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Herbert Howells's "Two Afrikaans songs" (1929)

Summary

The English composer Herbert Howells (1892-1983) did not understand the Afrikaans language, but he did hear it spoken when he travelled in South Africa in 1921. In his letters from South Africa he made very negative comments on the sound of the language. In this article his "Two Afrikaans Songs" of 1929 (*Eensaamheid* and *Vryheidsgees*, on texts by Jan F E Celliers) are analysed in order to determine whether his settings in a language foreign to him are convincing. It is concluded that the songs reveal remarkable sensitivity to the Afrikaans texts. Howells probably consulted the Afrikaans-speaking South African mezzo-soprano Betsy de la Porte, who was a student at the Royal College of Music in London where he was teaching. The "Two Afrikaans Songs" are a surprising, extraordinary and invaluable contribution to the Afrikaans song repertoire.

Herbert Howells se "Twee Afrikaanse liedere" (1929)

Die Engelse komponis Herbert Howells (1892-1983) het nie Afrikaans verstaan nie, maar gehoor hoe dit gepraat word tydens sy Suid-Afrikaanse reis in 1921. In die briewe wat hy uit Suid-Afrika geskryf het, het hy baie negatiewe kommentaar gelewer op die klank van die taal. In hierdie artikel word sy "Two Afrikaans Songs" uit 1929 (*Eensaamheid* en *Vryheidsgees*, op tekste van Jan F E Celliers) ontleed om vas te stel of Howells se toonsettings in 'n taal wat vir hom vreemd was, oortuigend gedoen is. Die gevolgtrekking is dat die liedere 'n merkwaardige gevoeligheid vir die Afrikaanse tekste openbaar. Howells is heelwaarskynlik deur die Afrikaanssprekende Suid-Afrikaanse mezzo-sopraan Betsy de la Porte gehelp. Sy het op daardie stadium aan die Royal College of Music in Londen gestudeer, waar Howells 'n dosent was. Howells se twee Afrikaanse liedere is 'n verrassende, merkwaardige en onskatbare bydrae tot die repertoire van Afrikaanse liedere.

Herbert Howells (1892-1983) was 28 years old when he toured South Africa for six weeks in 1921 as an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.¹ During that tour he presided at examinations in many centres in the then Cape Province and Orange Free State.² Howells was not impressed by the standard of music-making in South Africa, and he was very critical of many of the people he met.³ In spite of his antipathy towards the sound of Afrikaans, to which he was often exposed, Howells surprisingly enough, composed two songs in this “God-forsaken language”, in 1929.⁴ By that time (on 27 May 1925 to be precise) Afrikaans had been included as an official language of the Union of South Africa.⁵ Howells’s “Two Afrikaans Songs”, *Eensaamheid* (“Loneliness”) and *Vryheidsgees* (“Spirit of freedom”), are settings of poems by Jan F E Celliers (1865-1940), one of the first generation of Afrikaans poets.⁶

- 1 The author would like to thank Chris Bornet, Reference Librarian at the Library of the Royal College of Music in London, Paul Andrews of Bedford, England, and Mrs Ursula Péliissier (Howells’s daughter) of Petworth, England, for their invaluable help. Financial assistance from the Anglo American Corporation in Johannesburg, the University of Pretoria and the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria is gratefully acknowledged. Findings and conclusions drawn in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of these institutions.
- 2 Since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the provinces have been reorganised and most of their names changed. The places that Howells visited were Ceres, Villiersdorp, Worcester, Robertson, Montagu, Riversdale, Mossel Bay, George (all now in the Western Cape); Willowmore, Graaff-Reinet (Eastern Cape); Bethulie (Free State); Aliwal North (Eastern Cape); Rouxville, Smithfield (Free State); Sterkstroom, Indwe, East London, Fort Beaufort, Bedford (Eastern Cape), and Cape Town (Western Cape).
- 3 Van der Mescht 1998, 1999, 2000.
- 4 In a previous article, I traced the origins of Howells’s “Two Afrikaans Songs”. Cf Van der Mescht (1994).
- 5 “From as early as 1914 Afrikaans was used both as the medium of instruction and as a subject in the primary schools in the Cape, the Transvaal and the Free State and in 1915 the [*Suid-Afrikaanse*] *Akademie [vir Wetenskap en Kuns]* published its first Afrikaans spelling list” (Liebenberg & Spies 1993: 198).
- 6 Howells’s title *Vrijheidsgees* uses incorrect spelling. It should have been *Vrijheidsgeest* as in the original volume of poetry, or *Vryheidsgees* as in the later Afrikaans version.

At the time of their composition Howells was an experienced composer with about 70 songs to his credit; after 1929 he produced only a handful more songs.

In his *magnum opus* on the Afrikaans song, Johann Potgieter regards c 1900-1913 as the first period in the development of the Afrikaans song.⁷ This he calls the "immigrant period", as most of the composers were immigrants to South Africa. The period c 1914-1933 he calls the "period of awakening" ("bewuswordingsperiode"), in which Afrikaners realised that Afrikaans was a feasible language for song-writing. It is to this period that Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs" of 1929 belong. Notable contemporary Afrikaans songs include some of S le Roux Marais's compositions which later became very well-known art songs: *Geboorte van die Lente*; *Mali, die slaaf se lied*; *Sluimer, beminde*; and *Heimwee*. 1930 saw the composition of further fine Afrikaans art songs: Jan Bouws's folk-like *Op my ou ramkietjie* (poem by C Louis Leipoldt), Gideon Fagan's immensely touching *Klein sonneskyn* (A G Visser), and Johannes Joubert's *Dis al* (Jan F E Celliers).⁸

Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs" were dedicated to the famous South African mezzo-soprano Betsy de la Porte (1901-1977) who at the time of their composition (1929) was a student at the Royal College of Music in London. Howells had been teaching there since 1920.⁹ De la Porte enrolled at the College on 4 May 1925¹⁰ after being awarded the University of South Africa's overseas music scholarship in 1924.¹¹ After an interrupted period of study, she finally left the College on 26th July 1930.¹²

7 Potgieter 1967: viii-ix.

8 Potgieter 1967: 48, 117, 125, 129. Johannes Joubert was the *nom de plume* of Hayden Matthews. Cf Malan 1984: 213-8.

9 Palmer 1992: 24.

10 According to the enrolment form (Application Regr No 7000) of Elizabeth de la Porte which is kept in the Archive of the Royal College of Music in London.

11 Malan 1979: 328-9.

12 Betsy de la Porte was not the only South African student at the College at that time. Another South African was Gideon Johannes Fagan (1904-1980) who was only 17 years old when he enrolled on 30 September 1922. He left on 12 June 1926, according to his enrolment form in the Archive of the Royal College of Music. He became a well-known conductor (of *inter alia* the Northern Orches-

The fact that Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs" are virtually unknown in South Africa must be attributed largely to the unavailability of the sheet music before 1999. De la Porte did not bring back a copy of the songs upon her return to South Africa in 1935, and never performed the songs in this country.¹³ While they are mentioned in a book containing an index with all the songs owned by Betsy de la Porte, kept in the Betsy de la Porte Special Collection in the University of South Africa's Archival and Special Collections in Pretoria, the "Two Afrikaans Songs" are not in the collection.

They have been recorded on compact disc, but these courageous efforts by a singer who apparently did not know Afrikaans and was working from Howells's difficult-to-read manuscript, contain many pronunciation errors.¹⁴ I was of the opinion that the songs should not be left languishing in manuscript in the library of the Royal College of Music in London,¹⁵ and therefore prepared the first printed edition, which was published in 1999 by the Department of Music of the University of Pretoria.

An article on his friend Ivor Gurney (1890-1937),¹⁶ which appeared in *Music and Letters* in January 1938, contains one of the rare expressions of Howells's views on the art of song writing:¹⁷

There is, indeed, so much in Gurney that few English song-writers have possessed. It is my belief that not more than five or six since Dowland and Campion have brought to their task a literary perception equal to his. It is direct and experienced knowledge of poetry —

tra of the BBC in Manchester) and, in 1964, the Head of Music of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Among his compositions are the excellent songs *Klein sonneskyn* (1930, A G Visser) and *Wys my die plek* (1941, C Louis Leipoldt), both often sung by Betsy de la Porte, according to the pianist and expert on the Afrikaans song Anna Bender, who was Betsy de la Porte's accompanist between 1950 and 1970 (personal communication 1998-06-22: P O Box 85083, Emmarentia 2029). Cf Malan 1982: 48-50.

13 According to Anna Bender (personal communication 1998-06-22).

14 The recording was produced by Chandos Records, CHAN 9185/6. The performers are Catherine Pierard (soprano) and Julius Drake (piano).

15 *Vrijheidsgees* is MS 5271/1a and *Eensaamheid* is MS 5271/1b.

16 Both Howells and Gurney grew up in Gloucestershire. They studied in Gloucester with Herbert Brewer (1865-1928) and then at the Royal College of Music in London.

17 Howells 1938: 13-17.

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the poet's 'creative knowledge' — that so often lends beauty and power to his approach. This it is that enables him so often to find that first engendering phrase of a song. It is this again that enables him to succeed just where most song composers signally fail — in that element of pace-variation which is the birthright of speech and the despair of music-set-to-words. All union of music to words is based on compromise. It is the mark of genius that it does not stress that compromise. [...]he precious understanding of pace-variation within the phrase, or within the stanza as a whole, rarely deserts Gurney.

Are these complimentary words also applicable to Howells's own "Two Afrikaans Songs", seventy years after their composition? And what artistic (apart from historical) considerations justified their publication and dissemination to the world at large? The purpose of my article, therefore, is to discuss the artistic merits of Herbert Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs". How well did Howells set these two very different texts in a language that he did not know? And did he convey the meaning of the Afrikaans texts in his settings?

1. *Eensaamheid*

1.1 The poem

Eensaamheid is the fourth poem in *Die vlakke en andere gedigte* (translated "The plain, and other poems"), Celliers's debut volume of poems. It was published by Volkstem Printers in Pretoria in 1908 when Celliers was 43 years old. The text of *Eensaamheid* as Howells wrote it down in the manuscript, is clearly not that of the first edition of 1908, where the language is a mixture of Dutch and Afrikaans. Neither is it the "Afrikaansified" 1920 edition.¹⁸ It is my belief that the poem was written down from memory by Betsy de la Porte, using the first Dutch/Afrikaans version she had probably learnt at school and her own modernisation containing Afrikaans spelling (Van der Mescht 2001: 53-62). Being of the opinion that one should certainly not try to be authentic and publish this conflated version found in the manuscript, I decided to use the Afrikaans version published in 1920, prior to Howells's visit to South Africa in 1921. In the music examples in this article, the Afrikaans versions of the two poems are therefore used.

18 Published by *De Nasionale Pers* in Cape Town.

Howells did not set all nine stanzas of the poem.¹⁹ Probably under the influence of Betsy de la Porte (who may have translated the text for him), he chose only four, leaving out stanza three (containing the beautiful lines “Nou bly die lug alom / in stil aanbidding staan”; translated “Now the air around stands still in adoration”); stanza four which rather mundanely refers to oxen; stanza six which refers to God; stanza eight which does not concentrate on nature like the other stanzas he chose; and stanza nine which again refers to God. Howells, who had experienced the isolation of the South African landscape during his tour of the country eight years earlier, decided to set only those stanzas portraying loneliness.

Below follow the four stanzas chosen by Howells, as they appear in the 1920 edition of the poems, with a direct English translation:²⁰

<i>Eensaamheid</i>	Loneliness
<i>My vuurtjie en ek is op wag—</i>	My little fire and I are on guard—
<i>My vuurtjie en ek alleen; die awend-ster wink al van ver, en die velde slaap ombeen.</i>	My little fire and I alone; the evening star beckons from afar, and the surrounding fields are sleeping.
<i>En stadigies sterwe die dag, soos een in sy armoed verlaat, ongesien, ongeag, sonder suggie of lag, waar niemand van weet of van praat.</i>	And slowly the day dies, like one deserted in his poverty, unnoticed, unrespected, without a sigh or a smile, of whom nobody knows or speaks.

19 Neither did Walter Spiethoff (1874-1953) whose setting of *Eensaamheid* was published by Pro Ecclesia Drukkerij in Stellenbosch in 1920. Spiethoff chose stanzas 1, 2, 5 and 6 and used the 1908 spelling. He repeated and added words; this was not done by Howells.

20 Direct translation by Heinrich van der Mescht.

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<i>My vuurtjie is al wat nog leef</i>	My little fire is all that is still alive
<i>in die eindeloos ruim met my,</i>	in the endless expanse with me,
<i>en sy stemmetjie dwaal</i>	and its little voice roams
<i>soos 'n deuntjie wat draal</i>	like a little tune that lingers
<i>om dae lank verby,</i>	on days long past.
<i>Die slapende velde lê wyd,</i>	The sleeping fields lie wide,
<i>en wyer die donkere see,</i>	and wider the dark sea,
<i> wat my vuurtjie en my</i>	which tonight separate
<i> vanawend skei</i>	my little fire and me
<i>van die wêreld se vreug en wee;</i>	from the world's joy and sadness.

In his letters from South Africa in 1921 Howells described the loneliness of the South African countryside in an evocative manner. The following is an extract from the letter to his wife, written in East London on Sunday 4 September 1921:²¹

Quite suddenly, the railway begins running along the side of a range of hills. Looking out to the North, one seems to be running on the southern rim of a basin, with the dip of the basin between oneself and the Northern rim; which latter was formed of a 15-miles distant off-shoot of the Stormberg Mountains. It was getting near Sunset-time, and the atmosphere and skie [*sic*] were at clearest [*sic*]. The colour of the distant mountains was wonderfully warm ... pinks, and mauves everywhere, and some patches almost golden. The 'basin' itself, a wide flat (sometimes undulating, too,) stretch of multicoloured soil, here and there green patches where the lonely farmers were farming it and growing oats or other cereals; no hedges, of course, no boundary marks at all; occasional groups of animals (cows mostly, all black in colour; sometimes droves of sheep). Occasionally, too, a patch of the loveliest pink blossom, wherever there was a farmstead with orchards of peach-trees. (I wish you could see the peach blossoms out here just now!) ... And all

21 The letters are kept in the Library of the Royal College of Music in London. This extract is given exactly as Howells wrote it down.

along this huge valley, [...] I saw very few 'European' houses, and practically no white man; but numbers of Kafir men, women and children, and their round huts and stone kralls [*sic*].

1.2 Range and form

The range required from the singer of *Eensaambeid* is extensive, the lowest note being A below middle C, and the highest note G above the staff. This song can be sung by a mezzo-soprano, which was the voice of Betsy de la Porte. Both extreme notes are reached near the end of the song: the high G appears in the fifth-last bar as the peak of a melisma on the first syllable of the word "wêreld" ("world"), and the low A is the penultimate note of the song. It is obvious that Howells appreciates the effect of keeping the most exciting notes for the end.

Eensaambeid can be divided into four sections corresponding to the four stanzas chosen by Howells. The beginning of the final climactic phrase (bar 33) shows a clear reference to the very beginning of the song. In this way the form is rounded off.

Example 1a: Howells *Eensaambeid*, 1-3

35

man - - ne - moed, wat God slegs vrees!

mp

p *mf*

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Example 1b: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 32-38

1.3 Motives

Howells starts the song with a short slow piano introduction with prominent syncopated repeated notes in the middle register (see Example 1a), perhaps indicating the coldness of the evening. These features are common traits of many songs about loneliness and coldness — compare, for example, *Das verlassene Mägdlein* (1888) by Hugo Wolf,²² and, nearer to home, *Koud is die Wind* (1934), *Vaalvalk* (1936) and *Eerste Winterdag* (1937) from the *Vier Weemoedige Liedjies* by Arnold van Wyk.²³

Example 2a: Wolf *Das verlassene Mägdlein*, 1-6

22 Wolf [s a]: 26-7.

23 Van Wyk 1985.

Example 2b: Van Wyk *Vaalvalk*, 1-5

Wit is die wêreld van ou - lys - su wees...

Wolf uses a high register, repeated intervals and a repeated rhythm in *Das verlassene Mägdlein*, whereas Van Wyk employs a high register, repeated syncopated notes, and a melody against repeated notes in *Vaalvalk*. *Eerste Winterdag* shows the use of repeated chords in the middle register.

In the second section of *Eensaamheid* (bars 9-15) a rhythmic motive containing syncopation is developed from the repeated syncopated bass notes of the first section (Example 1a). This motive is employed as a unifying element throughout the rest of the song.

Example 3: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 7-15

vri te slaap om ver heen. En... En...
En der tug-ge of lag, waar nie-mand van weet, of van tram, colla voce

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Only in bars 20-21 (Howells's stanza three), at the words "soos 'n deuntjie wat draal" ("like a little tune which lingers"), does the listener realise that the repeated syncopated notes and the repeated rhythmic figure probably indicate the tune which lingers on and on.

It is generally known that the insistent repetition of short rhythmic motives is typical of African music, often inducing a trance-like effect. It is possible that Howells was aiming for just that effect in this song. Perhaps he was recalling musical impressions from his travels in South Africa. In the letters that he wrote to his wife, mother or brother during that journey, Howells unfortunately never commented on African music.²⁴

1.4 Word painting

It is surprising that there are so many examples of excellent word painting in this song, as the foregoing discussion has revealed. But perhaps Betsy de la Porte explained each word to Howells.

In bar 6 (Example 4) the word "wink" ("beckons") is placed, in syncopation, at the zenith of the long phrase. In this way it is made to stand out.

Example 4: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 4-6

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, which is a vocal line and piano accompaniment for bars 4-6 of Howells' 'Eensaamheid'. The vocal line is written in G major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: 'wag - my vuur - tje en ek al - leen; die a - wend - ster wink al van ver, en die'. The piano accompaniment is in G major and 4/4 time, featuring a syncopated rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. A 'poco' marking is present in the piano part.

24 Howells was a keen observer of his surroundings. In the letter from East London he wrote the following about the black people whom he encountered on his travels, using the typical colonial racial terminology of that time, now regarded as offensive:

I watched these Kafirs [...] (their bodies and faces are very dark chocolate colour, their teeth generally beautifully white, their hair like closely-knitted black wool, their palms of hands quite light in colour, and the edges of their finger-nails white too. Some of the men are magnificent in physique: the women not as good to look upon.

The word “slaap” (“sleep”) in bar 7 (Example 3) is given a falling melisma consisting of five notes. This is exceptional, as Howells does not often use long melismas.

On the words “en sy stemmetjie dwaal” (“and his little voice roams”) in stanza three (Example 5, bars 19.3-20.2), Howells follows an ordinary dominant seventh construction on D with a C sharp minor chord with a minor seventh. This uncertain harmony highlights the word “dwaal” (“roams”).

Example 5: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 19-21

The musical score for Example 5 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. It begins at bar 19 with the lyrics "my, en sy stem - me - tje dwaal soos 'n deun - - - tje wat draal om". The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. Performance markings include "espressivo" above the vocal line and "mp" (mezzo-piano) below the piano accompaniment.

Howells chooses the obvious long note for “lank” (“long”) at “dae lank verby” (“days long past”) in stanza three (Example 6, bar 23). The long note is supported by chords in the piano which gradually become more dissonant on each of the three beats, emphasising the growing pain of longing.

Example 6: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 22-24

The musical score for Example 6 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. It begins at bar 22 with the lyrics "dae lank ver - by.". The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. Performance markings include "accel." (accelerando) above the vocal line, "poco rit." (ritardando) above the piano accompaniment, and "dim." (diminuendo) below the piano accompaniment.

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In bars 28.3-29.1 the word "wyer" ("wider") is aptly placed higher than "wyd" ("wide") in bar 28.1 in order to intensify the meaning:

Example 7: Howells *Eensaamheid*, 25-31

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system covers bars 25 to 28.1. The vocal line starts at bar 25 with the tempo marking 'assai tranquillo'. The lyrics are 'Die sla - pen - de vel - - de lê wyd, en wy - -'. The piano accompaniment has dynamic markings 'mp' and 'ppp'. The second system covers bars 29 to 31. The lyrics are '- er die don - - kere see, wat my vuur - - tje en my van-'. The tempo marking 'poco' is present above the vocal line in bar 29.

The song's sweeping final phrase in bars 33-38 (encompassing nearly two octaves, and containing the song's highest and lowest notes) illustrates with its rising and falling line a word from that phrase: "wêreld" ("world"), cf Example 1b. Howells surprises the listener at the very end with an upward vocal leap of a ninth instead of the expected rising second. This change lends poignancy to the final words "vreug en wee" ("joy and sadness").

Howells's placement of the word "waar" ("of whom" in this particular case) on a high, long note in bar 14.1 (Example 3) could be criticised, since the important word in the line "waar niemand van weet of van praat" ("of whom nobody knows or speaks") should rather be "niemand" ("nobody").

2 *Vryheidsgees*

2.1 The poem

The poem *Vryheidsgees* was published as “Vrijheidsgeest” (“Spirit of Freedom”), the tenth poem of a set of 28 which constitute the *Unie Kantate* (Union Cantata), written by Celliers, a staunch patriot, for the festivities associated with the celebration of the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910.²⁵ Poems 10, 14 and 27 bear the title “Vrijheidsgeest”, implying that they would all be sung by the allegorical figure, the Spirit of Freedom. It is No 10 which was set to music by Howells.

Howells’s song is not the first setting of the poem. The *Unie Kantate* was set to music by Henri ten Brink (1856-1920)²⁶ and first performed in the Opera House in Pretoria in 1910 as part of the Union of South Africa celebrations.²⁷ In the first edition of the *Unie Kantate* (1910), performance indications are given in the text: “Sopr. Solo / Recitatief” for the first four lines, and “Aria” at the beginning of the fifth line. These indications were left out in the 1920 edition. Howells’s setting does not show the “prescribed” divisions.

Here is my direct translation of the 1920 edition of *Vryheidsgees*:

<i>Herwaarts tot my,</i>	Hither to me,
<i>Ek sal u lei,</i>	I shall lead you,
<i>oor die velde, as oor die see:</i>	over the fields, as over the sea:
<i>kom mee!</i>	come with me!
<i>Myne is die fiere gees</i>	Mine is the noble spirit
<i>wat wêrelds eer</i>	that scorns worldly honour
<i>en roem ontbeer</i>	and glory
<i>om vry te wees;</i>	to be free;

25 It was published by Het Westen printers in Potchefstroom in 1910.

26 Henri ten Brink (1856-1920) was born in Amsterdam and came to South Africa in 1896. The manuscript of his *Unie Kantate* is lost, but two of the songs were published: *Heerlik land* and *Unielied*, cf Malan 1986: 329-30.

27 Celliers 1920: 19.

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<i>myn die oog vol durf en gloed</i>	mine the eye filled with daring and glowing,
<i>myn die hart vol manmoed,</i>	mine the heart filled with manly courage,
<i>wat God slegs vrees!</i>	which fears God only!
<i>Noordwaarts met my</i>	Northward with me:
<i>ek sal u lei!</i>	I shall lead you!

As with *Eensaamheid*, Howells' manuscript version does not use the spelling as printed in the original 1910 version of the poem, or the "Afrikaansified" 1920 version published in the new edition of *Die Vlakte en ander gedigte (insluitende "Die Rivier" en "Unie Kantate")*. Howells also decided to include the first, second and third lines once more before the final two lines of the song.

2.2 Range and form

The setting can again be sung by a mezzo-soprano (such as Betsy de la Porte), but it does not require a wide range: the lowest note is E flat above middle C, and the highest is G above the staff. The tessitura is, however, mostly high, making it a taxing song for a mezzo-soprano. As in *Eensaamheid* the highest note is reached near the end of the song (bars 55.2-57.1).

As this is a very patriotic text, Howells uses passages of fanfare-like material as an introduction and as interludes between sections. The form may be explained as follows: Fanfare (bars 1-3.1); A (bars 3.2-15.1); Fanfare (bars 15.2-18); B (bars 19-30.1); C (bars 30.2-41); Fanfare (bars 42-44.1); D, reminiscent of A, but now in the tonic major (bars 44.2-55.1), and Coda, including fanfare-like material (bars 55.2-62). The fanfares and the vocal part of section A contain similar material.

2.3 The piano part

In *Vryheidsgees* the piano plays a major role in creating a rousing atmosphere. It is responsible for the fanfare-like opening, and then provides tempestuous arpeggios running up and down, similar to the arpeggios in Debussy's Prelude *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* (What the

west wind saw).²⁸ Although there is no reference to a strong wind in the text, this nationalistic poem is rendered convincingly by the surging accompaniment.

Example 8a: Howells *Vryheidsgees*, 1-7

Allargando ----- Allegro

Her - waarts tot my! Ek sal u

Example 8b: Debussy *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*, 1-2

Animé et tumultueux

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It is clear that Howells attached importance to recurring unifying elements, as was also evident in *Eensaamheid*. The fanfare theme is the main binding motive in this stirring song.

28 Debussy 1910: 24-30.

2.4 Word painting

Vryheidsgees suggests, once more, that Howells must have been coached in the meaning of the words by Betsy de la Porte. One instance is found at bars 11-14 (Example 9). For the beckoning call "kom mee" ("come with me"), Howells uses an exceptionally long note and a melisma on "kom":

Example 9: Howells *Vryheidsgees*, 10-14

The image shows a musical score for Example 9, covering bars 10 to 14 of the song 'Vryheidsgees'. It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at bar 10 with the lyrics 'see: kom - - - - mee!'. A long note is held on the word 'kom', followed by a melisma. Above the vocal line, there are markings 'poco allarg.' and 'a tempo'. The piano accompaniment features various dynamics, including 'mf' and 'f', and includes triplets and other rhythmic patterns. The score is in 3/4 time.

The word "vry" ("free") in line 8 of the poem, a key word, given that the song is called *Vryheidsgees* (Spirit of Freedom), is approached by a rising leap of a fourth on the third beat (in 3/4 time) in bar 26. This long note is the beginning of a melisma which then goes one step higher to the zenith of the phrase.

For the words "wat God siegs vrees" ("which fears God alone") the time signature in effect changes to 2/4 (Example 10), and equal half-notes are used on the first three words (bars 37-40) to emphatically express strong faith. Before "vrees" ("fears") the voice leaps upwards a sixth:

Example 10: Howells *Vryheidsgees*, 35-40

The image shows a musical score for Example 10, covering bars 35 to 40 of the song 'Vryheidsgees'. It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts at bar 35 with the lyrics 'man - - - ne - mood, wat God siegs vrees!'. The piano accompaniment features various dynamics, including 'mp' and 'p', and includes equal half-notes. The score is in 2/4 time.

The most extraordinary instance of the use of harmony in *Vryheidsgees* to portray the words can be found at the last note of the vocal part (Example 11, bars 58-62). It is the final call: “Ek sal u lei” (“I shall lead you”). Here, instead of ending on a note of the tonic chord in E minor, Howells makes the vocal part end on a very long high F sharp (the 9th of the chord), creating a type of leading note, perhaps indicating how the Spirit of Freedom continues to lead its followers to the expected happy ending.

Example 11: Howells *Vryheidsgees*, 55-62

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, starting at bar 55, features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "ek sal u lei" and includes performance markings such as *mf*, *allarg.*, and *a tempo*. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with dynamics ranging from *mf* to *ff*. The second system, starting at bar 59, continues the piano accompaniment with a *ritardando* marking and a *ff* dynamic. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

3. Conclusion

In 1929, at a time when the development of the Afrikaans art song was in its infancy, Howells, who did not know the language, set two Afrikaans poems to music. These songs have been practically unknown to singers of the Afrikaans song for more than 70 years.

An analysis of Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs" reveals that they are an invaluable contribution to the Afrikaans song repertoire. They are settings which, surprisingly, take meticulous note of the natural rhythm of Afrikaans as well as the meaning of the words. It is astounding that an English composer could set these two contrasting poems in such a convincing manner. The probable explanation for this is that Betsy de la Porte assisted Howells in this undertaking, reciting the poems and explaining the meaning of the words.

In terms of Howells's admiration for Gurney as a song composer, quoted earlier, one can confirm that Howells's "Two Afrikaans Songs" live up to the very high standards of poem setting that he admired in Gurney's songs. Howells's settings reveal a remarkable sensitivity to the Afrikaans texts.

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