

Rediscovering Maude Valerie White by Christopher Howell

The current interest in women composers has only marginally touched Maude Valérie White. Perhaps her almost exclusive output of songs is felt to play into the hands of those who dismiss Victorian women composers as the musical equivalent of the Victorian lady with her sketch book and amateur watercolours. Her one-time popularity, and even the name Maude, tempt commentators to include her in a blanket dismissal of female amateurs. This is grossly unfair. White had a thorough professional training and, from approximately 1880 to 1914, supported herself almost exclusively through her compositions. Not many male composers managed this in those years. Above all, it is grossly unjust in view of the generally high standard and wide range of her songs. Moreover, her most famous song, *So we'll go no more a-roving*, has melodic and harmonic subtleties which Roger Quilter, for one, could have been proud to pen, and a glance at her settings of poems in other languages reveals a composer of unexpected range, resource and imagination. This latter point may arouse perplexity. White can seem a different composer according to the language she is setting. Is there a “real White” with a personal voice underlying this stylistic roving? Probably we need a fuller knowledge of her work to answer this.

The present article is prompted by the issue of a CD of songs by White, in which I accompany the Italian mezzo-soprano Elisabetta Paglia (Da Vinci Classics C01001). Unfortunately, it was not possible to include texts and translations with the CD, so I take the opportunity to include them here, and to expand my comments beyond what was possible in the booklet note.

For the following biographical sketch of Maude Valérie White, I am indebted to Sophie Fuller’s 1998 thesis *Women composers during the British renaissance 1880-1918* (King’s College, London)¹. Also well worth reading is Eugene Gates’s article *Emerging from the Shadows: Maude Valérie White, a Significant Figure in the History of English Song* (The Kaprolova Society Journal Vol. 18, Issue 1, June 2020)²

White was born in Dieppe on 23 June 1855 to English parents. The family moved to the UK before she reached the age of one. Aged seven, she spent two years in Heidelberg with her German governess, returning in 1864. The following year she was sent to school in Paris for three years, during which period her father died. Back in London, in 1868, she stayed with George Rose-Innes, a trustee of the White family who became something of a father figure. Rose-Innes, from Chile, enabled her to add Spanish to her store of languages and also introduced her to Italian opera, a potent melodic counterbalance to the strictly classical diet of her piano lessons up till that time. White published her first song in 1874. In 1874-5 she was in Torquay, where she took lessons in harmony and counterpoint from W.S. Rockstro, and in 1876 she was admitted to the Royal Academy of Music, where she studied composition with Sir George Macfarren. In 1879 she became the first woman to obtain the Mendelssohn scholarship. In 1881, however, her mother died and White, distraught, abandoned the scholarship and went to Chile for ten months, where her sister was staying with the Rose-Innes family. Her return to London in 1882 coincided with the death of George Rose-Innes and she took a room on her own – a bold step for a woman in Victorian society.

White had by now a burgeoning portfolio of published compositions. The White family had been neither poor nor particularly wealthy and from now on she depended on her own efforts for an income – teaching piano if necessary, publishing songs and organizing concerts of her own music for preference. She also

¹ <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/women-composers-during-the-british-musical-renaissance-1880-1918>, still available as of 1.4.2025.

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363841276_Emerging_from_the_Shadows_Maude_Valerie_White_a_Significant_Figure_in_the_History_of_English_Song, still available as of 1.4.2025.

used her linguistic skills to translate books and poetry. Unlike many women song composers in the Victorian period, she remained unmarried – the nearest she came to a sentimental attachment, so far as is known, was her longstanding friendship with Robert Hichens (1864-1950), a homosexual writer and aesthete associated with Oscar Wilde and Alfred Douglas who introduced her to the beauties of Italy.

In 1883, White went to Vienna to study for six months with Robert Fuchs. Fuchs, and Macfarren before him, was concerned that White had written no large-scale works. Both tried to persuade her to write a piano concerto and both came to agree that songs and miniatures were her comfort zone.

In her heyday, till the end of the century and, to some extent, until 1914, White enjoyed a high reputation and a more than adequate income on the strength of her compositions – enough to enable her to travel frequently. This was partly a matter of cultural curiosity, but ill-health increasingly obliged her to choose spa towns and places noted for their favourable climate. From 1901, encouraged by Hichens, she made Taormina, Sicily, her base, moving to Florence after the 1908 Messina earthquake. For a period, she was also in Rome, sharing accommodation with her sister. Her compositions petered out (the last was published in 1927) and, in the post-1918 world, she seemed a figure from the past. She published two volumes of memories and spent her last years in London, where she died in 1937.

The songs on this CD follow linguistic groupings rather than a chronological sequence. White was fluent in all the five languages sung here. Appropriately for a disc made in Italy with an Italian singer, it opens with an Italian group.

Isotta Blanzesmano, published by Ricordi in 1906, is an opulent affair. Its claustrophobic, decadent atmosphere and fragile longing could easily have been penned by Mascagni, a composer much associated with Gabriele D’Annunzio. Not the blood-and-thunder Mascagni of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, but the delicate, sensitive artist of *Zanetto* or *Silvano*. This song also reveals White’s love of sweeping, arpeggiated chords, which lend sumptuousness even to her simplest accompaniments. White’s songs often had much more complicated original accompaniments which held no terrors for the composer herself. Her publishers, however, insisted that they be reduced to something more marketable. White provided her own English translation, as was her almost invariable custom. She does not rigorously follow the original metre of the poem and provided several rhythmic variants for those singing in English.

<p>Torna in fior di giovinezza Isaotta Blanzesmano; Dice: Tutto al mondo è vano, Ne l’amore ogni dolcezza.</p> <p>Fanno l’ore compagnia Alla bionda Blanzesmano; Dicon: “Tutto al mondo è vano, Ne l’amore ogni dolcezza.”</p> <p>S’apra, come rosa in fiore Alla gioia il cuore umano, Perché tutto al mondo è vano, Ne l’amore ogni dolcezza.</p> <p>Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), <i>Trionfo d’Isaotta</i> White sets verse 1, second parts of verses 2 and 13</p>	<p>Lo, in the flower of youth returneth Isaotta Blanzesmano; Sighing: All on earth is vanity, In love alone undying sweetness.</p> <p>And th’attendant hours surround her, Isaotta Blanzesmano; Sighing: All on earth is vanity, In Love alone undying sweetness.</p> <p>Ev’n as the rose unfolds her petals So the heart of all that’s human Turns to Love since all else is vanity And in Love alone undying sweetness.</p> <p>Free English translation by M.V.W., in the score</p>
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The *Canzoncina pastorale, founded upon an Ancient Sicilian Melody*, was published by Chappell in 1902. This arrangement provides further evidence of White’s love of sweeping arpeggios. White later

incorporated this melody in her piano suite *From the Ionian Sea*³. Lullabies by Mary to the child Jesus are frequent in all Italian regions, but I have not identified the original of this one, which White presumably heard sung in or around Taormina. The unnamed English translator is likely to have been White herself.

<p>O fa la ninna Gesù bello Dormi pur in dolce sonno Dormi O caro bambino, Fa la ninna mio Gesù, A te veglio a te adorando La tua Madre Verginella E va pure replicando, Fa la ninna mio Gesù.</p> <p>E più non soffia il vent'irato, Ma il dolce zeffiretto E si surg' in sonno grado, Fa la ninna mio Gesù, Mormorando ti fa omaggio Il ruscello ch'è vicino E pur dice in suo linguaggio, Fa la ninna mio Gesù</p>	<p>O sleep, my pretty Jesu, sleep While angels out of heaven peep To see if Thou art fast asleep. Sleep my pretty Jesu sleep, For thy gentle Virgin mother O'er thy cradle watch doth keep; And she singeth oh so sweet, Sleep my little Jesu sleep.</p> <p>The softest breeze is blowing now, No more the mournful wind doth weep, And the moon and stars are whisp'ring, Sleep my pretty Jesu sleep. 'Tis for Thee alone my Jesu, That the brook flows towards the deep, Murm'ring as it ripples onward, Sleep my little Jesu sleep.</p>
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Waiting, included in this group because of its Italian theme, combines two unrelated Tuscan *Rispetti* translated very freely by John Addington Symonds. Symonds does not follow the metre of the original poems, so any thoughts of inserting the Italian words in the music, however enticing, must be dismissed as impractical. White adheres more closely here to a traditional ballad manner.

Christina Rossetti's well-known poem "Too late for love, too late for joy" must surely have been inspired by the second of these stanzas.

<p>O swallow flying over hill and plain If you should see my love, Oh bid him come, And tell him on these mountains I remain, Even as a lamb who cannot find her home. And tell him I am left all alone, Even as a tree whose flow'rs are overblown; And tell him I am left without a mate, Even as a tree whose boughs are desolate; And tell him I am left uncomforted, Ev'n as the grass upon the meadows dead.</p> <p>Oh dear, my love, you come too late What found you by the way to do? I saw your comrades pass the gate, But yet not you dear heart, not you. Oh dear, my love, you come too late If but a little more you'd stayed With sighs you would have found me dead If but awhile you'd kept my crying With sighs you would have found me dying.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Addington Symonds (1840-1893)</p>	<p>Colombo che nel poggio sei volato, Colombo che nel poggio hai fatto il nido, E dammi nuove del mi' innamorato, E dammi nuova se l'è morto o vivo: E dammi nuove di quel bel castello, Di lui, di su' madre, e del fratello: E dammi nuove di quel bel paese, Di lui, e della madre che lo fece.</p> <p>Caro amor mio, se' arrivato tardi: Che cosa ci hai fatto per la via? Ne son rivati tanti di quest'altri, E te non ti vedevo, anima mia! Se stavi un altro poco e non venivi, Tu mi trovavi morta di sospiri. Se stavi un altro poco e non tornavi, Tu morta di sospiri mi trovavi.</p>
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³ Published in 1907 by Chappell and recorded by the writer of this article in *An Englishman in Italy*, 2011-12, Sheva Collection SH056 (2 CDs). Reviewed for MWI by [John France](#), [John Sheppard](#) and [Byzantion](#). Not currently (4/2025) available.

<p>From Sketches in Italy and Greece, 1874 The two “verses” are not actually related</p>	<p>Canti popolari toscani, collected by Giuseppe Tigri, 1860 These two “Rispetti” (659 and 878) are Symonds’ stated sources but, while the second is a faithful translation, the first only slightly resembles the original.</p>
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The single Spanish song on this CD, *Serenata Española*, seemed best placed at the end of the Italian group. This is an earlier piece, published by Ricordi in 1883. The chattering accompaniment and brittle rhythms may be a reminder that White knew Spanish culture mainly by way of Chile. The text seems an essentially masculine one, but the score states that the song is for “baritone or mezzo-soprano”, thus authorizing the present performance. The score contains, with the Spanish original, an Italian translation. I offer here a literal English version.

<p>Delio á las rejas de Elisa Le canta en noche serena sus amores: Raya la luna y la brisa Al pasar plácida suena por las flores.</p> <p>Del fondo del pecho mío Vuela á ti suspiro tierno Que yo siento. en él, mi Elisa, te envió El fuego de amor eterno, Que yo siento.</p> <p>Despierta que ya pasaron Las horas que nos costaron Tanto lloro. Sal, que gentil enramada dice á tu puerta enlazada: Yo te adoro.</p> <p>José de Espronceda (1808-1842) Of Espronceda’s 10 verses, M.V.W. sets 1, 7 (slightly altered) and 10</p>	<p>Delio at Elisa’s veranda Sings to her on a serene night of his loves: The moon shines and the breeze, Rustles as it passes placidly among the flowers.</p> <p>From the bottom of my breast I feel a tender sigh Fly to you. In it, my Elisa, I send you The fire of eternal love That I feel.</p> <p>Awake, for the hours Have passed that cost us So many tears. Come up, says that gentle bough Leading to your door: I adore thee.</p>
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The German Lieder were presumably products of White’s period of study with Fuchs in Vienna in 1883. They were published between that year and 1885, when there were gathered into an *Album of German Songs*. Anybody coming to them blind might suppose them to be by Schumann – and worthy products of his pen. Closer examination will find the paradox that White has set, in four of the songs here, texts almost indelibly associated with Schumann, but treating them so differently as to imply a reproach to the German master. It was presumably not White’s intention to create an “anti-Dichterliebe”. Rather, the two composers had different agendas. Schumann had strung together Heine’s miniatures to create a single narrative, giving them implied meanings in their new context that, as White readily spotted, they did not have when taken singly. Nevertheless, ears accustomed to *Dichterliebe* – and what lover of Lieder is not? – will be startled to find *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*, published in 1882, not a dreamlike evocation of a time when the poet might still hope in requited love, but a sprightly expression of a young man’s aspirations. White provided her own English version of most of these German Lieder.

<p>Im wunderschönen Monat Mai, als alle Knospen sprangen, da ist in meinem Herzen die Liebe aufgegangen.</p> <p>Im wunderschönen Monat Mai, als alle Vögel sangen, da hab' ich ihr gestanden mein Sehnen und Verlangen.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)</p>	<p>'Twas in the lovely month of May As all the flow'rs were budding That love awoke in all its strength My heart and fancy flooding.</p> <p>'Twas in the lovely month of May As all the birds were singing That I confess'd my love to her In accents true and ringing.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translation by M.V.W.</p>
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In the love-tangle of *Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen*, published in 1880, Schumann's folksy lilt implies this is the way of the world, we just have to put up with it. White, perhaps taking the maiden's part, adopts a doleful, almost tragic tone.

<p>Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen, die hat einen Andern erwählt; der Andre liebt eine Andre und hat sich mit dieser vermählt.</p> <p>Das Mädchen heiratet aus Ärger den ersten besten Mann, der ihr in den Weg gelaufen; der Jüngling ist übel d'ran.</p> <p>Es ist eine alte Geschichte, doch bleibt sie immer neu, und wem sie just passieret, dem bricht das Herz entzwei.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Heine</p>	<p>A youth once lov'd a maiden, But she cast his love aside Alas! Her heart was given, Who was wooing another bride.</p> <p>The maiden in grief and anger And smarting beneath the blow Accepted another suitor, Heav'n help her lover now!</p> <p>It is an old, old story, And yet alas! how new. May God console each tender heart, That sorrow breaks in two.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translation by M.V.W.</p>
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In *Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen*, published in 1885, where Schumann strains his ear to hear the now distant melodies, while White takes her cue from Heine's "stormy winds and rain", which beat relentlessly and passionately throughout the song.

<p>Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen, das einst die Liebste sang, so will mir die Brust zerspringen vor wildem Schmerzdrang.</p> <p>Es treibt mich ein dunkles Sehnen hinauf zur Waldeshöh', dort löst sich auf in Tränen mein übergrosses Weh'.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Heine</p>	<p>Whenever I hear the strain That once my darling sang Love tortures my heart and brain With many a bitter pang.</p> <p>To the woods I hurry fast Through stormy winds and rain, And blessed tears at last Flow forth and soothe my pain.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translation by M.V.W.</p>
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Himmelsaugen, published in 1885, takes a poem not set by Schumann. Composers who have set it include Robert Franz, Max Reger and Hans Gál. White creates here a strikingly rich effect with the simplest means. This song might almost have been written by the young Richard Strauss.

<p>Aus den Himmelsaugen droben fallen zitternd goldne Funken durch die Nacht, und meine Seele dehnt sich liebe weit und weiter.</p> <p>O ihr Himmelsaugen droben weint euch aus in meine Seele, dass von lichten Sternen tränen überfließet meine Seele.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Heine</p>	<p>From the eyes of heav'n above us Fall the trembling golden starbeams Through the night and all my being Turns to love and tender longing.</p> <p>O ye eyes of heav'n above us Weep yourselves into my soul Till my being overfloweth With those tears of heavenly beauty.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translation by M.V.W.</p>
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Leaving Heine for the moment, there are fewer difference of mood between Schumann's and White's settings of Kerner's *Stille Tränen*. White's version, published in 1885, replaces Schumann's steadily pulsating accompaniment with a piano fantasy that the master would surely not have disowned.

<p>Du bist vom Schlaf erstanden und wandelst durch die Au', da liegt ob allen Landen der Himmel wunderblau.</p> <p>So lang du ohne Sorgen geschlummert schmerzen los, der Himmel bis zum Morgen viel Tränen niedergoss.</p> <p>In stillen Nächten weinet oft mancher aus den Schmerz, und morgens dann ihr meinet, stets fröhlich sei sein Herz.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Justinius Kerner (1786-1862)</p>	<p>Thou wakest full of gladness From slumbers sweet and blest, Unconscious of the sadness In many a weary breast.</p> <p>In peace thou hast been sleeping For thou hast never mourn'd The day of bitter weeping Not yet for thee hath dawn'd.</p> <p>How oft a night of sorrow Succeeds the weary day Yet all think on the morrow The pain hath pass'd away.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translation by M.V.W.</p>
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Die Das Meer hat seine Perlen, thanks to Longfellow's rendering, is perhaps Heine's most famous poem in the English-speaking world. It has been set by many composers, with general preference for an idyllic treatment. White's version, published in 1880, opts for galloping passion, with an accompaniment reminiscent of Schubert's in *Der Musensohn*. She did not provide a translation of her own in this case – evidently she was happy with Longfellow's.

<p>Das Meer hat seine Perlen, der Himmel seine Sterne, aber mein Herz, mein Herz, mein Herz hat seine Liebe.</p> <p>Groß ist das Meer und der Himmel, doch größer ist mein Herz, und schöner als Perlen und Sterne leuchtet und strahlt meine Liebe.</p>	<p>The sea hath its pearls, The heaven hath its stars; But my heart, my heart, My heart hath its love.</p> <p>Great are the sea and the heaven; Yet greater is my heart, And fairer than pearls and stars Flashes and beams my love.</p>
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Du kleines, junges Mädchen, komm an mein großes Herz; mein Herz und das Meer und der Himmel vergeh'n vor lauter Liebe.	Thou little, youthful maiden, Come unto my great heart; My heart, and the sea, and the heaven Are melting away with love!
Heine	Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Espoir en Dieu was one of White's earliest successes, published by Choudens in 1878. The model here may be Gounod. If White cannot quite achieve the fruity memorability of that master's *Repentir* (*O Divine Redeemer*), she matches most of his other songs in religious vein. White also wrote an orchestral accompaniment to this song.

Espère enfant demain et puis demain encore, Et puis toujours demain croyons dans l'avenir. Espère! et chaque fois que se lève l'aurore, Soyons là pour prier comme Dieu pour bénir.	Hope, child! tomorrow, then tomorrow once more, and ever tomorrow, let us believe in what is to come. Hope! and every time the dawn rises let us be there to pray, as God is there to bless.
Nos fautes, mon pauvre ange, ont causé nos souffrances Peut-être qu'en restant bien longtemps à genoux Quand il aura béni toutes les innocences Puis tous les repentirs Dieu finira par nous.	Our faults, my poor angel, have caused our sufferings. Perhaps if we remain for long on our knees, when He has blessed all the innocent and then all the repentant, God will close with a blessing for us.
Victor Hugo (1802-1885)	Literal translation by C. Howell.

The later *Si j'étais Dieu*, published by Cocks in 1893, is closer to Fauré in its flowing manner and modulations, though with an extra burst of passionate adrenalin.

Si j'étais Dieu la mort serait sans proie Les hommes seraient bons, j'abolirais l'adieu Et nous ne verserions que des larmes de joie, Si j'étais Dieu.	If I were God, death would have no prey, Men would be good, there would be no farewells And we would shed only tears of joy, If I were God.
Si j'étais Dieu pour toi celle que j'aime je déploierais un ciel toujours frais, toujours bleu Mais je te laisserais O mon ange la même Si j'étais Dieu.	If I were God, over you whom I love, I would spread a sky that is always cool, always blue. But you, my angel, I would leave exactly as you are, If I were God.
Sully Prudhomme (1839-1907) White omits the second of the three verses.	Literal translation by C. Howell.

The other two songs in this French group are much later and reflect White's response to the Great War. *Le départ du conscrit*, published by Winthrop Rogers in 1917, is a dialogue between a departing soldier and his sweetheart. The two never sing together and there is no indication that White intended it to be divided between two singers. Indeed, the front page of the score tells us it was sung by Mr. Gervase Elwes and M. Boris Lansky – no singer of the opposite sex is named. The texture is more austere than in the earlier songs, creating a powerfully brooding atmosphere that saves the potentially mawkish sentimentality of the words, a *prose-poème* by White herself. As was her custom, she also provided an English version, sufficiently different metrically to require separate staves for the two languages.

(Lui) Je dois partir, ma douce femme	(He) I must away my heart's beloved
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<p style="text-align: center;">pour la terrible guerre</p> <p>(Elle) Tu n'iras pas seul mon amour te suivra et nous serons ensemble toujours.</p> <p>(Lui) Je ne crains guère mort ni blessure C'est de te laisser seule qui me brise l'âme</p> <p>(Elle) Je ne serai pas seule mon bien aimé car ton cœur fidèle veillera sur moi jour et nuit</p> <p>(Lui) Mais si je tombe dans la bataille que deviendras tu mon pauvre amour ?</p> <p>(Elle) Je mourrais moi-même et mon ange gardien portera mon âme rejoindre ton âme au Paradis.</p> <p>(Lui) Hélas ! qu'en savons nous ? pourtant si c'était vrai !</p> <p>Mon Dieu, mon Dieu qu'importerait la mort !</p> <p>(Elle) C'est vrai mon bien aimé, car notre doux Seigneur nous aime encore mieux que nous ne nous aimons toi et moi.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Prose-poème by Maude Valérie White</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">to join the dreadful battle</p> <p>(She) Thou wilt not go alone my love will follow thee And we will be together alway.</p> <p>(He) I fear not Death, nor wound nor pain 'Tis leaving thee alone that sears my very soul</p> <p>(She) I shall not be alone have no fear, my dear one, for thy faithful heart will watch over me day and night.</p> <p>(He) But should I fall on the battlefield, what, poor child will then become of thee?</p> <p>(She) Then I will also die and my guardian angel will carry my soul to meet thy soul in Paradise.</p> <p>(He) Alas! How can we know! And yet if it were true! my God! my God! the sting of Death were gone!</p> <p>(She) 'Tis true my best beloved, For Christ our gentle Saviour doth love us even more than we love one another thou and I.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">English version in score presumably by M.V.W.</p>
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The subject matter of *On the Fields of France*, despite its English text, places it logically as a pendant to this group. It was published by Winthrop Rogers in 1919. The semi-recitative style and harmonic shifts suggest that White had kept up with such younger contemporaries as Bantock, or even Scott, and was prepared to use their techniques when appropriate. I have been unable to identify definitely the author of this poem. The Irish Olympic runner Norman McEachern (1899-1986) would be chronologically possible, though I find no indication that he was also a poet.

<p>There are rivers of Peace in Avalon, And Valleys of Rest by heroes trod – Where music lingers, drifting down From the shadowy mountain seat of God –</p> <p>There is music and rest and unfailing peace, In the sheltered valleys of Avalon, When strife is o'er and its turmoils cease, For the heroes whose battles are fought and won On the fields of France.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Norman McEachern</p>

In some ways, the English songs are the most remarkable of all, since the other countries had well-established song traditions and repertoires upon which White could draw. England had the royalty ballad. Though White was slightly younger than Parry or Stanford, her earliest efforts are contemporary with theirs and show a fluidity of form they achieved only later. She can stand as a bridge between Cowen, who was tentatively renewing the ballad form, and Quilter, who much admired her work.

Where White differs from Parry and Stanford is her assumed freedom to top and tail poems even by celebrated writers, omitting or repeating lines, and even reordering the text. This was something Cowen allowed, but he did not often set the finest poetry. An extreme case is *How do I love thee*, a setting of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous lines published by Ricordi in 1885. I reproduce here the text as set by White and the poet's original.

<p>How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, I love thee purely. I love thee to the level of every day's Most quiet need. I love thee with the breath of all my life; And, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.</p> <p>Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) (Sonnets from the Portuguese no. 43) M.V.W. has omitted several lines and reordered those remaining.</p>	<p>How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of being and ideal grace. I love thee to the level of every day's Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for right. I love thee purely, as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath, Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.</p> <p>E.B. Browning's poem in its original form</p>
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If literary-minded readers will raise their eyebrows, they will not deny, I hope, that White's use of developing melodic lines rather than cut and dried tunes is highly effective and puts her at the forefront of British song writing in the mid-1880s.

Developing melodic lines are also a strong feature of her most famous song, *So we'll go no more a roving*, published by Chappell in 1888. In this case, her liberties with the text are more restrained.

<p>So, we'll go no more a roving So late into the night, Though the heart be still as loving, And the moon be still as bright.</p> <p>For the sword outwears the sheath, And the soul wears out the breast, And the heart itself must pause, And love itself have rest.</p> <p>Though the night was made for loving, And the day returns too soon, Yet we'll go no more a roving By the light of the moon.</p> <p>George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824) M.V.W. has slightly altered the second verse</p>
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In *A Greeting*, published by Boosey in 1894, White sets her own take on a poem by Rückert, *Ich sende einen Gruß wie Duft der Rosen*. Her version begins faithfully but increasingly becomes a personal gloss. Moreover, she does not respect Rückert's original metre, so her setting could not be sung to the German words, which I reproduce here for the benefit of readers who wish to study White's treatment of them. She achieves a fine cumulative effect, in which the voice soars above one of her most elaborate accompaniments.

<p>To you I send a greeting sweet as summer roses, To you whose face is like a summer rose; To you I send a greeting soft as spring's caresses, To you within whose eyes the springtime glows.</p>	<p>Ich sende einen Gruss wie Duft der Rosen, Ich send' ihn an ein Rosenangesicht. Ich sende einen Gruß wie Frühlingskosen, Ich send' ihn an ein Aug voll Frühlingslicht.</p>
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<p>From out my storm-toss'd heart It wings its way to you, And gently may it in your own alight.</p> <p>When you remember me, whose days are sad and dark, Then all is well, and once again 'tis light; To you I send a greeting sweet as summer roses, To you whose face is like a summer rose, To you within whose eyes the spring-time glows.</p> <p>Translated by M.V.W. from the German of Rückert</p>	<p>Aus Schmerzensstürmen, die mein Herz durchtosen, Send' ich den Hauch, dich unsanft rühr' er nicht! Wenn du gedenkest an den Freudelosen, So wird der Himmel meiner Nächte licht.</p> <p>The original poem by Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)</p>
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In strong contrast with the imperious passion of *A Greeting* is the intimacy of the *Three Little Songs*, published by Chappell in 1897. Unlike Liza Lehmann, White showed no interest in constructing song-cycles. The brevity of these three miniatures, rather than any common theme, probably led to the decision that they should not stand alone. The text of *When the swallows homeward fly* is baldly described as “from a German Volkslied”. The default assumption is that White herself made the translation. The original has been identified as *Wenn die Schwalben heimwärts ziehn* by Karl Reginald Herloss⁴. It has a ritornello and a third verse not set by White. The author of *A Memory* is not named in the score and no source for this poem has been found. Again, the default assumption is that White wrote them (or translated them) herself. The author of *Let us forget* was in her day a celebrated associate of the Pre-Raphaelites.

<p>When the swallows homeward fly And the rose's bloom is o'er, And the nightingale's sweet song In the woods is heard no more, Then I think with bitter pain, Shall we ever meet again?</p> <p>When the swans fly towards the south Where the golden lemons grow, And the sun sinks in the west, And the hills are all aglow! Then my heart goes out to you, And forgetting all the pain, Hope once more within me whispers "You will surely meet again".</p> <p>“Words from a German Volkslied”, presumably M.V.W.’s translation</p>
<p>Oh! To be light of heart once more, To ride through the woods again, As once I rode ere sweetest joy, Had turned to saddest pain</p> <p>Do you remember that glad day, That sun-bath'd day in June, When all the world was harmony, And you – the perfect tune?</p> <p>No one will ever love a tune,</p>

⁴ See the entry in Emily Ezust’s Lieder site: https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=25218, retrieved 2.4.2025

As I that simple lay,
Content to live because you were
So good to me that day.

No author is named

Let us forget we loved each other much,
Let us forget we ever have to part,
Let us forget that any look or touch,
First let in either to the other's heart.

Only we'll sit upon the daisied grass,
And hear the larks and see the swallows pass,
Only we'll live a while, as children play,
Without tomorrow, without yesterday.

M. Darmesteter, married name of Agnes Mary Frances Robinson (1857-1944)

The regular movement and melodic shape of *Absent yet Present*, an earlier piece published by Stanley Lucas, Weber and Co. in 1880, brings it closer to the Victorian ballad. A refined, flowing accompaniment helps it to rise above most of its presumed models. Sung by Charles Santley, it was an immediate success and long retained its popularity. On the winding up of the original publisher in 1903 and subsequent auction of their copyrights, E. Goodman of Chappell's wrote to White that he had offered £470 for it, but had been outbid by Stanley Lucas who, he believed, had offered £600⁵.

As the flight of a river
That flows to the sea,
My soul rushes ever
In tumult to thee.

A twofold existence
I am where thou art;
My heart, in the distance,
Beats close to thy heart.

Look up, I am near thee,
I gaze on thy face;
I see thee, I hear thee,
I feel thine embrace.

And absence but brightens
The eyes that I miss,
And custom but heightens
The spell of thy kiss.

It is not from duty,
Though that may be owed,-
It is not from beauty,
Tho' that be bestow'd;

But all that I care for
And all that I know,
Is that, without wherefore,
I worship thee so.

⁵ Maude Valérie White: *Friends and Memories*, Edward Arnold 1914, p. 186.

Lord Lytton – Edward George Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873)
The original poem has ten verses. M.V.W. sets 1-3 and 5-7

For *Ask Not*, published by Morley in 1890, White drew upon a writer who was not so much an independent poet as a provider of verses that might be set to music. Cowen had frequently made use of his fluent if unoriginal talent. Parry and Stanford, and more often than not White herself, established the custom of setting songs to “real” poetry and treating it with the respect it deserves. Can we perhaps detect a touch of irony in the vocal roulades with which White brings a touch of originality to what might have been a tawdry ballad?

I love thee! ask not why, love,
It is because thou art
Beyond, above, and standing
From all beside, apart;
The movement of my world is
The beating of thy heart.

Thou speakest, and my spirit
Gives answer unto thine;
The music of thy soul, love,
Is set to words of mine,
Till Life with all its discord,
Is like a song divine.

I love thee! O but ask not,
Nor bid me tell thee why;
As well ask why the sun shines,
Or why the wild birds fly;
I know that I must love thee –
None other, till I die.

Clifton Bingham (1859-1913)

Clearly, a lot more work needs to be done before we can bring White fully into focus – ideally, we need a carefully edited complete edition. It is to be hoped that this disc will give a hint of the riches to be found and encourage further exploration. Some of these songs, too, though little heard in recent years, have a recorded history that goes back to White’s own day – for which reason I hesitate to make any specific claims about first recordings here. It would be interesting to restore some of these early recordings to a more permanent life than that provided by occasional YouTube offerings.

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