The Life of the Composer: Gerald Finzi's Biography and the Reception of his Works

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Glancing at the biography of English composer Gerald Finzi (1901–1956), one sees little of apparent interest (see table overleaf). Unlike other composers with their fascinating indiscretions, Finzi seems to have avoided debt, gambling, alcoholism, homosexuality, madness, or indeed any other type of scandal one might care to conjure up, save that he vehemently opposed conscription in World War II and was briefly banned by the BBC.[1] Nor did Finzi acquire particular luminance as a composer or performer; he was perceived as possessing intelligence rather than genius and achieved recognition rather than acclaim.

With respect to the critical reception of a composer's works, however, the issue of biography is one which cannot be ignored. No matter how sedate the record of Finzi's life may be, the manner in which his contemporaries viewed his biographical details had a powerful impact upon the ways in which they understood and wrote about his works. The life of the composer assumes its own life in terms of influencing critical reception. While the significance of biography with regard to other issues such as musical analysis is, at the least, debatable, in terms of reception it provides a valuable insight into critical expectations and perceptions of musical works.

This notion draws on a concept discussed by authors in various fields, although it appears to have been first propounded early this century by literary theorist Boris Tomaševskij.[2] In 1923 he published an article entitled 'Literature and Biography' in which he proposed that the audience's awareness of the author's biography influenced their reading of the work.[3] It was not the actual biography which came into play, rather it was an 'ideal biography,'[4] a legend of the author's name, life and personality. Utilising this theory as a framework for the examination of the reception of Finzi's works, it is necessary to ask the following questions:

- What legends existed about Gerald Finzi?
- How did such legends evolve?
- Did Finzi contribute to the promotion of a certain perception of his biography?
- How did these biographical legends influence critical perceptions of his works?

[1] Christopher Finzi, personal interview, 3 Dec. 1995.

[2] Tomaševskij was associated with the school of Russian Formalism, which originated c.1915 and was suppressed by the Soviet state in 1930.

[3] Boris Tomaševskij, 'Literature and Biography,' trans. Herbert Eagle, in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, ed. Ladislav Matejka & Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978) 47–55; trans. of 'Literatura i biografija,' *Kniga i revoljucija* 4 (1923): 6–9.

[4] Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 20.

Table: Chronology of Finzi's life

14 July 1901	Gerald Raphael Finzi born, London
1914–16	Studied composition with Ernest Farrar, Harrogate
1917–22	Studied composition with Sir Edward Bairstow
1922	Moved to Painswick, Gloucestershire
1924	• Carnegie Trust published *Severn Rhapsody*
1924	• *Requiem da Camera*
1925	Moved to London; several lessons under R.O. Morris
1930–33	Taught harmony and counterpoint, Royal Academy of Music, London
1930s	Promoted Ivor Gurney's compositions, prepared music for publication
16 Sept. 1933	Married Joy Black (2 sons; Christopher (b. 1934) and Nigel (b. 1936))
1935	Moved to Aldbourne, Wiltshire
1937	Moved to Church Farm, Ashmansworth, Berkshire
1939	• *Dies Natalis* for high voice and strings
1939	Founded and became conductor of Newbury String Players
1941–45	Employed at Ministry of War Transport, London
1942	• *Let Us Garlands Bring* for baritone & string orchestra or piano
1945	• *Five Bagatelles* for clarinet and piano
1945–56	Annual attendance at and contribution to Three Choirs Festival
1949	• Clarinet Concerto
1950	• *Intimations of Immortality* for solo tenor, mixed chorus and orchestra
1951	Diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease
1951	• *God is Gone Up* anthem
1953	• *Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast* anthem
1953	• *Grand Fantasia and Toccata* for piano and orchestra
1955	• 'Cello Concerto
1955	Gave three lectures at Royal College of Music: 'The Composer's Use of Words'
27 Sept. 1956	Died, Oxford

Robert Holub, summarising the various elements of reception theory, reflects that the 'ideal biography is an essential mediating element between text and audience.'[5] Factual biography is of little significance; the legend of the author's life is not to be underestimated in an analysis of a literary work. Tomaševskij declares that 'we must consider how the poet's biography operates in the reader's consciousness,' and discusses the ways in which authors often manipulate or inflate their own biographical legends through their artistic creations. Victor Erlich, in his comprehensive exploration of the history and doctrine of the Russian Formalists, describes the concept as follows:

> Poetry mythologizes the poet's life in accordance with the conventions prevalent at the time, the idealized image of the Poet typical of the given literary school...Thus, out of a discordant welter of fact and of indispensable accessories there emerges a literary biography-myth. But this myth may become a fact of life in its own right. Literary mystification may be projected back into actuality, the 'mask' may obtrude upon the 'man.'[6]

[5] Holub, *Reception Theory* 21.
[6] Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955) 174.

In this article I have employed the term 'legendary biography' to reflect the aspects of Finzi's personality and identity as they are represented as idealised legend.

Tomaševskij's theory relies upon the author's idealisation of his own biography within his literary work. Clearly this can rarely be directly applied to music, considering its non-representational nature. With the exception of blatantly programmatic and preferably texted works, it is difficult for the composer to project his idealized biography on to his music. Finzi's reviewers, rather than drawing on a legend of the composer located in his musical works, created the legend themselves, promoting the man in a manner which would emphasise their perceptions of his music.

Reviews of Finzi's works from February 1928 until his death in September 1956 indicate that perceptions of his biography operated as persistent undercurrents in his critical reception. The manner in which some critics idealised the composer's 'legendary biography' influenced their reviews of his works over several decades. Thus the nature and evolution of the myths concerning Finzi which stemmed from elements of his factual biography, and the impact of these myths upon the subsequent reception of his compositions, will be explored.

Gerald and Joy Finzi retired to the Berkshire countryside in 1935, preferring the rural lifestyle and enabled by Joy's inheritance to enjoy it. Having been urged by (Sir) Adrian Boult to move to London in 1925, Finzi's time there was less than happy. At the Royal Academy of Music (hereafter RAM) he taught harmony and counterpoint rather than composition. It is notable that none of his students at the RAM subsequently boasted of their teacher. There were few performances or reviews of his works during this time.

His removal to the country and his subsequent rural lifestyle post-1935 became a dominating element in the formulation of Gerald Finzi's legendary biography. Critics promoted Finzi's peaceful, idyllic home setting and the inspiration of nature in his compositions. With regard to the reception of his works, this issue became closely linked with the pastoral ethos of the English Musical Renaissance. The revival of English music from c.1880 onwards was promoted along nationalist and pastoral lines, a renewed interest in folk music uniting these ideals. Pastoralism epitomised Englishness, and even today recordings of the compositions of this era are packaged to evoke rural nostalgia: photographs of nature scenes and prints of Turner or Constable adorn CD covers. Composers looked wistfully back to a Golden Age; the countryside was seen as an idyllic, secluded, peaceful retreat from the world.

In the critical literature, Finzi's music is appropriated by the pastoral tradition; in a 1954 article on Finzi's solo song, the author C.M. Boyd describes him as 'a quiet composer, whose music breathes the air of the countryside by which he is surrounded.'[7] In another article by 'cellist Christopher Bunting, the countryside represents inspirational and spiritual aspects of Finzi's music. Bunting's article begins:

> Gerald Finzi is a countryman. I don't mean a man that happens to live in the country, or even one that has chosen a most beautiful part of Berkshire for his home. I think of him as of a man that is fully aware of the 'spirit' of the land in its deepest sense. He is aware of, and kin with, the land in all its aspects, from the mighty forces of geological change to the song of the birds.[8]

The pastoral element of his biography is idealised in a slightly different manner in three other articles published shortly after the composer's death late in 1956. Arthur Bliss' article

[7] C.M. Boyd, 'Gerald Finzi and the Solo Song,' *Tempo* 33 (1954): 18.
[8] Christopher Bunting, 'The 'Cello Concerto of Gerald Finzi,' *London Musical Events* 11 (1956): 23.

'Gerald Finzi: An Appreciation' offers a personal reflection of Gerald's compositions, which he perceives as infused with pastoral and nationalist themes. He describes Finzi's music as '[exhaling] the very air of England,' and also writes:

> [Finzi] was an expert on apple growing, and was often consulted. It was his pride to show you round his orchard and tell you that he had examples of every variety grown in this country...There were always six or seven [cats] living in the house, each with its own defined territory, and every stray seemed welcome. It was part of his nature that he could do no harm to any living person or animal... Ashmansworth where he lived was a haven for his many friends. Within the close circle of his wife and two sons he created an atmosphere in which anything sham and insincere wilted.[9]

An article on Finzi by Howard Ferguson published in April 1957 is marked by similarly Arcadian themes, the author also finding the cats and the orchard worthy of discussion:

> [Gerald] and his wife Joyce...made with their two sons a rare and united family circle in that long attractive house at Ashmansworth, overlooking a twenty-five mile stretch of country towards Winchester... There were always the innumerable cats to be admired; the apple trees to be visited—nearly 400 varieties, many of them saved from extinction (occasionally well-merited) by Finzi's patient efforts; or a walk or drive in the country with a picnic lunch at the end of it. It was an enchanted and at the same time a wonderfully stimulating atmosphere.[10]

In a eulogistic notice of Finzi's death written by the editor of *The Musical Times* in November 1956, his music is described as having 'an unmistakable pastoral, sometimes almost consciously rustic, air.'[11] John Russell also adopted the rustic theme in his article of December 1956:

> A visit to his beautiful house on the Hampshire Downs with its smallholding, its fruit trees, and its apparently endless kittens...was an occasion for any caller...It is not easy to describe the degree of hospitable warmth and enthusiasm with which Gerald and Joyce Finzi surrounded us, our wives, children, friends, helpers about the house and garden. Gerald, short, sturdy, his face alight with eagerness and humour, would discourse on food, apple trees, cats, literature, people, everything except his own music.[12]

In a posthumous contemplation of Finzi in *Musical Opinion*, this sense of the ethereal in Finzi's legendary biography is particularly evident. The author Hugh Ottoway reflects that 'he created a world which was self-contained, remote from the realities of modern life; a world of simple, pastoral values and child-like "innocence," gently tinged with regret'.[13] The Finzi home is appropriated as an icon of pastoralism; it is idealised in reviews and articles as an Arcadian, almost fairytale retreat from the troubles which beset modern society. It must be noted that

[9] Arthur Bliss, 'Gerald Finzi: An Appreciation,' *Tempo* 42 (1956–57): 6.
[10] Howard Ferguson, 'Gerald Finzi (1901–1956),' *Music & Letters* 38 (1957): 134.
[11] 'Editor's Notes,' *Musical Times* 97 (1956): 571.
[12] John Russell, 'Gerald Finzi,' *Musical Times* 97 (1956): 630.
[13] Hugh Ottoway, 'The Three Choirs at Gloucester,' *Musical Opinion* 80 (1956): 83.

these extended personal reflections on the composer and his music were often (although not exclusively) written by critics who were Finzi's friends and fellow composers and conductors.

The mores associated with rural life such as stability, propriety and pride in craftsmanship—as opposed to creative inspiration and the fire of genius—are often evident in reviews of Finzi's works. This 'workmanlike' element of his legendary biography was augmented by the fact that he wrote so slowly, constructing his compositions over many years and in some cases, decades. In a 1953 review in *London Musical Events*, C. B. Rees wrote:

> From 1930 to 1933 he was Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music but afterwards decided to devote himself entirely to his own composing and migrated to the country to get away from the metropolitan maelstrom... The integrity of the man is in his work and he goes on his way undistracted by the fashions and clamours of the age. He is not to be waylaid in the London scene, for he stays in the country doing the job by which he enriches our English heritage.[14]

Similarly, when describing the formulation of Finzi's 'Cello Concerto, Christopher Bunting declared: 'I saw a craftsman at work...essentially a man toiling to make something and to make it well.'[15] In 1949 in *The Hereford Times* a 'Special Representative' reflects that '[h]e is a sound workman, full of resource, and with a firm control of his medium.'[16] Thus Finzi's rural lifestyle linked him to a rural work ethic, his compositions described as possessing 'skill' and 'craftsmanship' rather than genius.

The attribution of meaning to the biographical fact of Gerald Finzi's withdrawal to the country is not as straightforward nor as beneficial as it first appears, however. There is no doubt that Finzi's biographical legend did assume significance related to his rural lifestyle. This led critics down two distinct and divergent paths. As discussed above, the bucolic ethos pervading Finzi's legendary biography was sometimes a source of pleasure for critics, who valued the unity between pastoralism in his life and in his works. However, for other critics Finzi's withdrawal to the country became linked with his rejection of musical progress, his physical distance from London symbolising his divorce from the potential of stylistic development. Arthur Bliss noted that 'just as in his personal life he eschewed certain social environments...so as an artist he found valueless much of what was being written in the musical world around him.'[17] John Russell, who became a close friend of Finzi and conducted many of his works during the 1950s, lamented shortly after the composer's death: 'What *can* one do with someone who persists in writing like that in this day and age?'[18] In a review of the 1956 Three Choirs festival in *Musical Opinion*, the critic noted that Finzi's path lay 'in improving his "acre plot," not in reacting to new ideas and experiences.' He censured the 'limited' nature of Finzi's music, and declared:

> I sometimes think that if the world turned blue, or even red, Finzi would still be digging his acre plot. And perhaps there is merit in that; but so narrow and static an outlook can scarcely produce the major works which the Three Choirs Festival ought now to be bringing forward.[19]

[14] C.B. Rees, 'Impressions...Gerald Finzi,' *London Musical Events* 8 (1953): 26–27.
[15] Bunting, 'The 'Cello Concerto' 23.
[16] 'New Finzi Work,' *Hereford Times* 10 Sept. 1949: 7.
[17] Bliss, 'Gerald Finzi: An Appreciation' 5.
[18] Russell, 'Gerald Finzi' 630.
[19] Ottoway, 'The Three Choirs at Gloucester' 83.

There is a strong implication that Finzi's rural retreat was tying him to an increasingly anachronistic style. Hans Redlich, in a review of the cantata *Intimations of Immortality*, condemns his 'old-fashioned, slightly morose style of anachronistic romanticism,' but allows that 'some of his principal melodies are beautiful in a faded, out-dated way, his pastoral scenes having the quaint flavour of engravings from the middle 19th-century.' The critic also declared that 'to write in 1950 a work so obsolescent is a singular quixotism for a composer still on the right side of fifty.'[20] Evidently, Finzi's decision to make his home in rural England influenced the reception of his works in diverse ways, a number of critics identifying his removed physical location with a lack of stylistic modernity and refinement in his works.

Finzi's association with the Three Choirs Festival came to constitute a significant factor in his biography. Like his decision to live in the country, however, this association did not always improve his public reputation. Finzi's compositions were performed at the Three Choirs Festival almost every year from 1946 until his death, and continue to appear on its programmes today. Finzi frequently conducted his own works at the Three Choirs, and the Finzi family were welcomed into its coterie, which included Ralph and Adeline Vaughan Williams (and later Ralph's second wife Ursula), Herbert and Alice Sumsion, Meredith Davies and Howard Ferguson.

In contemporary writings and reviews it is evident that Finzi became associated with the characteristics attributed to this festival, which themselves are overwritten with pastoral themes. A critic writing in *The Daily Telegraph* as recently as 1990 reflected that

> [r]eputations die hard. If you've never been to the Three Choirs Festival, perhaps you feel you can imagine the scene all too clearly: tea and warm sandwiches in marquees, lots of old ladies of the kind who wear woolly stockings in midsummer, an atmosphere of somnolent soulfulness reflecting the English Choral Tradition at its heaviest, and unremarkable musical standards to match.[21]

Ursula Vaughan Williams' more personal recollections of the 1956 Festival—the last which Finzi attended before his death—are filled with bucolic imagery:

> The best week of all that summer was that of the Gloucester Festival. A large party stayed at the King's School House, just behind the cathedral; the whole Finzi family were there... We had a wonderful Sunday when the Finzis drove us out to Chosen Hill and Gerald described how he had been there as a young man on Christmas Eve at a party in the tiny house where the sexton lived and how they had all come out into the frosty midnight and heard bells ringing across Gloucestershire from beside the Severn to the hill villages of the Cotswolds...For us it was still summer, with roses in the tangled churchyard grass where the sexton's children were playing; blackberries in the hedges and the gold September light over the country we all knew and loved.[22]

Similarly in 1949 the *Hereford Times* published an article reviewing that year's Festival, which is brimming over with exaggeratedly romantic language. The anonymous critic writes:

[20] H[ans] R[edlich], 'Reviews of Music,' *Music Review* 13 (1952): 243.
[21] Anthony Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festival* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992) 255.
[22] Ursula Vaughan Williams, *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: OUP, 1964) 374.

> For those who have thronged the Cathedral this week the Festival will enliven dull autumn evenings and gloomy winter days with haunting memories, and as they, too, bend to everyday avocations once more, they will hark back in happy thought to the golden September days when in our central shrine they were uplifted on wings of song and were enabled to forget for awhile [sic] the anxious cares of this modern age.[23]

Although the Three Choirs Festival could be described simply as a long-standing, annual choral festival held in turn at the cathedrals of Gloucester, Worcester, and Hereford, it is evident that it is imbued with much more profound resonances of meaning. For the Finzis, as for many, the words represented the reunion of friends, the best of the English countryside and a rich tradition of English composition and performance.

Undoubtedly the Three Choirs constituted a significant creative outlet for Finzi in his later life. In western regional newspapers which printed reviews of the Festivals, Finzi's works were, without exception, well received. Critical expectations—at least in these provincial chronicles—that his compositions would affirm the continuity of the Three Choirs tradition were fulfilled.

Finzi's association with the Festival also became a matter of local pride, as he had lived for a time in Gloucestershire, and Thomas Traherne, whose poems Finzi set in *Dies Natalis*, was born in or near Hereford. Of the premiere of *Intimations of Immortality*, which was performed alongside Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony, the reviewer from the Gloucester *Citizen* wrote: 'Here we had one of the foremost of England's young composers and the doyen of English composers represented. Both have the closest associations with Gloucestershire, Vaughan Williams...having been born at Down Ampney, and Gerald Finzi having spent much of his youth in Painswick.'[24] Similarly, in the *Hereford Citizen & Bulletin*, Finzi's *Dies Natalis* was deemed 'of particular interest here, because it is a setting of poems by Thomas Traherne, born in Hereford or Ledbury, and in the mid 17th century, rector of Credenhill.'[25]

Anachronistic tendencies in Finzi's works were, in fact, welcomed by many of the local critics. Qualities such as lyricism, religious feeling, harmonic stability and judicious treatment of the text were perceived as valuable in maintaining the Three Choirs tradition. The critic 'J.O.C.' wrote in the Worcester *Evening News and Times*:

> It was equally good to hear Gerald Finzi's cantata 'Lo, The Full Final Sacrifice' again at this year's Festival...The lyricism of his vocal writing is particularly pleasing in an age when melody too often has to take a back place. One of the loveliest parts of the work is surely the final 'Amen' bringing with it a feeling of absolute finality and calm.[26]

A.T. Shaw, reviewing Finzi's *Intimations of Immortality* in the same newspaper in 1951, was particularly enraptured by the work: 'Everything was perfect...It was a tremendous performance, dynamic, imaginative and alive. Of the stuff of the work itself it is enough to say that it catches the most subtle inflexions of Wordsworth's thought. And what writing! What unerring judgement of tonal values!'[27]

[23] 'The Festival,' *Hereford Times* 10 Sept. 1949: 6.
[24] 'Fine Performance of New Work: Beautiful but Difficult,' *Citizen* [Gloucester] 6 Sep. 1950: 5.
[25] 'A Memorable Three Choirs,' *Hereford Citizen & Bulletin* 9 Sep. 1955: 1.
[26] J.O.C., 'A Mixed Programme,' *Evening News and Times* [Worcester] 10 Sept. 1948: 4.
[27] A.T. Shaw, 'Two Magnificent Choral Performances,' *Evening News and Times* [Worcester] 5 Sep. 1951: 1, 4.

Despite the enthusiastic nature of many local reviews of Finzi's works at the Three Choirs, however, his broader musical reputation suffered somewhat from the association, particularly amongst those critics who favoured more challenging avant-garde material. Critics must have been aware of the Three Choirs' unfashionable reputation in comparison with other festivals such as Edinburgh and Cheltenham. The Edinburgh Festival provides a particularly apt comparison as its timing coincided annually with the Three Choirs Festival; it had been established in 1947 with an avowedly international outlook.[28] The Cheltenham Festival of Contemporary British Music was similarly established after World War II, with an obvious emphasis on the performance of new works. In contrast, the Three Choirs Festival maintained an extremely conservative repertoire which is evident in its post-war programming, including annual homage to Handel, Parry and Elgar. A 1947 article in *The Musical Times* reflected that '[The Festivals] have a character of their own and are determined that no change of fashion, no new tendency shall affect them.'[29] Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, hailed at its premiere in Leeds in 1931 as 'the most excitingly original choral work for a generation,'[30] was staved off by the Three Choirs Festival until 1957 due to its references to eunuchs and concubines.[31]

John Russell reflected that Finzi was regarded as 'a "Three Choirs composer" (how damning a term...).'[32] If the Festival itself was outdated, then Finzi's works were an anachronism within an anachronism, identified as limited and stagnant even in comparison with other works performed there. The impact of his Three Choirs association is illustrated most tellingly in a review of the score of *Intimations of Immortality* published in the *Music Review* in 1952. The critic notes that

> [t]he whole composition is curiously old-fashioned in technique and musical subject matter. The initial horn melody, strongly reminiscent of Brahms, but even more the stereotyped treatment of emotional words like 'joy,' 'tears' and the like conjure up the atmosphere of Victorian Romanticism, probably released in the composer's subconscious mind by the fact that his score was being written for the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester.[33]

The *Music Survey* similarly describes the work as a 'well-written representative of the Three Choirs genre.'[34] Clearly, although some critics, including Frank Howes at *The Times*, valued Finzi's association with the Three Choirs Festival, for many other critics his categorisation as a 'Three Choirs composer' had a negative influence upon ther evaluation of his works.

Finzi's reputation as a musicologist contributed to a perception of his music as scholarly, despite the fact that he avoided a typical institutional music education. Public acknowledgment was made of his editions of works by obscure eighteenth-century English composers, his collation of Parry's manuscripts and his efforts on behalf of Ivor Gurney.[35] Reviews of Finzi's editions of

[28] Noël Goodwin, 'Edinburgh,' *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 5, 837.
[29] 'The Three Choirs Festival,' *Musical Times* 88 (1947): 328.
[30] Boden, *Three Choirs* 178.
[31] Boden, *Three Choirs* 199.
[32] John Russell, 'Gerald Finzi—An English Composer,' *Tempo* 33 (1954): 15.
[33] R[edlich], 'Reviews of Music' 242.
[34] 'Reviews of Music,' *Music Survey* 3 (1951): 184.
[35] Ivor Gurney (1890–1937) was a Gloucester-born composer and poet. He studied at the RCM from 1911 to 1915 and served in the Gloucester regiment in France during World War I. Two volumes of his poetry, *Severn and Somme* and *War's Embers*, were published in 1917 and 1919 respectively. Following the war his mental condition deteriorated. He returned to the RCM in 1919 but in 1922 he was certified insane and committed to a Gloucester asylum. Soon thereafter he was relocated to the City of London Mental Hospital

the works of John Stanley and Richard Mudge appeared in prominent journals including *Music & Letters, The Strad* and *The Monthly Musical Record.*[36] In *Music & Letters* the reviewer declared: 'Mr. Finzi's editing...is a lesson in the combination of scholarship and practical editing...Mr. Finzi and his publishers are doing a good service to English music by bringing these eighteenth-century works before the public.'[37] In a 1953 article in *London Musical Events*, the author described Finzi as 'instrumental in securing publication of the songs of Ivor Gurney,'[38] although the extent of his involvement was not revealed until the publication of Gurney's biography in 1978.[39] Similarly, reference was made in Finzi's obituaries to his work as a musicologist; Vaughan Williams wrote in his letter to *The Times* that Finzi 'was convinced that the English eighteenth-century composers were underrated, so he brought his imaginative scholarship to bear on the British Museum and other libraries where he discovered and made known to the world many hitherto hidden treasures.'[40] In 1955 Finzi gave three lectures under the Crees lectures scheme at the Royal College of Music, entitled 'The Composer's Use of Words,' in which he examined the relationship between text and music. These lectures were reviewed by Frank Howes in *The Times*, augmenting the 'scholarly' aspect of Finzi's legendary biography.[41] In a posthumous reflection on Finzi, Howes declared:

> It was not only an intuitive thing with Finzi, this penetration of the strange relationship of words and music in song... In his Creese [sic] lectures at the Royal College of Music last year he discoursed brilliantly upon them with a wealth of historical illustration.[42]

Perceptions of Finzi as erudite thus also influenced the critical reception of his works. In the *Hereford Citizen & Bulletin* his cantata *Dies Natalis* was described as 'choice and scholarly modern music.'[43] In the American journal *Musical Courier*, the reviewer Frederick Werlé declared: 'One is immediately impressed by the sincerity and expressive means of this thoroughly trained composer.'[44] 'Music was for him the supreme training for mental discipline,' wrote John Russell in December 1956; '[h]is strong convictions were always supported by intensive thought [and] vast reading.'[45] This emphasis on the scholarly aspect of Finzi's compositional process and style is remarkable considering his lack of formal training in music. It was his diverse

where he remained until his death in December 1937.
Gurney was primarily a composer of songs, setting texts by poets such as Housman, Yeats, de la Mare, Thomas and Masefield. A number of his individual songs and song cycles were published during the 1920s. He continued to write during the asylum years although the quality of these works varied widely. Gerald Finzi subsequently catalogued and assessed Gurney's substantial musical ouptut, making a selection of the songs for pu blication by Oxfod University Press. Volumes 1 and 2 appeared in print in 1938, Volume 3 in 1952, Volume 4 in 1957 and Volume 5 in 1979. Finzi's efforts also resulted in the publication of a symposium on Gurney in *Music & Letters* in January 1938 and in the deposit of Gurney's manuscripts in the Gloucester Library. See Michael Hurd, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* (Oxford: OUP, 1978).

[36] These reviews include E[dmund] R[ubbra], 'New Music,' *Monthly Musical Record* 80 (1950): 245; Christopher le Fleming, 'Reviews,' *Making Music* 13 (1950): 24–25; 'Music Reviews,' *Strad* 61 (1950): 100; 'Reviews of Music,' *Music & Letters* 36 (1955): 197–98.

[37] 'Reviews of Music,' *Music & Letters* 36 (1955): 198.

[38] Rees, 'Impressions' 27.

[39] Hurd, *The Ordeal.*

[40] Ralph Vaughan Williams, Letter, *Times* 3 Oct. 1956: 13.

[41] [Frank Howes], 'Words for Music: A Composer's Point of View,' *Times* 20 May 1955: 3.

[42] [Frank Howes], 'A Poet's Musician: The Works of Gerald Finzi,' *Times* 5 Oct. 1956: 3.

[43] 'A Memorable Three Choirs' 1.

[44] Frederick Werlé, 'General Reviews,' *Musical Courier* 154 (1956): 29.

[45] Russell, 'Gerald Finzi' 630.

musicological endeavours, rather than any institutional studies, which influenced this element of his legendary biography and his reviewers' perceptions of his music.

Evidently, the meanings attached to 'Gerald Finzi—composer' are widely varied and at times contradictory. They draw on knowledge and assumptions made about his biography, as well as resonating with dominant cultural ideas such as nationalism. One thing is certain, however. With regard to the reception of his works, Finzi's biography is never simply a collection of dates and events. Rather, it is a powerful factor in colouring critical response. Critiques such as those cited above keenly demonstrate that criticism does not occur within a vacuum. The way in which the composer's biography acts in the mind of the critic is one of the elements which shapes, if not predetermines, critical response to a musical work.[46]

[46] Interested readers should note that Stephen Banfield's life-and-works study, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, (London: Faber, 1997).