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## Death Becomes Him: Elizabeth Maconchy's One-Act Opera *The Departure*

### Background

“Benjamin Britten’s opera, ‘Peter Grimes,’ has rekindled hope for the future of the English musical stage,” reads the opening sentence of 1945 review, “Sadler’s Wells and British Opera.”<sup>1</sup> The waves created by Benjamin Britten’s first opera spurred a tide that swept across the English nation, bringing about premieres of Britten’s own *Billy Budd* (1951), Michael Tippett’s *A Midsummer Marriage* (first staged at Covent Garden in 1955), and even Ralph Vaughan Williams returned to opera after a decades-long hiatus to complete *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1909-51). In the 1950s and ‘60s not a few small opera companies sculpted after the English Opera Group and Aldeburgh Festival popped up across England, including the New Opera Company, which commissioned a trilogy of Elizabeth Maconchy’s earliest chamber operas, *The Sofa*, performed first at Sadler’s Wells in 13 December, 1959, *The Three Strangers*, composed 1957-1958 but not performed until 1968, and the subject of the present analysis, *The Departure*, which premiered in 16 December, 1962, at Sadler’s Wells.<sup>2</sup>

Peppered throughout this volume is Elizabeth Maconchy’s remarkable musical influence among her contemporaries in Britain, mainland Europe, and the rest of the world – the most frequently recollected of her compositions being the passionate strings quartets and her modernist orchestral works. Though rarely treated in the composer’s reception history, Maconchy’s burst onto the operatic stage shows without a doubt that she had her finger on the pulse of her time. The sudden popularity of opera in England may account for Maconchy’s relatively late turn to opera, when the composer was fifty years old, but once she decided to take the leap, she

dove in headfirst. She composed close to ten operas in fifteen years and continued to shove ahead of the musical current even in her later years. It all started with that commission from New Opera Company in 1956 – though she had yet to compose an opera – and thankfully this stroke of fortune reignited her productivity after a brief compositional silence following the uneventful reception of her Seventh String Quartet (1955).<sup>3</sup>

Before I delve into the heart of this essay, my analysis of Maconchy's one-act chamber opera *The Departure*, I would like to first provide a brief synopsis of its sister operas to demonstrate the range of Maconchy's operatic oeuvre but also to provide a glimpse into the composer's mindset at this time, as these works may be unfamiliar to some readers since they have, until now, received scant critical attention.

New Opera Company's commission resulted in three chamber operas, the restricted instrumentation of which, as suggested by Maconchy's daughter composer Nicola LeFanu, may have been for practical performance reasons, but evidently, also came to be a standard practice for the composer, who would later compose several works of modest ensemble for amateur musicians and for children.<sup>4</sup> These works include, *Samson and the Gates of Gaza* for mixed chorus and orchestra (1963-1964); *The Birds*, an "extravaganza after Aristophanes" with a libretto by the composer (1968); *Johnny and the Mohawks* (1969); *The Jesse Tree* (1970), with a libretto by Anne Ridler, who was also the librettist for a children's opera, *The King of the Golden River* (1975).

*The Sofa* was written in collaboration with Ursula Vaughan-Williams, Maconchy's composition teacher Ralph Vaughan-Williams's wife. The work's titillating libretto tells the story of a virile young prince whose grandmother transforms him into a sofa as punishment for his excessive sexual exploits. Poor Prince Dominic can only return to human form on the condition that coupled lovers fornicate upon him. In the end, it is his own love interest who inevitably breaks the spell – with another man. [Verweis?]

The second opera of the trilogy is based on Thomas Hardy's story *The Three Strangers*, which likewise stages a moralistic twist of fate. This opera takes place in a countryside cottage, where the locals are gathered to celebrate the christening of the community's newest addition. Hijinks ensue when, one after the other, three wayfarers unexpectedly join the party. The first stranger is invited in without hesitation, and he takes a seat among the merrily dancing guests. Soon after, the group learns that an escaped convict from the neighboring town is on the loose, and the second visitor – the

prisoner's executioner – arrives in search of the runaway whom he has not yet met. The third stranger then appears to confront the amassed crowd, but upon entering the congested party, his face pales with fright and immediately he bolts out the door. At this, the party-goers assume that *he's* the guilty runaway, and inevitably a chase ensues. Unfortunately for the third stranger, he is not the convicted felon. As it turns out, the felon is his brother – the inconspicuous first visitor, who manages to escape again once the guests depart after his spooked and abetting brother. Though it wasn't staged until 1968, *The Three Strangers* was composed simultaneously with *The Sofa* in the late 1950s, and meanwhile, Maconchy set to work on her dark and sorrowful opera, *The Departure*.

*The Departure's* tragic story does not sport the humor of her two accompanying one-act operas, though musically it easily evokes similarities with Maconchy's other works. As in her string quartets (in particular No. 5) and later choral works, *The Departure* builds on "short, generative cells" introduced in the opera's first moments.<sup>5</sup> Similar harmonic and timbral writing is apparent also in *Reflections* (1960) and pursued later in the *Serenata Concertante* for violin and orchestra (1962).<sup>6</sup> In the remainder of this essay, I will present an analysis of one of the opera's recurring motivic cells to demonstrate how Maconchy mimetically elaborates this small fragment to comprise the structure of *The Departure's* complex musical and psychological narrative.

### Driving Character, Driving Characters

We meet Julia as she frantically prepares for an appointment, but before departing, she waits anxiously for her husband Mark to return home. Surmounting tension drives continuously to the midpoint of the opera, when Mark finally arrives. When he enters, oblivious to her, Julia comes to the realization that she has died in a car accident, and that the departure she awaits is really her spirit's final farewell. To maintain suspense, the two characters, Julia and Mark, are paired in musical counterpoint but also in dialogic counterpoint. Speaking of composing a string quartet – her preferred medium of musical composition – Maconchy explains her notion of this interplay:

Dramatic and emotional tension is created by means of counterpoint in much the same way as happens in a play. The characters are established as individuals, each with his own differentiated characteristics: the drama then grows from the interplay of these characters – the clash of their ideas and the way in which they react upon each other.<sup>7</sup>

With only two characters, a minimally utilized off-stage chorus, and an orchestra of 14 instruments, *The Departure* is arguably the most intimate of Maconchy's operas. In the vein of monodramas like Schönberg's *Erwartung* (1909) or Morton Feldman's *Neither* (1976-77) after the Beckett poem, *The Departure* invades the inner psyche of its few characters intoning their emotions as a soundscape for the nether (spiritual) realm.<sup>8</sup> Rather than a plot-centric opera laden with adventures, *Departure*'s simple plot moves to the background to make room in the foreground for the music. It is through the music that the composer draws our attention to the psychological state of each character and their shared apprehension of and confrontation with death.

### Voices from Beyond

The opera opens to the music of a funeral dirge, with the off-stage chorus singing the Latin text of Psalm 120, "I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?"<sup>9</sup> If Maconchy's earlier music inclined more toward the instrumental, she was later increasingly drawn to the vocal medium, where the majority of her choral works were composed after 1962 on the heels of her blooming fascination with opera. Notably, however, Maconchy did already compose *Two Motets* for double chorus in 1931, "A Hymn to Christ" and "A Hymn to God the Father," based on poems by John Donne, who composed the texts in the face of his own confrontation with death.<sup>10</sup> Though the titles suggest religious devotion, the texts also expound a divine entreaty commonly expressed in Maconchy's texted works.<sup>11</sup> Some suggest that this appeal to God began when the composer contracted tuberculosis in 1932, a disruption that caused her to move to the Kent countryside and away from London, the center of English contemporary music at the time. Presumably it was this move that had a rippling effect on her subsequent popularity. Nicola LeFanu urges that her mother was far from religiously observant, at least not to the extent of *Departure* librettist, Anne Ridler,<sup>12</sup> who was appointed by the Council of Churches around this time to work

with a panel of scholars on a modern translation of the Bible, published jointly by the Oxford and Cambridge University presses in 1970.<sup>13</sup> However, in a private communication, Maconchy's eldest daughter Anne Dunlop informed me that certain religious texts may have held special significance for the composer. For example, at age 15 the composer lost her father to tuberculosis, and Psalm 120 is partially inscribed on his tombstone.<sup>14</sup> While the Psalm's message resonates with Donne's poems, it also recalls the memory of her father and inferably also the composer's own mounting fears upon contracting the very disease that killed him. More than an off-hand reference, Maconchy's setting of Psalm 120 in *The Departure* is a staple of the opera, as it resounds repeatedly at important moments and serves as a sonic and metaphorical bridge between Mark's living world and Julia's spiritual beyond.

As Julia informs us in the opera's opening, dirge music leaks through her window from a passing funeral procession – Julia's *own* procession. Though in the opening, this music permeates the character's soundscape, causing her to peer out the window and witness her own funeral, the music returns again at the end of the opera, to serve as the guiding light (or guiding sound) that lures her to her final destiny, and by then it is not at all clear if this music exists also in the living realm or whether it is only symptomatic of Julia's condition – hence the apt comparison to the monodramas of Schönberg and Feldman.

### Prismatic Elaboration

Beyond textual citation of the existing Psalm, musical motives in the opening dirge are also musically important. In the opera's first moments (Example 1.1), a unison dotted rhythm sounds three times, pained by the descending dissonance of a major seventh, D-Eb, which is exchanged between the violas and celli/basses (Motive 1a). Although D is the first pitch heard, Eb falls in a stronger metric position, albeit on the weaker “and” of a duple hypermeter, which functions to propel the music forth to the downbeat of the second bar. A wobbling chromatic quintuplet turn then enters in the violin I, violin II and cello (Motive 1b) to accompany the dirge, and this quintuplet turn is then flittingly passed from bassoon, to celli, and lastly to the contrabasses.<sup>15</sup> Not merely ornamental, Motive 1b is linked to Motive 1a as both outline the same recurring pitches, Eb and D, from the

dirge's opening. As will become clear in the course of this analysis, these two pitches first establish the opera's primary pitch center but eventually come to form the overall motivic organization of the work as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

Example 1.1: “Motive 1a” Neighboring fragment and corresponding “Motive 1b” wobbling quintuplet, bars 1-2. © Copyright 1961 Chester Music Limited.<sup>17</sup>

Example 1.2: Oboe's ‘longing’ descending melody, bars 1-4 before Figure 2.  
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Through the first half of the opera the Eb-D fragment returns frequently, often paired with the word “stranger.” As mentioned, Julia does not know that she died (nor does the audience). Soon after the opera's introduction, D and Eb are emphasized again by tenuto markings in Julia's first utterance “I shall never be ready in time,” echoed by a longing melody oboe (Example 1.2), to gain greater significance later in the opera. Finding herself home alone, she searches the disordered house frantically, exclaiming, “nothing is where is should be” (1 bar before Figure 4 in the score). She examines herself, and proclaims, “I feel like a stranger, a stranger even to myself” (bars 4-5 after Figure 4), and is so distraught she prays for her husband Mark to return swiftly, because “when he comes,” she resolves, “I shall be

free, I shall be gay. Oh, let him not delay.” At this proclamation, the funeral music resurfaces for the first time since the introduction, and Julia pleads once more, “Return, return, my love!” (bars 1-3 after Figure 10).

Turning toward the window from whence the funeral music draws, Julia is surprised as she looks out to find Mark. He’s there with their friends, and she’s at home alone. “What has happened?” she cries, “Why are we not together?” She calls to him, but he cannot hear her. “He looked like a stranger,” she remarks, intoning the Eb-D motive (Example 2). When Mark finally arrives, their meeting is bittersweet. “At last my darling,” sings Julia to the tune of a ‘hopeful’ major third, D-F# (Example 3), which is also recalled from the opera’s introduction. But Julia’s hopeful anticipation is unmet, Mark passes by her without a glance. Here Maconchy retains the D as a common tone between the anxious minor second with Eb, and its major third resolution F#, thereby establishing and foreshadowing a relationship between D, Eb, and F#, that, like the oboe’s ‘longing’ melody above (Example 1.2), will become important at the opera’s conclusion. By now Julia is convinced that something is awry, that there is a stranger about: he has disturbed her belongings, he haunts her, and he even looks through Mark’s eyes.

Handwritten musical notation for Example 2. The notation is on a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo/mood is marked *Meno mosso (poco lento)*. The melody consists of a half note Eb, followed by a triplet of quarter notes D, E, F, and then a half note G. The lyrics "He looked like a stranger" are written below the notes, with "He" under Eb, "looked like a" under the triplet, and "stranger" under G. A circled "7" is written below the G note. The name "Julia" is written to the left of the staff.

Example 2: Motive 1 paired to “stranger” text, bars 5-6 after Figure 16.

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Handwritten musical score for Example 3. The score includes vocal lines for Julia and Mark, piano accompaniment, and a flute/cornet part. The lyrics are: "She spec to meet him" (Julia), "At last, my darling" (Mark), and "but he walks straight past" (Julia). The score includes various performance markings such as dynamics (ff, mf, p) and articulation (meno mosso).

Example 3: 'Hopeful' major third paired with Mark's arrival, bars 5-8 after Figure 19. © Copyright 1961 Chester Music Limited.

Handwritten musical score for Example 4. The score includes vocal lines for Mark, Flute/Cornet, and Piano/Rod. The lyrics are: "Julia, are you trying to speak to me?" (Mark), "or is it my long - - - ing that calls your voice from the air" (Mark), "Good afternoon" (Mark), "I said, 'What a love - ly day -'" (Mark), "Sound - ing as I heard it first" (Mark), and "Ju - lia" (Mark). The score includes various performance markings such as dynamics (pp, mf, p) and articulation (meno mosso).

Example 4: Mark's *a cappella* Entrance, bars 4-14 before Figure 24.

Momentously, at the halfway point of the 30-minute opera, Mark is suddenly overcome with a nagging feeling that he is not alone, and finally he utters, “Julia, are you trying to speak to me? or is it my longing, that calls your voice from the air...” (Example 4). The opera is organized loosely as a palindrome, in narrative and in music, and this palindromic structure contributes to the pulsing drama of the overall story. The first half of the opera follows Julia’s struggle to recall what has happened. The midpoint of the opera is marked by Mark’s arrival, which coincides also with Julia’s discovery that she’s died. Prior to Mark’s entrance, Julia’s monologue is plagued by confusion and pain, but midway through the opera Maconchy brightens the atmosphere in the moments of their reunion. Note that Maconchy emphasizes many of these moments of realization, by setting them *a capella* and *senza misura*.<sup>18</sup>

From Mark’s first *a capella* utterance (5 bars after Figure 24), he solidifies three motivic features that foreshadow musical events but also significant plot points: 1) Mark joins Julia at the Eb-D cell; 2) He alters the cell’s intervallic content; and 3) he symbolically augments the distance between Eb-D with melismatic filler.

### 1. Bonded Pairs

Mark’s exclamation to Julia in Example 4, bookended by Eb and D, reiterates Motive 1. In this way Maconchy draws a musical bond between the two characters, in spite of their spiritual separation. This motivic confirmation serves to conclude the first part of the opera, characterized by the tension and dissonance of Mark’s pain and Julia’s confusion. Mark’s utterance then departs from Motive 1, replacing D<sup>♯</sup> with Db, a distancing effect that is both musical and metaphorical. Mark’s relieving Db is reinforced by trilling winds on the pitches Db and Eb (3 bars before Figure 25 through *Meno Mosso*, 7 after Figure 25), and this intervallic softening initiates a more uplifting musical environment as the two delve into past memories of themselves. Where the world prior to Mark’s appearance is wrought with dissonant major sevenths and minor seconds – the D-Eb minor second – after Mark enters, the couple join to sing a melancholy waltzing duet that is draped atop the previously mournful music (beginning Figure 34 *Tempo di Valse*), subtly shifting the tense emotional environment. Mimicking Mark’s entrance, the themes of the waltz section retain the Eb,

but soften the previous tension by shifting the dissonant neighbor D<sup>b</sup> repeatedly to Db, from a minor second to a major second.

Lastly, Mark's music expresses his distant "longing" with a rhythmic augmentation and an expanded range, a grand melismatic gesture that hints at the expanse his lover must cover and the widening divide between the two characters. Julia echoes Mark's softened Eb-Db major second and completes the phrase settling on Gb to establish the new harmonic palette for their joyous reunion.

## 2. Mirrored Doubles

From the point of this reunion, Maconchy establishes an enharmonic boundary between the two, which, though inaudible, is nevertheless apparent in the score. Some demonstrative examples are, Julia's C# on the word "death" (bars 5-6 after Figure 27), which is echoed by Mark with the word "long" on Db; referring to death that peers through Mark's eyes, Julia sings "How could I know him in you?" with "know" on Gb and a subsequent descent falling from F# and ascending back to Gb (Figure 30ff.); Julia begs that "time turn back," and "time" imperceptibly shifts from D# to Eb (bars 2-3 after 30); and again, Julia speaks of her son promising that she will see him "forever, forever, and ever, and ever," exchanging D# for Eb (bars 4-6 after Figure 39). Neither for modulatory purposes nor for ease in score reading, this enharmonic persistence, I would argue, serves metaphorically to establish a boundary that, like a mirror, links the severed spiritual and earthly realms and the physically divided Julia and Mark.

During the waltz, the couple expresses their union through joint reminiscence. They lament not being able to turn back the clock to the time before Julia's passing, and the waltz's theme of turning back time is cleverly set up through an enharmonic association, this time between Eb and D# (bars 3-5 after Figure 31). Just like that, the "strange" Eb becomes the point of revolution into the past, marking the boundary between what has been and what will be, between strange and familiar, and between the living and the dead.

Yet this boundary is uneasy. "Let us start in a different direction," sing the couple (bars 6-10 after Figure 32), but each time Mark recalls a memory with the bright major second Eb-Db, he is interrupted, first by the orchestra's ticking clock (bars 3-6 after Figure 33 and at 9 bars before

Figure 34), and then again by Julia, who suggestively intones the word “Looonng” repeatedly (subtly on D at Figure 36, and then more pronounced on a high Gb 7 bars later), echoing Mark’s desperation but also reflecting her own desire to depart, to pull away. After this momentary relapse, the waltz disperses, gradually returning the couple to their present situation of Julia’s looming departure.

Given that the two live side-by-side, if only in blurred en-harmony, even by the close of the opera we are never quite sure if the characters are truly interacting. Julia can hear and see Mark, but *he* can only make out vague impressions of her. Julia is able to hear the chorus singing “The Song of Ascents” (Psalm 120), but Mark hears “nothing – not a voice, not a word” (Figure 51ff.). The divide between heaven – presumably from Julia’s stratospheric singing – and earth is pronounced musically and textually with increasing emphasis. We hear in the last moments of the opera that, in Mark’s world their child lives on without his mother, yet Julia is sure she “shall see him forever” (bars 4-6 after Figure 39). And, in Mark’s earthly domain death is painted “like a monster” with “grinning skull and gaping eye holes,” but in Julia’s, “he comes with the face [she loves] most,” Mark’s (5 bars before Figure 30ff.).

From the moment that Julia realizes she has died in the crash (1 before Figure 27), she does not allow us to forget that she is awaiting her departure, and Eb remains an incessant reminder. But where before the nagging Eb was merely a “strange” feeling looming over the two, by the opera’s conclusion Julia seems to make sense of the situation. Addressing her husband numerous times, she proclaims, “The stranger who looks through your eyes is death,” and, “I should have recognized him there – how could I know him in you?” (Fig 30ff.). While her husband is driven progressively to panic, Julia grows evidently calmer.

In contradistinction to other operas – *Erwartung* or *Lucia* perhaps – it is the woman who appears here, at the end of the opera, practically rational about the situation, while her husband frantically seeks to comprehend the circumstances. The middle of the opera briefly resolves this tension, softening D $\sharp$  to Db, by digressing thereafter into the major key waltz – only slightly on edge. But at the close of the opera Maconchy returns once again to D $\sharp$ . Reinstating the dissonant minor second with Eb. Where the dissonant D $\sharp$ -Eb may reflect Julia’s anxieties of an unknown nature, and the softened Db to Eb of the mid-way waltz imparts a fond reminiscence of the couple’s

former happiness, the Eb-F# augmented second, which returns more emphatically toward the end of the opera, reinforces an ever-expanding musical and spiritual gap between Julia and Mark.

As with the waltz's melodic softening, Maconchy further expands their remoteness through melodic elaboration of Eb and F#. Thus the chromatically expanding intervals also denote something of the opera's temporality.

### 3. Drifting Mates

In the final moments of the opera, Julia sings a stratospheric, four-bar hypermetric melody, which begins at the upper echelon of her soprano range (Example 5, one score measure is equal to one beat in the example). Intermittent pitches are omitted from the example so as to illuminate a melody that Maconchy goes through great lengths to expose by placing it in the highest register of Julia's soprano range. In this case, the term "hypermeter" should be placed in quotations, since its typical rhythm is not audible in the music, but is nevertheless evident in the score.<sup>19</sup>

When isolating the highest pitches sung by Julia over the course of several lines in the last moments before her departure, one can see that Maconchy has deliberately concealed the opera's key motivic fragments "behind" or within Julia's normal song. The oboe's 'longing' melody receives honorable mention, and Motive 1a's neighboring D-Eb-D appears transposed to G-F#-G. Just as occurs structurally within the opera *writ large*, Motive 1a is 'softened' to the major second G-F-G, and Motive 1b's wobbling D-Eb-Db-C-D is also transposed to G-G#-F#-E-F<sup>‡</sup>, though slightly modified to prolong the dramatic effect of a metrically strong F# that optimistically punctuates the line. Thus, like the lingering stranger behind Mark's eyes, Julia too has her own enigmatic convictions.

Julia's hypermelody emerges with her discovery of the dark "abyss" lingering behind Mark's eyes, and the 12 rehearsal numbers (almost 10 minutes) over which the melody extends could symbolize the expansive "bridge" she must cross to the "other side," where, significantly, the terms "abyss," "bridge," and "other side" are words that recur throughout the opera's final moments. Like the waltz, the "abyss" melody again plays with the Janus-faced enharmonic Gb/F#.



At isolated moments, Julia’s stratospheric song repeatedly descends in thirds from F#/Gb, lingering each time – like the oboe’s ‘longing’ melody on the dreaded Eb, before settling at long last on D<sup>♯</sup> (compare Example 1.2 to Example 5, the F# in Figure 38 is prolonged chromatically upward as if floating before plummeting down to D#, i.e. Eb). Remarkably, the lowest pitch of this melody appears once again to be Eb, which resolves itself downward to D<sup>♯</sup>. Like previous moments of ‘discovery’ in the opera, these wailing descents are all sung *a cappella*.

Recall that in the beginning of the opera, Julia tells us with the first ‘hopeful’ major third D-F#, “When he comes it is May Day. I shall be free I shall be gay. O let him not delay!” At that time we assumed that the “he” she referred to was Mark, but now – just moments before the opera’s conclusion – she lets us on to the fact that there is and always has been another being in the picture. Julia cries “He is saying ‘Part. Depart, depart’” (*Poco più mosso* after Figure 50) – D-Eb, D-Eb, D-Eb. She then says to Mark, “The being behind your eyes is neither enemy nor friend. Behind your eyes is nothing now but a bridge over a black abyss” (Figure 53ff.). At this realization, we hear the D-Eb-F# collection for the last time. Following a magical flourish in the harp (1 after Figure 55), Mark echoes Julia’s ‘abyss’ melody, responding with the text “Joy is afar over the Alps of loss.” In these, the final moments before her departure, the chorus enters with an ominous responsorial of Psalm 120 set to the pitches D<sup>♯</sup>-Eb. As the chorus’s text instructs, “Levavi oculos meos in montes,” “I lift my eyes to the hills,”

...from where will my help come?

120:2 My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.

...

120:8 The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.<sup>20</sup>

Gradually in these moments, Julia drifts into the distance, singing “That bridge I cross...Nor light, nor touch...Only the word Depart, Depart, Depart” – D-F#, D-F#, D-F#. And together our eyes and ears, like Julia’s soul, are lifted to heaven.

Philosopher and literary critic Catherine Clement has famously presented opera as a genre in which women frequently die.<sup>21</sup> Clement argues that the staged death of female characters is representative of an off-stage muting and mutiny against women that is prevalent in our male-dominated society. Maconchy's Julia, however, as if preempting Clement, is given a voice *only* in death. Like her creator, Julia's music survives her relentlessly long after the final curtain has been drawn.

In *The Departure* one easily sees how Maconchy develops her compositions through motivic cells at all structural levels of the work. Eb is central to several independent motives in the work, presented in the funeral dirge, the stranger figure, and featured as the connection between life and death. In this way, Maconchy's opera demonstrates, what Rhiannon Mathias terms, her typical "expansion through a prism."<sup>22</sup> The Eb is an important pitch that links the opera extrinsically to Maconchy's other works, featuring significantly, for example, also in Maconchy's Second String Quartet, where C-D-Eb are important features of the motivic cells. And, comparably to the D-Eb-F# cell in *The Departure*, the first theme of the Ninth String Quartet is comprised of the pitches D-D#-F#.

As Eb is a signatory trait of Maconchy's music, it possibly serves as a signature, like J. S. B-A-C-H's, Shostakovich's D-S-C-H, Elgar's caricatures of his wife in variations 1, 9, and 14, of the *Enigma Variations*, or Ethel Smyth's E-H indicative of her intimate relationship with Elisabeth (Lisl), her piano teacher Herzogenberg's wife.

But one can, after all, never be certain of a composer's inspiration. I suppose, this is one of many mysteries that Maconchy took with her on her very own departure.

## ANNOTATIONS

<sup>1</sup> Rutland Boughton, 'Sadler's Wells and British Opera', *The Musical Times* 86 (1945), no. 1232, pp. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Williams, and Twentieth-century British Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens*, Surrey 2012, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Twelve years span between the composition of the seventh and eighth quartets, with relatively few works composed between 1956 and 1960, these include, *Variations on a Theme from Vaughan Williams's 'Job'*, for cello (1957); *A Hymn*

to *God the Father* (J. Donne), for tenor and piano (1959). The dates of the string quartets are as follows, String Quartet No. 1 (1932/3); String Quartet No. 2 (1936); String Quartet No. 3 (1938); String Quartet No. 4 (1942/3); String Quartet No. 5 (1948); String Quartet No. 6 (1950); String Quartet No. 7 (1955); String Quartet No. 8 (1967); String Quartet No. 9 (1968); String Quartet No. 10 (1972); String Quartet No. 11 (1976); String Quartet No. 12 (1979); String Quartet No. 13, “*Quartetto Corto*” (1984).

- <sup>4</sup> Nicola Lefanu, ‘Three Welcome strangers’, *Opera* 1315 (November 2007), p. 24. <http://opera.archive.netcopy.co.uk/article/november-2007/24/three-welcome-strangers> (accessed 26 July 2014); Erica Siegel, “*What a delicious, what a malicious imputation!*” *Gender and Politics in the Reception of Elizabeth Maconchy’s The Sofa*, MA Thesis, UC Riverside, 2012, p. 15-6.
- <sup>5</sup> Catherine Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers: Elisabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy and Thea Musgrave*, Oxford 2005, p. 69.
- <sup>6</sup> See ??? in this volume.
- <sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, [this volume p.5](#).
- <sup>8</sup> Anthony Tommasini, ‘Who Killed This Woman’s Lover? And Other Elusive Operatic Issues’, *The New York Times*, 27 March 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/28/arts/music/monodramas-new-york-city-opera-one-acts-review.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/28/arts/music/monodramas-new-york-city-opera-one-acts-review.html?_r=0) (last accessed 3 December, 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> The Latin “Song of the Ascents” is listed in Catholic Bibles as Psalm 120 prior to revisions introduced with the publication of the Revised Standard Version (1946; 1952; 1971). In modern editions, this psalm is listed as Psalm 121.
- <sup>10</sup> Not to be confused with Maconchy’s *Three Donne Songs* for Tenor and piano from 1964, which also feature two songs with the titles *A Hymn to God the Father* and *A Hymn to Christ*.
- <sup>11</sup> Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers* (note 5), p. 69.
- <sup>12</sup> Nicola LeFanu, personal communication with author, 25 October 2014.
- <sup>13</sup> Anne Ridler, *Memoirs*, Oxford 2004, p. 182.
- <sup>14</sup> Anne Dunlop, personal communication with author, 25 October 2014.
- <sup>15</sup> The wobbling quintuplet outlines the same intervallic content of the feature “motivic cell” of the viola’s melody at “Tempo II” of Maconchy’s String Quartet No. 9, movement I, Figure 4, and returns again in movement II: *Presto* of the

same quartet. Compare this figure also to the opening of the fourth movement, see Examples 4 and 5.

- <sup>16</sup> Eb and D function similarly in the melody of Maconchy's *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings* (1945).
- <sup>17</sup> All rehearsal numbers refer to the score published by Chester Music, Elizabeth Maconchy, *The Departure: Opera in One Act*, London, 1961.
- <sup>18</sup> Such moments of reflective contemplation are also apparent in her late quartets, see the viola in String Quartet No. 9, first movement: Poco piu mosso (Tempo II). See Rhiannon Mathias, p.7, this volume.
- <sup>19</sup> On the relation of meter and rhythm regarding hypermeter, see Christopher Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, Oxford 1997, pp. 176-182.
- <sup>20</sup> Ps 121:1, 2, 8, New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.
- <sup>21</sup> Clément, 'Dead Women', in *Opera, Or, The Undoing of Women*, Minneapolis 1988, pp. 43-59.
- <sup>22</sup> See Rhiannon Mathias this volume.