound, emphasizing the “dusty” aspect of death described in the poem. In the B section, the horn, trumpet, and trombone are used with mutes, and the oboe, clarinets, and bassoon make their first appearances in this song. In the absence of the double basses, Copland thickens the texture with multiple notes in the first and second violins, violas, and cellos, indicated “*non divisi.*” The orchestration thins out in the A’ section, this time with oboe, B-flat clarinet, bassoon, and strings. In the last three measures (mm.151-153), after the unusual turn of events in the poem, the entire orchestra, including harp, is employed for the first time in this song. Instead of using the full orchestra loudly and bombastically, as in the previous song, Copland scores the instruments in their middle to upper registers and indicates a three-measure *diminuendo* that fades from *mezzo piano* to nothingness. (See Musical Example No. 2.)
Relationships between Text and Music

Through his use of tempo indications, pitch content, and orchestration, “Copland seems to be saying that even though the ministry of a friend may be soothing, the dust of death is still an ever-present reality.”58 In addition to suggesting the inevitability of death and the possible comfort that can come from a loved one during the last moments of life, the overall lullaby-like setting of the poem is both soothing and ironic in that the text and music dwell in the vague, uncertain state that lies between life and death. Quite possibly, this song “would suffice, by itself, to demonstrate Copland’s enormous stature as a song composer. Rarely has so much been achieved with such economy of material and gesture.”59

IV. Heart, we will forget him

It probably is not fortuitous that the death song of “The world feels dusty” is followed by the cycle’s only love song, admittedly a song about love’s impossibility. Emily Dickinson wrote tributes to the memories the people whom she had loved. Such is the case in “Heart, we will forget him.”

Heart, we will forget him!
You and I, to-night!
You may forget the warmth he gave,
I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me,
That I my thoughts may dim;
Haste! lest while you’re lagging,
I may remember him!

58Peters, 34.
59Starr, 67.
Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

Of the four categories of subject matter found in Emily Dickinson’s poetry, this song is the only song in the cycle that fits into the category of love. The poem is comprised of two four-line stanzas. In the first stanza, the speaker informs the heart that “We will forget him!” The heart is charged with forgetting “the warmth,” while the speaker will forget “the light.” In the second stanza, as the heart lingers, the mind cannot stop remembering “him.” Copland masterfully uses orchestration to express his interpretation of the poem. For example, in the beginning, he uses strings in their middle to lower registers and solo horn to introduce the song and then support the vocal line in counterpoint. As the song progresses, it appears as though the orchestra and singer are engaged in a duet. At times, the orchestra represents the heart to which the poetry is addressed. On the other hand, the orchestra is the voice of reason and logic that provides musical direction, rhythmic continuity, and form. An anonymous British critic in *Music Review* once noted, “This song is as exquisitely touching as any that has come out of America. Indeed, I have a feeling that it may be the most affecting song written since Mahler’s death.”

Phrase Structure

This short, eight-line poem is set in thirty-six measures that can be divided into three sections of unequal length and assigned a formal label of A-B-A’. The A section (mm.154-173) begins with a slow, quiet, two-measure introduction for orchestra alone that establishes the poignant character of the entire song. Copland uses two lengthy phrases, eight measures and ten measures, respectively, to set the text of the first stanza. The B section (mm.174-181) is the emotional highpoint of the song. In eight measures, the composer sets Lines 5 and 6, where the

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61 It is important to note that other analysts, such as Larry Starr, argue that the formal template of “Heart, we will forget him” is A-A’-B-A’’, the favored pattern for the sentimental songs of Tin Pan Alley.
speaker tries to remove all thoughts of “him” from her mind. In the A’ section (mm.182-189), Lines 7 and 8, also set in an eight-measure phrase, speak of the speaker’s desire to hasten her lagging heart so that all the painful memories will end. The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “Heart, we will forget him.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>2+8+10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>2+(4+4)+(6+4)</td>
<td>(4+4)</td>
<td>(5+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>154-173</td>
<td>174-181</td>
<td>182-189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 – Phrase Structure of “Heart, we will forget him”

**Pitch Content**

In addition to their role of supporting formal divisions, Copland uses referential collections in this song as a means of illustrating the mood of the text, just as he does in the previously discussed songs. In “Heart, we will forget him,” the most important referential collection is DIA₃. DIA₁, DIA₄, DIA₅, DIA₊₁, DIA₊₂, DIA₊₃, DIA₊₅, and AC₊₁ are employed, as well. More specifically, the first seven measures of the A section are comprised entirely of the DIA₃ collection. The last three measures of the first eight-measure phrase (mm.161-163) employ DIA₊₅ and DIA₊₁. The DIA₃ collection returns in m.164 and continues through m.170. As the B section approaches (mm.171-173) and continuing through the entire B section (mm.174-181), the composer employs a different referential collection in almost every measure, all of which are supported by a descending bass line. The tension created by all these changes in pitch content well reflects the momentum that is building in both the text and the music, as the
speaker is “beseeching forgetfulness and striving for a loss of memory.” As peace and serenity return in the A’ section, so too does the DIA-3 collection. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “Heart, we will forget him.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>2+(4+4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>(6+4)</td>
<td>(4+4)</td>
<td>(5+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential Collections</td>
<td>DIA-3, DIA-5, DIA+1, DIA-4</td>
<td>DIA+5, DIA-2, DIA-1, AC+1, DIA+3</td>
<td>DIA-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>154-173</td>
<td>174-181</td>
<td>182-189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 – Pitch Content of “Heart, we will forget him”

**Tempo**

One element that makes Copland’s setting of this poem so effective and moving is the use of constantly changing tempos, perhaps a reference to the poet’s ambivalence. With the first marking “Very slowly—dragging,” the composer suggests that Dickinson is sworn to forget “him.” At the same time, she is trying to act determinedly. The designations “moving forward” in mm.158-159 and mm.168-169 reflect this, musically not allowing the singer and orchestra to look back at the past. In the subsequent monologue, the composer achieves a sense of growing desperation with an accelerando, marked “moving forward” in mm.174-177 and “faster” in mm.178-179, after which a flood of memory slows the musical motion to a halt.

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62 Daugherty, 48.
Meter

“Heart, we will forget him” is the only song in the cycle in which the same meter (here, 4/4) is used in of the song. The metric pulse is quite stable, as well. At no point does Copland attempt to blur the meter or distort the rhythmic flow. Surely, it is not coincidental that the composer set a simple, two-stanza poem to music that is metrically stable. The listener may view this as a reflection of the poet’s inner determination to truly “forget him” or as a projection of the idea that time moves constantly onwards, in spite of an individual’s heartbreaks.

Orchestration

There are many poignant moments of orchestration in “Heart, we will forget him.” In the beginning, strings in their middle to lower registers and solo horn, all marked “very expressive and legato,” delicately introduce the song and then support the vocal line, a musical suggestion of “personal interrelationships, of lives entwined.”⁶³ Copland expands the timbral pallet with the addition of solo woodwinds, trumpet, and harp (mm.159-163). As the music builds toward the climax in the B section, all the instruments are employed for the first time in this song, and the movement ends as delicately as it began, with the shimmering touches of solo flute, B-flat clarinet, bassoon, and harp. Throughout this song, it is as though the orchestra and singer are engaged in a duet. At times, the orchestra represents the “heart” to which the poetry is addressed. On the other hand, the orchestra is the “voice” of “normalcy,” providing musical direction, rhythmic continuity, and form.

Relationships between Text and Music

Poetically and musically, “Heart, we will forget him” calls attention to the struggle between the speaker and her heart. There is a close musical, emotional, and psychological

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⁶³Daugherty, 50.
connection between this song and “The world feels dusty.” At the beginning, the speaker informs the heart that “We will forget him!” The heart is charged with forgetting “the warmth,” while the speaker will forget “the light.” As the heart lingers, the mind cannot stop remembering “him.” Through his treatment of orchestration, meter, tempo, and pitch content, Copland leaves the listener with the impression that although the text forgets, the music will always remember.

V. Dear March, come in!

Although the preceding “Heart, we will forget him” and “Dear March, come in!” are markedly different, the two share a very curious characteristic. Emily Dickinson casts both poems as dialogues with a silent respondent, or two respondents in the case of “Dear March, come in!,” i.e. March and then April.

Dear March, come in!
How glad I am!
I looked for you before.
Put down your hat —
You must have walked —
How out of breath you are!
Dear March, how are you?
And the rest?
Did you leave Nature well?
Oh, March, come right upstairs with me,
I have so much to tell!

I got your letter, and the bird’s;
The maples never knew
That you were coming, — I declare,
How red their faces grew!
But, March, forgive me—
And all those hills
You left for me to hue;
There was no purple suitable,
You took it all with you.
Who knocks? That April!
Lock the door!
I will not be pursued!
He stayed away a year, to call
When I am occupied.
But trifles look so trivial
As soon as you have come,
And blame is just as dear as praise
And praise as mere as blame.

Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

The climax in “Heart, we will forget him” is followed by “a fair-sized scherzo on a Nature poem (‘Dear March, Come in!’), in which the month of March, personified, is entrapped in human dialogue with the poem, though any replies March makes are not verbal, but presumably in her own terms.”64 There are three stanzas, one of eleven lines and two of nine lines. Each stanza is about an appreciation of nature. The poet welcomes the coming of spring in an excited, conversational manner. Spring, like Nature in “Nature, the Gentlest Mother,” is personified. What makes this personification of nature different is that the poet receives the beginning of spring as if receiving a long-awaited visitor. Throughout the dialogue, the reader/listener learns that Dickinson knows her visitor well by his yearly visits. Because seasons have passed since they last saw each other, the two quickly become reacquainted. The arrival of April at the door reminds the reader that the passing of time cannot be stopped, even if one tries to lock it out. Copland uses a breakneck tempo and 6/8 and 9/8 meters to reflect the lighter mood and conversational tone of the poetry. He uses duplet figures against triple-division figures to reflect the out-of-breath quality and conversational tone of the poem. The performance indication

“With enthusiasm” and the busy orchestral accompaniment effectively portray all the springtime images described in the poem.

**Phrase Structure**

Formally, Copland sets “Dear March, Come in!” as a scherzo. The A section of the song constitutes a setting of the first stanza of the poem. After a two-measure introduction, the composer sets Lines 1 through 6 in phrases of six measures, seven measures, and five measures. Dickinson’s own restatement of “Dear March” in Line 7 begins the A’ section. Phrases of five measures, six measures, and nine measures are used to set the rest of the first stanza.

The climactic arrival in both voice and orchestra on “I have so much to tell,” (m.224), announces the three-measure transition to the B section (mm.230-232). It is important to observe that Copland follows the conventional proportions of a scherzo in that the B sections are significantly longer than the A sections. The second stanza is set in phrases of six measures, eight measures, and twelve measures. An eight-measure orchestral transition leads to the second B section. Copland employs phrases of six measures, five measures, six measures, six measures, and seven measures for Lines 21 through 29. The last seven measures of this song function as a codetta. Larry Starr states well: “The composer’s synthesis of a musical form based on repetition, regularity, and rounding with his individual elements of variation, development, and the unexpected creates a fine and complex relationship with the subject matter and essential tone of Dickinson’s poem.”

65 The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “Dear March, come in!”

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65 Starr, 73.
Throughout “Dear March, come in!,” changes in tonics are integral in portraying the various stages of the visit between the poet, March, and April. Here, the most important referential collections are $\text{DIA}_+5$, $\text{DIA}_+1$, $\text{DIA}_+6$, $\text{DIA}_-4$, $\text{DIA}_-6$, and $\text{DIA}_+4$. Other collections, namely $\text{DIA}_+2$, $\text{DIA}_+3$, $\text{DIA}_+4$, $\text{DIA}_+6$, $\text{DIA}_-1$, are employed, as well. More specifically, the first eight measures of the A section establish the significance of the $\text{DIA}_+5$ collection. The second and third phrases of the A section (mm.198-209) employ $\text{DIA}_+3$ and $\text{DIA}_+1$. The $\text{DIA}_+5$ collection returns in m.210 at the beginning of the A’ section. Copland uses $\text{DIA}_+3$ (mm.224-229) and $\text{DIA}_+2$ (mm.230-232) as a bridge to the first B section. In the B section, each subphrase employs a different referential collection, more specifically $\text{DIA}_+4$ (mm.233-235), $\text{DIA}_+6$ (mm.236-238), $\text{DIA}_+1$ (mm.239-246), $\text{DIA}_+6$ (mm.247-251), $\text{DIA}_+2$ (mm.252-255), and $\text{DIA}_-1$(mm.256-258).

Beginning in m.259, the $\text{DIA}_-4$ collection is used as a bridge to the second B section. Here, although the harmonic rhythm slows down, referential collections are used in blocks just as they are in the A’ section, i.e. $\text{DIA}_-4$ (mm.259-272), $\text{DIA}_-6$ (mm.273-277), $\text{DIA}_+6$ (mm.278-283), $\text{DIA}_-1$ (mm.284-288), $\text{DIA}_+1$ (mm.289-293), $\text{DIA}_-6$ (mm.294-297), $\text{DIA}_-4$ (mm.298-302), and $\text{DIA}_+5$ (mm.303-306).
DIA\(_{+4}\) (mm.284-289), and DIA\(_{+2}\) (mm.290-293). The piece ends as it began, with the DIA\(_{+5}\) collection in mm.293-303. That there are so many different referential collections used, often for very few measures at a time, can be seen as a harmonic parallel to the fast-paced, out-of-breath nature of the text and the orchestral accompaniment. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “Dear March, come in!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>B’ Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>2+6+7+5</td>
<td>5+6+9+3</td>
<td>6+8+12+8</td>
<td>6+5+6+6+7+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>2+(3+3)+(4+3)+(3+2)</td>
<td>(2+3)+(3+3)+(3+3)+(3+2)</td>
<td>(3+3)+(5+3)+(5+4)+(3+5)</td>
<td>(4+2)+(3+2)+(3+3)+(3+3)+(3+3)+(3+3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referential Collections</td>
<td>DIA(<em>{+5}), DIA(</em>{+3}), DIA(_{+1})</td>
<td>DIA(<em>{+5}), DIA(</em>{+3}), DIA(_{+2})</td>
<td>DIA(<em>{+4}), DIA(</em>{+6}), DIA(<em>{+1}), DIA(</em>{+6}), DIA(<em>{+2}), DIA(</em>{+1}), DIA(_{+4})</td>
<td>DIA(<em>{+4}), DIA(</em>{+6}), DIA(<em>{+6}), DIA(</em>{+4}), DIA(<em>{+2}), DIA(</em>{+5})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>190-209</td>
<td>210-232</td>
<td>233-266</td>
<td>267-303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>12-20</td>
<td>21-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12 – Pitch Content of “Dear March, come in!”

**Tempo**

This song’s breakneck tempo and lighthearted spirit, marked “With exuberance,” provide “Dear March, come in!” the character of a scherzo. Typical of many B sections in scherzos, Copland relaxes the tempo a little bit, prepared by a two-measure *poco ritardando* in mm.228-229. The arrival of the transition to the second B section is reinforced by a return to the opening’s faster tempo. In mm.281-283, there is an indication to “relax the tempo,” accompanied by a somewhat broader tempo in m.284 and continuing until the end.
Meter

The use of 6/8 and 9/8 meters supplement the scherzo-like feeling. Copland portrays the out-of-breath quality and conversational tone of the poem by setting duplet figures in the vocal part against triple-division figures in the orchestral accompaniment. In every measure of this song, there is a constant eighth note pulse, perhaps symbolizing the constant movement and changing of seasons. Silence is a very powerful device in “Dear March, come in!,” as well. Frequently, the composer disrupts the constant rhythmic flow by means of rests on the first and fourth eighth notes in the measures, as well as consecutive ties over bar lines.

Orchestration

“Dear March, come in!” is dominated by the voice, with the orchestra serving an accompanimental role almost the entire time. During the transitions, between sections, the orchestra truly comes to the fore. The most notable example is the eight-measure bridge to the second B section. Here, in mm.265-266, the orchestra blatantly “knocks” just before “Who knocks?” is stated in the voice in mm.267-268. To imitate the sound of April knocking on the poet’s door, Copland employs Bartok pizzicato notes in the cello and bass parts, an effect that is aurally striking and because of the harshness and extreme intensity required to achieve this snap pizzicato.66 (See Musical Example No. 3.)

Relationships between Text and Music

“Dear March, come in!” returns the listener to the realm of Nature. Here, however, Nature is no longer a loving mother who guides her children with constancy and concern toward salvation. In this song, she is characterized as a “charming and exclusively worldly

66 A Bartok pizzicato is a type of snap pizzicato in which the string is pulled upwards and allowed to snap against the fingerboard.
companion.”⁶⁷ As opposed to the pastoral-like setting of “Nature, the gentlest mother,” this song is to be performed “With enthusiasm.” Reinforced by the busy orchestral accompaniment, “the breezy and almost juvenile tone of the poem [...] is incongruous and perhaps even discordant after the lyric statement of the isolate in ‘Heart, we will forget him.’”⁶⁸

Mention must also be made of the song’s ending. As the poet thinks no more of her “blame” of April for arriving at an inopportune time, Copland lets go of all the previously heard motives and rhythmic drive in the orchestral accompaniment. The last seven chords, widely spaced and played softly and shortly, provide a wide frame for the vocalist’s last note that is sustained for five measures. After one measure of silence, the song ends with a final chord played by the violins, violas, and harp, marked “delicately.” This gesture is “the musical equivalent of a gentle smile, a wonderfully warm and tender gesture that is reminiscent in its way of the beautiful conclusion to ‘Nature, the gentlest mother.’”⁶⁹

VI. Sleep is supposed to be

“Sleep is supposed to be” marks a very important change in the direction of the cycle. The five previous songs fit neatly into specific musical categories, namely pastorale, storm scene, recitative, lullaby, ballad, and scherzo. The classification of this song is much less straightforward.

Sleep is supposed to be,
By souls of sanity,
The shutting of the eye.

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⁶⁷Baker, 9.
⁶⁸Baker, 10.
⁶⁹Starr, 74.
Sleep is the station grand
Down which on either hand
The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be,
By people of degree,
The breaking of the day.

Morning has not occurred!
That shall aurora be
East of Eternity;

One with the banner gay,
One in the red array,—
That is the break of day.

Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

“Sleep is supposed to be” is a deep poem in five three-lined stanzas. Elusive in meaning, this poem compares everyday sleep with death. In the first stanza, the speaker describes sleep as “the shutting of the eye.” The second stanza provides an alternative definition of sleep as the station where “the hosts of witness stand,” a possible suggestion of the souls of the dead. The third stanza describes morning as the literal “the breaking of the day.” The fourth stanza speaks of morning as something like Eternity, but more remote, “East of Eternity.” The fifth stanza expands the metaphorical description of morning with the additional image of the “banner gay.” Copland carefully uses pitch content to portray the literal images described in the poem and to suggest the speaker’s inner discontent. He also designates a “Moderately slow—with dignity” tempo to establish the solemnity of the song. The alternations between measures of deliberately moving quarter notes and recitations effectively draw attention to the different definitions of sleep that the poem suggests. At the end of the song, Copland removes all feeling and remembrance of pulse and time, the perfect atmosphere in which the listener can ponder the definitions and symbols of sleep and eternity.
Phrase Structure

Poetically and musically, this song is the emotional heart of the cycle. A formal label that summarizes the architecture of this movement is Introduction-A-B-C-D-E, each section corresponding to one of the five stanzas of the poem. The four-measure introduction, featuring dotted-note figures, “summons the atmosphere of contemplative dignity projected by the text.”71 In the A section (mm.308-316), Copland sets the first stanza’s text in one five-measure phrase and one four-measure phrase of music. Here, the listener learns that “sleep” is a metaphor for death.

The text for the B section (mm.317-322), set in three two-measure subphrases, speaks of “The hosts of witness” that scrutinize a dying person, searching for features that point to salvation or damnation. The C section (mm.323-329) parallels the A section, both in terms of text and in terms of music. One subtle difference is that the third stanza is set in seven measures. Here, “morn” is a metaphor for eternity. The text of the D section (mm.330-335), set in three two-measure subphrases, proclaims that death is more than the “shutting of the eye” and that eternity is more than the “breaking of the day.” In the last section (mm.336-43), set in two four-measure phrases, morning is envisioned as the opening of Eternity. The final description of “One with the banner gay” and “One in the red array” can be viewed as Dickinson’s emphatic proclamation of “the splendor of waking to the new day in the New Jerusalem.”72 The overall effect of the poem, quite possibly, is to make the reader/listener contemplate the existence of

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70 Other analysts believe that the song reflects the shape of the poem, falling into two unequal parts, each of which is of bipartite design. See Larry Starr, p.75.


Heaven and the brevity of life. The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “Sleep is supposed to be.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D Section</th>
<th>E Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
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<td>(3+2)+(2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)</td>
<td>(3+2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2)+(2+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
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<td>308-316</td>
<td>317-322</td>
<td>323-329</td>
<td>330-335</td>
<td>336-343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13 – Phrase Structure of “Sleep is supposed to be”

**Pitch Content**

There is a significant relationship between the text of the poem and Copland’s use of referential collections to portray the literal images described and to suggest the poet’s inner discontent. In “Sleep is supposed to be,” the most important referential collections are DIA₃ and DIA₄. The composer also employs the DIA₀, DIA₋₁, DIA₋₅, and DIA₋₇ collections, as well. More specifically, the four-measure introduction establishes the importance of DIA₄. The first phrase of the A section is comprised of the DIA₃ collection, the second phrase seeing a return of DIA₄. In a similar manner, the B section begins in DIA₃ (mm.317-318) and soon shifts to DIA₇ in mm.319-322.

Although the C and A sections are similar on the surface, they are quite different in terms of pitch content. In only seven measures (mm.323-329), the composer employs four different referential collections, i.e. DIA₋₁, DIA₃, DIA₋₅, and DIA₀. Without question, the D section (mm.330-335) is the musical apex of the song, and quite possibly of the entire piece. It also is one of the most harmonically unstable moments in the entire cycle. The vocal part in these
measures employs the DIA₃ collection. In the orchestral accompaniment, however, there are numerous chromatic clashes, such as the C against C-flat conflict in mm.330-333 and the E-flat against E-natural clashes in mm.334-335. It sounds as though “the harmonic fabric of the song gets wrenched apart” and the orchestra “lunges repeatedly toward its highest register in what sounds like an attempt to take Heaven by storm.” ⁷³

As the last stanza describes the Resurrection, something remarkable happens. Mm.336-339 alternate between DIA₅ and DIA₃. In the last four measures, the composer uses no specific referential collection. Rather, the pitches comprise a stack of perfect fifths, first in the winds and strings and then in the harp and string harmonics. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “Sleep is supposed to be.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D Section</th>
<th>E Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
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<td>(3+2)+(2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)</td>
<td>(3+2+2)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)</td>
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<td>Referential Collections</td>
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<td>DIA₃, DIA₄</td>
<td>DIA₃, DIA₇</td>
<td>DIA₁, DIA₃, DIA₅, DIA₀</td>
<td>Harmonic Instability</td>
<td>DIA₅, DIA₃, Stacked P5s</td>
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<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>304-307</td>
<td>308-316</td>
<td>317-322</td>
<td>323-329</td>
<td>330-335</td>
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<td>Poetic Lines</td>
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<td>1-3</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14 – Pitch Content of “Sleep is supposed to be”

⁷³Starr, 77.
Tempo

From the beginning, Copland’s tempo designation “Moderately slow—*with dignity*” establishes the grandeur of the song. When the voice enters in m.308, “*with great calm,*” there almost is a complete cessation of pulse, the sustained notes in the orchestral accompaniment creating a feeling of recitation, similar to that in “Nature, the gentlest mother.” Continuing through m.329, there are alternations between measures of deliberately moving quarter notes and *recitative*-like moments. Beginning in m.330, the emotional kernel of the song and possibly of the cycle, Copland combines *marcato* sustained notes in the bassoon, brass, and strings with deliberate eighth-note figures in the upper woodwinds. As the music begins to unwind in m.336, a magical moment occurs in the last four measures. After the singer proclaims, “That is the break of day,” there is one measure of non-arpeggiated notes in the harp, given a “*long fermata*” with the instructions to “let vibrate after singer concludes.” After the voice concludes and as the harp continues to vibrate, there is another “*long fermata*” of string harmonics. Throughout these four measures, Copland completely removes all feeling and remembrance of pulse and time, creating the perfect atmosphere in which the listener truly can ponder the existence of Heaven and the brevity of life.

Meter

In “Sleep is supposed to be,” the rhythmic motion generally is in 4/4 meter, with occasional measures in 2/4 and 3/2 meters. This possibly suggests the composer’s desire for flexibility of movement with written-out *rubato*. Because the changes of meter occur at the ends of subphrases, a feeling of fluidity and a sense of repose are created. Throughout the D section, as the poet proclaims, “Morning has not occurred,” 4/4 meter is deliberately maintained. This
metrically resolute ending possibly informs the listener about the composer’s personal beliefs about Heaven and eternity.

**Orchestration**

There is a great deal of musical dialogue between the singer and the orchestra in “Sleep is supposed to be.” Copland often alternates between measures for orchestra alone and measures in which the orchestra supports the voice, as seen in mm.304-307 and mm.308-312, respectively. He employs a wide variety of instrumental combinations, ranging from bassoon, horn, trombone, and lower strings to violins and violas only. The orchestral highlight of this song begins in m.330. Here, Copland employs the entire orchestra for the first time in this song. In addition to scoring the woodwinds and brasses in their middle and upper registers, the texture is thickened considerably by means of *non divisi* double-stops in the first violins, second violins, and cellos.

A very ethereal, otherworldly atmosphere is created in the last two measures. In the penultimate measure, scored for harp alone, a three-note collection in the harp’s highest register is heard, marked *fff*, “*non arpeggiando,*” and accented, a musical representation of a steeple bell or possibly of the final stroke of a clock. The final measure, scored for first violins in three-part *divisi*, second violins in two-part *divisi*, and violas in unison, consists of the same pitches of the harp in the previous measure, here played in harmonics, marked *ppp*, a poignant image of one’s Last Sleep. (See Musical Example No. 4.)

**Relationships between Text and Music**

All the previously discussed musical parameters makes “Sleep is supposed to be” quite possibly the most breathtaking song in the set. It is as though Copland understands that “Dickinson is drawing on the tropes of Christianity to cast death metaphorically as sleep and

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74It is important to note that the composer added these final two measures. In the original *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*, the piano sustains the same chord in mm.340-343.
symbolically as the ‘shutting of the eye.’ Likewise, the figurative dawn (‘the breaking of the day’) is the resurrection for eternity.”\textsuperscript{75} Just as the text is very abstract, so is Copland’s setting. It is as though he avoids all elements of word painting and does not attempt to evoke any specific musical type or genre, all “in the interest of establishing a new and different musical ambience.”\textsuperscript{76}

\section*{VII. Going to Heaven!}

Emily Dickinson did not have the answers to the important religious questions. The tension between belief and disbelief is the subject of “Going to Heaven!”

\begin{quote}
Going to heaven!
I don’t know when,
Pray do not ask me how,

Indeed, I’m too astonished
To think of answering you!
Going to heaven!
How dim it sounds!
And yet it will be done
As sure as flocks go home at night
Unto the shepherd’s arm!

Perhaps you’re going too!
Who knows?
If you should get there first,
Save just a little place for me
Close to the two I lost!
The smallest “robe” will fit me,
And just a bit of “crown”;
For you know we do not mind our dress
When we are going home.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75}Baker, 11.

\textsuperscript{76}Starr, 75.
I’m glad I don’t believe it,
For it would stop my breath,
And I’d like to look a little more
At such a curious earth!
I am glad they did believe it
Whom I have never found
Since the mighty autumn afternoon
I left them in the ground.

**Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting**

In “Going to Heaven!,” the reader sees Emily Dickinson struggling with the realization that most of the tenets of her early religious teachings are no longer acceptable in her mind. The tone is again a mocking one. Copland makes this clear by his repetitions of the phrase “Going to Heaven,” which occur only twice in the poem, as opposed to seven times in his musical setting. In spite of the fact that the poetry seems to dismiss a Heaven in which the poet “can’t believe,” this disbelief is qualified slightly by the poet’s admission that she is “glad” that two people who were close to her did believe. As the poem progresses, the themes of death (“the two I lost”) and life (“I’d like to look a little more/At such a curious earth!”) begin to supersede the theme of eternity.

Copland’s setting of “Going to Heaven!” is very similar to his setting of “Dear March, come in!,” a song whose theme is much less solemn. The music’s quick tempo and *non legato* orchestral accompaniment remove any feelings of sentimentality or gravitas. At times, it is as though the music does not fit the words. On the other hand, Copland makes great use of the formal intricacies in “Going to Heaven!” to give equal musical expression to the varied thoughts and feelings in the poem, as well as to equally emphasize the numerous contrasts and conflicts inherent in those ideas and sentiments.
**Phrase Structure**

There are a number of formal and musical challenges posed by this mercurial text. Serious, complex, secure, insecure, and whimsical describe the various moods of the poem. Some analysts believe that Copland uses a rondo form and scherzo genre to tackle these challenges.\(^77\) A better way of labeling this song, both in terms of the poetry and the music, is through-composed, consisting of five sections of unequal length, even though the poetry is in three stanzas. Though the mood of this song is playful at times, it is not appropriate to describe it as a scherzo because there are no principal and trio sections, as is the case in “Dear March, come in!”

In the A section (mm.344-372), the breathless excitement of the first stanza, choice of 6/8 meter, and overall athleticism in the orchestral and vocal parts suggest an aural link with “Dear March, come in!” Because Copland repeats the phrase “Going to Heaven!” twice in mm.345-347, it is unclear if the first four measures are an introduction to an A section that begins in m.348. Assuming that the first four measures are an introduction, Copland sets the first six lines of text, the poet’s affirmation of her ultimate heavenly destination, in phrases of eight measures, four measures, seven measures, and six measures.

There is a definite character change in the text and music of the B section (mm.373-390). Lines 7 through 11, set in two nine-measure phrases, inform the listener that Heaven is “dim,” yet, at the same time, is as certain “as flocks go home at night/Unto the shepherd’s arm!” The C section (mm.391-427) begins with an eight-measure phrase, marked “Slower” and is set in a recitative-like manner, as the speaker sardonically asks “Perhaps you’re going too!/Who knows?” After a return to the opening tempo, the speaker asks the listener to “Save just a little

\(^{77}\)Starr, 128.
place’ in Heaven for her that is “Close to the two” she lost. In the following phrases of four
measures, seven measures, four measures, six measures, and eight measures, Copland sets Lines
13 through 19. Here, the poet elaborates on what it might be like to wear a robe and crown, and
suggests that others will be likely to make the journey, too.

The A’ section (mm.428-445) begins with a restatement of the musical material from the
beginning of this song. After this four-measure orchestral interlude, the orchestra drops out
completely and the singer is left alone for seven measures, a powerfully dramatic effect that
Copland employs here for the first time in the entire song cycle. The interactions between voice
and orchestra resume in m.439, as the speaker states that her disbelief is a way of maintaining
her sanity and may be a way of ensuring more time on Earth for her.

The D section (mm.446-469) is in the style of an accompanied recitative. The orchestra
provides soft, sustained notes as the voice states, in two ten-measure phrases, that the two whom
she lost, presumably through death, have probably gone to Heaven, because of their belief…or at
least she hopes so. The last four measures of this section (mm.466-469) are a codetta. On top of
the sustained notes in the voice, brass, and strings, Copland brings back in the piccolo and
bassoon a truncated version of the musical material from the beginning. The chart below
summarizes the phrase structure of “Going to Heaven!”
Because it affects the form and phrase structure of this song, a few comments must be made about the instances of text repetition added by Copland in “Going to Heaven!” In the beginning of this song and in mm.370-375, the reiterations of “Going to Heaven!” are “local ways of bringing emphasis to central verbal and musical ideas.”⁷⁸ Towards the end of the song, in mm.430-434, the composer adds “Going to Heaven! Going to Heaven!” where Dickinson does not have these lines in the original poem. Arguably, this interpolation serves a formal purpose. It is a vocal cadenza that “allows Copland to recapitulate his opening musical idea, before he sets off with the poet in a totally new and different direction.”⁷⁹

**Pitch Content**

Throughout “Going to Heaven!,” changes in tonics are integral in portraying the various stages of the dialogue. There are numerous referential collections used in this song. Instead of consistently using one or more collections throughout the song, Copland uses a particular combination of referential collections as a means of defining a formal section. More specifically, the most significant collection in the A section is DIA₁. This collection is employed throughout

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⁷⁸Starr, 23.

⁷⁹Starr, 23.
the entire A section, with the exception of four measures of DIA-3 in mm.363-366. The arrival of
the B section is supported by a shift to DIA-5 in m.373. This section is less tonally stable than the
A section, as evidenced by the presence of DIA-6 (mm.382-384), DIA+1 (m.385), DIA-1 (mm.386-
387), and a return to DIA-5 (mm.388-390).

The character change in the text and music of the C section is reflected by the appearance
of DIA+2. The harmonic rhythm of this section is somewhat slower than the one that preceded it,
i.e. DIA+2 (mm.391-400), DIA+3 (mm.401-402), DIA+2 (mm.403-409), DIA+1 (mm.410-417), and
DIA+5 (mm.418-427). Not surprisingly, the A’ section ushers in a return of DIA-1. Seven
measures before the D section (mm.439-445), Copland uses DIA0 as a transition to the final
section of this song. Even though the music unwinds little by little throughout this last section,
the rate at which tonal centers change does not. In only twenty-four measures, Copland weaves
through DIA+2, DIA0, DIA+2, DIA0, DIA+1, DIA+2, and DIA+3/DIA-1. The following chart
summarizes the referential collections used in “Going to Heaven!”

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<tr>
<th>Form Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>A’ Section</th>
<th>D Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Phrase Length</td>
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<td>(5+4)+(4+5)</td>
<td>(4+4)+(4+3+4)+4+(4+2)+(4+4)</td>
<td>4+(3+4)+(3+4)</td>
<td>(6+4)+(5+5)+4</td>
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<td>DIA.2, DIA.3, DIA.2, DIA.1, DIA.5</td>
<td>DIA.1, DIA0</td>
<td>DIA.2, DIA.2, DIA.2, DIA.2, DIA.2, DIA.2, DIA.3/DIA.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>373-390</td>
<td>391-427</td>
<td>428-445</td>
<td>446-469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>11-19</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16 – Pitch Content of “Going to Heaven!”
Tempo

The overall tempo indication for this song is “Fast.” This, along with the use of 6/8 and 9/8 meters, provides an aural connection to “Dear March, come in!” A consistent tempo is maintained, except for a few instances. The first, mm.371-372, appears at the end of Section A, where the voice repeats “Going to Heaven!” a trifle slower. The second change of tempo occurs in mm.391-394, where the poet sardonically asks, “Perhaps you’re going too! Who knows?” The most striking tempo change occurs in mm.432-438. Here, the voice sings freely and unaccompanied, marked “Broadly – recitative style.” The final tempo change occurs in Section D. The entire section is marked “Slower, freely.” The voice and orchestral accompaniment contain longer rhythmic values than in the other three sections, resulting in considerably slower surface and harmonic rhythms.

Meter

In terms of meter, this song is quite similar to “Dear March, come in!,” i.e. both are chiefly in 6/8 meter. In this song, there are only two measures of 9/8 meter: mm.398 and 465. Copland creates a scherzo-like atmosphere by occasionally distorting regular metric accents with emphases on normally unaccented beats in the measure. Understandably, the recitative-like measures and measures of unaccompanied singing completely remove any sense of meter in their respective measures.

Orchestration

Copland explores wide varieties of orchestral colors in this song. Some notable examples are the simultaneities of divisi pizzicato, bowed notes, and harmonics, alongside muted brass and solo woodwind instruments (mm.357-362). One of the most poignant moments in this song is
the use of the piccolo in the B section. Marked “delicately” and “softly,” this lighter color complements nicely the character change in the text. Another masterful use of the piccolo occurs in the last four measures. On top of the muted sustained chords in the brass and strings, the composer cleverly sneaks in a restatement of the opening motive, here in the piccolo and the bassoon in its upper register. (See Musical Example No. 5.)

**Relationships between Text and Music**

An interesting relationship between the text and music exists in “Going to Heaven!” The poem relies on “sentimental conventions of describing one’s entrance into paradise as going home and receiving one’s crown, with the new saint cast as a sheep returning to the shepherd.”

Because of the quick tempo and non legato orchestral accompaniment, often designated as “impetuous,” the song is neither sentimental nor grave. Copland’s setting is musically similar to “Dear March, come in!,” a song whose theme is much less solemn. In fact, the Russian-born conductor Serge Koussevitzky believed that the music did not fit the words of this song. On the other hand, one could very easily argue that Copland makes great use of the formal intricacies in “Going to Heaven!” to give equal musical expression to the varied thoughts and feelings in the poem, as well as to equally emphasize the numerous contrasts and conflicts inherent in those ideas and sentiments.

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80 The flautist plays the piccolo only in this movement, and only in mm.378-390, mm.420-425, and m.468.

81 Baker, 15.

82 *Aaron Copland: Since 1943*, 162.
VIII. The Chariot

Throughout Dickinson’s lifetime, death became a well-known certainty that was capable of creative incarnations in characteristic disguises. Her more enduring poems transform death into something that is capable of being understood in terms of commonplace experiences. Such is the case in the last poem of the cycle, “The Chariot.”

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then ‘tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses’ heads
Were toward eternity.

Structure and Perceived Meaning of the Text through the Composer’s Setting

In the first stanza of the final song, the now-familiar themes of death and immortality are reiterated. In five four-line stanzas, the speaker describes death as a gradual journey. Death takes on human characteristics and is seen as a kind, well-mannered person who extends an invitation for an afternoon drive through the countryside. The invited guest does not realize, until much later, that the journey was “towards eternity.” The performance indication “With
quiet grace” best summarizes Copland’s setting of the poem. The overall dignified atmosphere that Copland creates removes any feeling of conflict between text and music. Copland personifies the characters in the poem with instruments in the orchestra, most notably the use of dotted-rhythm figures, initially in the woodwinds and eventually in all the instruments, to represent the horse-drawn carriage. As the speaker’s journey through the countryside progresses, the orchestration gradually thickens from a few solo woodwind instruments to a climactic tutti. As the poetic intensity wanes, the texture becomes thinner, and a quiet, calm atmosphere leaves the listener with a feeling of hope for eternity.

**Phrase Structure**

In “The Chariot,” unlike Copland’s setting of “Going to Heaven!,” the music is very stately, measured, and consistent. Here, there are no internal or external struggles in the poem or music. The genre is a processional, “a steady journey that moves us to the end of the cycle, to the end of the poet’s life and struggles, and ‘towards eternity.’” In this through-composed song of fifty-six measures, there are five short sections of unequal length and contrasting character.

The A section (mm.470-482) begins with a slow, quiet, six-measure introduction for orchestra alone that establishes the graceful character of the entire song. This opening recalls the beginning of “Sleep is supposed to be.” Copland uses one phrase of seven measures to set the text of the first stanza. In the B section (mm.483-491), the composer sets the second stanza in nine measures, where the listener learns of Dickinson’s leisurely ride in Death’s carriage. The C section (mm.492-503) begins with a two-measure transition that recalls the opening measures. Then, in phrases of four measures and six measures, the poet notes the daily routine of the life from which she is passing.

83Starr, 93.
In the D section’s two five-measure phrases (mm.504-513), the poet begins to recall the last objects before her eyes during the journey. In the E section (mm.514-525), the music, the poem, and the cycle as a whole unwind slowly over the course of two six-measure phrases, a perfect musical metaphor for the poet’s rejoicing over death “by accepting it calmly, civilly, as befits a gentle woman receiving the attention of a gentleman.”84 The chart below summarizes the phrase structure of “The Chariot.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D Section</th>
<th>E Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>6+7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2+4+6</td>
<td>5+5</td>
<td>6+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subphrase Length</td>
<td>(3+3)+(4+3)</td>
<td>(4+5)</td>
<td>2+(2+2)+(3+3)</td>
<td>(2+3)+(2+3)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)+(2+2+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Numbers</td>
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<td>483-491</td>
<td>492-503</td>
<td>504-513</td>
<td>514-525</td>
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<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>17-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17 – Phrase Structure of “The Chariot”

**Pitch Content**

Similar to all the other songs in this cycle, there is a significant relationship between the text of the poem and Copland’s use of referential collections to portray the literal images described and to suggest the poet’s states of mind. In “The Chariot,” the most important referential collection is DIA+3. The composer also employs the DIA+2, DIA+4, DIA+5, and DIA+6 collections, as well. More specifically, the six-measure orchestral introduction establishes the importance of DIA+3. This collection comprises the remainder of the A section, with the exception of m.482. Here, the word “immortality” is supported by a shift to DIA+4. The arrival

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84 Parker, 85.
of the B section is supported by a return to DIA₃. Similar to the end of the A section, the pitches of the last measure of the B section come from the DIA₄ collection.

As the poet’s journey continues in the C section, the harmonic rhythm begins to quicken. In the first seven measures of this section, the composer employs the DIA₅ for the first time in this song. As the climax of the song approaches, Copland builds musical intensity by quick changes in referential collections, namely DIA₃ in mm.499-500 and DIA₂ in mm.501-503. The beginning of the D section is the climax of this song. The composer supports this musical apex with a change to DIA₆. As the intensity of the poem and music begins to wane in mm.509-513, DIA₂ is used. In the E section, the poet looks back on her carriage ride, and the harmonic content returns to the DIA₃ collection that begins this song, a very sobering yet poetically subtle way of suggesting the full circle nature of both the poem and of life. The following chart summarizes the referential collections used in “The Chariot.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Label</th>
<th>A Section</th>
<th>B Section</th>
<th>C Section</th>
<th>D Section</th>
<th>E Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase Length</td>
<td>6+7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2+4+6</td>
<td>5+5</td>
<td>6+6</td>
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<td>(2+3)+(2+3)</td>
<td>(2+2+2)+(2+2+2)</td>
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<td>Referential Collections</td>
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<td>Measure Numbers</td>
<td>470-482</td>
<td>483-491</td>
<td>492-503</td>
<td>504-513</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poetic Lines</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>17-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18 – Pitch Content of “The Chariot”

**Tempo**

The tempo marking “With quiet grace” is an excellent description of the music’s character. The use of the word “grace” is simple yet profound, especially since the previous
song ends in a state of great disbelief. Similar to the way that Copland begins each section with a different referential collection, the opening of each section is accompanied by a change in tempo. More importantly, the tempo changes themselves are quite subtle, a factor that contributes to the overall stately yet somber mood of the music. On a slightly larger scale, Copland’s tempo indications “capture the tone of mid-Victorian politeness in which Dickinson unfolds the tale of Death stopping for her in his chariot and driving her past the receding material world to the ‘swelling of the ground’ (i.e., the grave) and thereby, eternity.”

**Meter**

“The Chariot” is the most metrically fluid song in the entire cycle. The abundance of ties and slurs over bar lines and the frequent weaving through 4/4, 3/4, 2/4, and 5/4 meters at irregular periods provide a fluidity of movement. Because the changes in meter do not always coincide with the beginning of phrases and formal divisions, there is a feeling of ceaseless motion with little repose. This compositional device is used with great effect in this song and in other songs in the cycle, e.g. “Nature, the gentlest mother” and “Sleep is supposed to be.”

**Orchestration**

The orchestra plays a subtle yet powerful role in this song. Similar to some of the other songs, Copland personifies the characters in the poem with instruments in the orchestra. The most obvious example of this is the use of dotted-rhythm figures, initially in the woodwinds and eventually in all the instruments. This musical gesture, representative of the motion of the horse-drawn chariot, is present in nearly every measure of the song, a strong testament to the invincible power of death.

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85 The tempo indications for each section are as follows. Section A: With quiet grace; Section B: More slowly; Section C: As at first/Trifle faster; Section D: Tempo I; Section E: A trifle broader.

86 Friedberg, 134.
In the beginning, Copland employs only solo woodwinds to accompany the voice. As the journey continues in the B section, the orchestration thickens with the addition of the strings. The addition of the harp and brass instruments adds to the intensity that builds during the C section. At the climax, the texture is the fullest; this being the first instance in the song where all the instruments in the orchestra are playing and Copland divides the second violins, violas, cellos, and basses. The texture becomes thinner as the poetic intensity wanes. By the last few measures, only solo woodwinds, muted horn and trombone, and strings (some marked “divisi” and others playing harmonics) are heard. The quiet, calm atmosphere that Copland creates in the end “sustains the visionary atmosphere of the poem; fear of death has been assuaged by the hope of eternity.”

**Relationships between Text and Music**

The relationship between the text and music is subtle. Because of the melodic and harmonic similarities between “The Chariot” and “Sleep is supposed to be,” the music suggests that sleep produces the images evoked in the poem. Arguably, this could mean that “death comes to many people during sleep or that the vision of death in this poem is the product of dreams. In either case, the music suits the image of the slow-paced carriage ride with a gentleman caller which forms the basis of the poem.” Larry Starr notes well: “The relationships among the four main themes of the cycle become more complex and intertwined in the final song. This is rather befitting because it represents a testament to the profoundly cumulative nature of Copland’s composition.”

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87 Butterworth, 131.
88 Daugherty, 75.
89 Starr, 49.
CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An overview of the preceding analysis shows that there are cyclic implications throughout the work, in addition to the one very important thematic relationship acknowledged in the program note of the score by the composer. An evaluation of textual and musical similarities between songs of the cycle exposes interrelationships that imply an overall structure much more complex than that suggested by other analysts. In my opinion, these eight Dickinson songs represent Aaron Copland at his finest. The standard of writing, originality of thought, and the emotional range set forth by the cycle make this cycle an important contributions to American orchestral song repertoire. As one studies this cycle in detail, it becomes quite clear that the composer combines many intricate musical and textual materials to create a highly organized and unique overall structure. Below are conclusions about the previously discussed musical parameters.

Form

Architecture is a powerful element that provides structure and unity to the eight songs, individually and as a whole. One could argue that the architecture of the poems influences the architecture of the music. In *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson*, six of the eight songs are through-composed. Copland uses A-B-A’ form in “Nature, the gentlest mother” and retains elements of the scherzo in “Dear March, come in!” In terms of phrase structure, the number of stanzas and the number of lines in each stanza dictate whether the phrases are well balanced or unequal. Referring to the phrase structure charts for each song, one sees that the stanzas for songs I, III, IV, VI, and VIII are equally divided, i.e. six stanzas of four lines, three stanzas of four lines, two
stanzas of four lines, five stanzas of three lines, and five stanzas of four lines. The only songs in
the cycle that contain unbalanced phrases are songs II, V, and VII. Here, the poems are divided
into three or four stanzas of varying numbers of lines.

**Pitch Content**

The music of *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* makes significant use of pitch centers. The music projects a strong sense of directional organization that is oriented towards firm points of arrival. Here, Copland demonstrates his expanded concept of tonality in a wide variety of ways. In each song, referential collections significantly influence the music’s structure. Although many analyses of Copland’s music, the Dickinson songs particularly, make only passing references to tonal centers and to the function of tonal changes, the analyses provided above show that using referential collections is useful in analyzing Copland’s music because each song’s themes and sections have tonics. More importantly, all large-scale formal divisions in the music are supported by changes in referential collections. That Copland reinforces thematic and textural contrasts by shifts in tonics supports the important role that these collections play in his music.

**Tempo**

Tempo is a musical parameter that Copland uses subtly and/or overtly throughout the *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* to reinforce both the mood of the text and the structural divisions of the music. As shown above, the numerous instructions for alterations in tempo that the composer provides in each song clearly indicate his sensitivity to the changing mood of the text. These instructions also take full advantage of the greater flexibility of musical rhythm over its poetic counterpart. More specifically, in songs that describe a journey or tell a story, such as “Nature, the gentlest mother,” “Dear March, come in!,” and “The Chariot,” Copland’s tempo
choices clearly reflect the stages and pacing of the journey or story. As the text becomes more animated, so do the tempos. Likewise, as a hush falls over the poetry, metric, rhythmic, and harmonic activity slow down, as well.

**Meter**

Similar to tempo choices, Copland’s use of meter(s) in each song points to subtle levels of cyclic unity within and across the cycle. As mentioned in the discussions of “Nature, the gentlest mother,” “Sleep is supposed to be,” and “The Chariot,” several of the songs contain a high level of metric fluidity. In each of these three songs, the abundance of ties and slurs over bar lines and the frequent weaving through various meters at irregular periods offer a great deal of flexibility of movement. Feelings of ceaseless motion without repose are created because the changes in meter do not always coincide with the beginnings of phrases and formal divisions.

Not surprisingly, the scherzo or scherzo-like songs, i.e. “There came a wind like a bugle,” “Dear March, come in!,” and “Going to Heaven!,” employ compound meters, namely 6/8 and/or 9/8. In addition to providing a lighthearted and playful feeling to the music, Copland uses these meters because of their potential for metric dissonance that can be created by means of duplet figures in the vocal part against triple divisions of the beat in the orchestral accompaniment.

Mention must be made of the one song in the cycle that contains neither metric dissonances nor metric changes. “Heart, we will forget him” is the only song in the cycle that uses the same meter in every measure of the song. The metric consonance and lack of blurred or distorted rhythmic flow is a very subtle and poignant effect that Copland masterfully achieves in order to reflect Dickinson’s own determination to “forget him” completely, as well as to remind the listener that time always moves onward, no matter what.
Orchestration

The orchestra shares an equal responsibility with the voice in expressing the emotion of the texts throughout the entire cycle. The accompaniment demands high levels of technical and expressive abilities from the orchestra, again reflecting contrasts in the texts. Copland creates a unique accompaniment for each song. Intimacy, simplicity, and delicacy are manifested in some. Others use an expansive timbral range with fast-moving rhythmic patterns and sharp dynamic accents.

Copland’s choosing to orchestrate his Dickinson songs is not surprising. “He was a master of distinctive, idiomatic orchestral writing, as well as a master of distinctive, idiomatic piano writing—and who could be better equipped to understand the connections between them?” This is seen in the ways that the composer combines flute (and piccolo in “Going to Heaven!”), oboe, clarinets in E-flat and B-flat (and occasionally in A), bassoon, horn, trumpet in C, trombone, harp, and strings to create a widely varying timbral pallet. More specifically, Copland effectively portrays pastoral sounds with the woodwinds in “Nature, the gentlest mother” and “Dear March, come!” Not surprisingly, the trumpet comes to the fore in “There came a wind like a bugle.” More subtle moments of orchestrational genius are seen in the use of muted brass instruments in “The world feels dusty.” In “Dear March, come in!,” April knocks on the door with Bartok pizzicato notes in the cellos and basses. In the last chord of “Sleep is supposed to be,” Copland uses harmonics in the strings to achieve an “eerie and ethereal sound” that is “utterly unlike any that can be produced on a piano and arguably captures the remnants of the ‘aurora’ with superior musical imagery.”

90Starr, 99.
91Starr, 102-103.
Relationships between Text and Music

_Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson_ unites the words of one of America’s greatest poets with the music of one of America’s greatest composers. Emily Dickinson’s concise use of language is matched well by Copland’s settings. His vocal lines and orchestral accompaniments display terseness. He set the text syllabically, except for a few melismatic passages. In addition, the composer adheres to the natural inflexion of the words, especially in those poems that are conversational. Based on the preceding analysis, one can conclude that Copland determined the mood of each musical setting from the general atmosphere of its text, instead of relying on picturesque words within the text to indicate musical direction and expressiveness. Since the individual poems are contrasting in moods and ideas, the settings are equally varied. Similar to the other musical parameters that provide unity, the cyclic wholeness is much more subtle, the product of the composer’s utilizing a concisely unified musical language and textual balance.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


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Theses and Dissertations


Electronic Resources


Scores

APPENDIX OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES\textsuperscript{92}

Musical Example No. 1 – “Nature, the gentlest mother” – mm.62-68

\textsuperscript{92}All musical examples are from Aaron Copland, \textit{Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson} (New York, NY: Boosey & Hawkes, 1978). Reprinted by permission.
Musical Example No. 2 – “The world feels dusty” – mm.148-153
Musical Example No. 3 – “Dear March, come in!” – mm.261-266
Musical Example No. 4 – “Sleep is supposed to be” – mm.339-343
Musical Example No. 5 – “Going to Heaven!” – mm.465-469
Musical Example No. 6 – “The Chariot” – mm.521-525

H.P.S. 934

Duration: 2 min. 55 sec.