

# LUCY ETHELDRED BROADWOOD

## Poet and Song Writer

by Lewis Jones<sup>1</sup>

Lucy Etheldred Broadwood (1858-1929) was, as we all know, a major figure in the folk song revival around the turn of the last century. In 1898 she was one of the 110 founder members of the Folk Song Society, of which she later became secretary, journal editor and, in the 1920's, president. In 1889 she published Sussex Songs, with accompaniments by her cousin Herbert R. Birch Reynardson. This contained the 16 songs first published by her uncle, John Broadwood, in his pioneering collection of 1843, together with 10 more pieces harvested by herself. In 1893 there appeared English County Songs, an influential collection compiled by Lucy Broadwood and JA Fuller-Maitland, and arranged by the latter. Then in 1908 came English Traditional Songs and Carols, collected, and this time set to music, by Lucy Broadwood herself. In addition, in the words of one of Lucy Broadwood's obituarists, "scarcely a number of the Journal (of the Folk Song Society) has appeared without some valuable contribution from her hand, and many have been almost entirely her own from beginning to end."<sup>2</sup>

Lucy Broadwood corresponded with many of the great figures of the first folk revival, particularly with Frank Kidson, but also with Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger and many others. Vaughan Williams was particularly impressed with "her brilliant talents as pianist, singer, composer and essayist."<sup>3</sup> Vaughan Williams, however, seems not to have known that Lucy Broadwood was also a poet.

Among Lucy Broadwood's personal book collection (now lodged in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House) is a well-produced volume of poetry entitled Leaves from the Family Tree. It has no date, and no publisher, but the "Index of Authors" at the beginning clearly identifies the volume with the Broadwood family.

This book contains 22 pieces by Lucy Broadwood and 1 piece which she co-authored. Of these 23 pieces, 15 are poems (some serious, others jocular). There is also a short play parodying Aristophanes. This was "performed at Cambridge, Nov. 1883 by undergraduates" with "incidental

music by Hubert Parry, Esq.” In addition, 6 pieces are translations or adaptations "from the German." Finally, there is a humorous poem "improvised in a cab" by Lucy Broadwood and two companions in 1879. Seven of the 23 pieces are dated, and, in addition, it is reasonable to suppose that the poem entitled "On My Thirtieth Birthday" was written in 1888.

These compositions were clearly significant to Lucy Broadwood. For some pieces, where no author is recorded, the initials "L.E.B." are added at the end in her own handwriting. She also wrote corrections and/or emendations in the text (noted in brackets in the quotations below) as she tried to find the exact words that she wanted. She even, in one place, took the trouble to change a "the" to an "a."

Lucy Broadwood's serious poems show to us a dark, melancholic and passionate nature. "On My Thirtieth Birthday", for example, bemoans the inexorable decay of the body with a vivid and remarkable image: there have been thirty Lucy Broadwoods, writes the poet, and every one of them lies in her grave. The poem is unfortunately too long to be quoted in full. Here are the first three verses:

Ah! Strange and shrouded figure! Sad new Year!  
    Couldst't thou not stay thy coming one short day,  
Till I had wept a little at the bier  
    Of this thy sister, newly passed away?

Behold, I loved her! See her where she lies  
    As nine and twenty of her kin have lain,  
See here her mouth, where mingle(d) smiles and sighs,  
    Her eyes, once bright with joy, or dimmed by pain.

See, I have laid upon her breast the wreath  
    Which at her coming first, she gave to me;  
'Tis strangely wrought: dark cypress sprays beneath,  
And midst them roses, rue and rosemary.

In other pieces, the poet is ambivalent on religion and on whether there is a better and less miserable life to come. "In An Avenue" sees a glimmer of hope:

Let me not deem the world is wholly dark  
Because my path in solemn shadow lies,  
For lo! The sun shines bright in Heaven's arc  
On other ways, and gladdens other eyes.  
But rather let me think, the while I wend  
My way adown mine avenue in night,  
How in the clearing, when I reach the end,  
The sunlight shall appear all tenfold bright.

However, a brief untitled poem seems to dismiss such hopes:

To do in part, and feel the whole undone,  
To win in part, and feel the whole unwon,  
To strive with death, and know that in the strife  
Death shall be victor - this is human life.

In three of her poems Lucy Broadwood, who never married, writes powerfully of frustrated and unrequited love. "Unfulfilled Promise" is one of a number of poems to use seasonal imagery:

Love came to me one sweet Spring day,  
And kissed me at my waking hour,  
Laid in my hand a budding spray,  
And bade me wait and see it flower.

I watched my spray through Summer's heat  
And shielded it from rays too fierce,  
I saw with wonder new and sweet  
The buds their tender sheathings pierce.

But Autumn came with rainy breeze,  
With early frosts and days of gloom,  
Yellowed the leaves upon the trees  
And seared my spray of tender bloom.

Alas! When Winter-time drew nigh -  
Ah me! Sweet Love! And well-a-day! -  
Cold snows fell from a leaden sky  
And buried all my hopes away!

For a respectable Victorian spinster these poems seem very personal and intimate. How interesting it would be to know whether they were inspired by the poet's own amatory entanglements. Take, for example, this "Song":

Give me, before I go,  
A leaf, I crave no flower(;  
Hope cannot blossom in our heart,  
Give me a leaf before we part,  
That will best suit the hour.

Let it be ever green,  
Then 'twill a token be  
Of the great love which you and I  
Each shall for each, until we die,  
Cherish unbrokenly.

Let it be faintly sweet,  
So shall its scent recall  
The fragrance on those days gone past,  
That being too fleeting (passing) sweet to last,  
Scarce breathed, have vanished all.

Reach me it wet with dew,  
Heaven shall add her tears  
To those which blind us, whilst we stand  
Gaze meeting gaze, hand clasping hand,  
As the dread moment nears.

Pluck it from whence it grows,  
Sever it from the bough:  
Thus must we sever - you and I -  
Give me the leaf! And so, good-bye!  
Good-bye for ever, now!

The third poem on the theme of love, "Dead Love", is dated 1889. It is (probably intentionally) ambiguous. But it seems to be the poet's feelings of love that are "dead", rather than the loved one. Here is the first verse:

Love of my youth,  
Art dead in truth?  
Or art thou only sleeping?  
Wake if thou live,  
And answer give,  
For I am wan with weeping.

Vaughan Williams may not have known of Lucy Broadwood's poems, but, as we have seen, he praised her as a composer. Her "few original compositions" he wrote again in 1948 "...though light in texture show considerable musical imagination."<sup>4</sup> A computer search of the Printed Music Retrospective Catalogue at the British Library shows 42 entries ascribed to Lucy Broadwood. Only 5 of these relate to original compositions, however, the rest being arrangements of folk songs, old tunes and the like. In 1921, there was published a collection of Lucy Broadwood's settings of songs from Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll. The other compositions were also songs, and were all published before 1900. In 1892 came "Tammy" and

"Nae more we'll meet", the latter a setting of words by J. Sim. 1893 saw the publication of "Annie's Tryst", a poem by Aytoun. Finally, in 1894, two songs were published together. These were settings of Burns's "The Woodlark" and of Tennyson's "What Does the Little Birdie Say?"

So, did Lucy Broadwood's compositions really show evidence of "musical imagination", or was Vaughan Williams merely being polite? To help you to judge for yourselves, here is a transcription of "Annie's Tryst." The melody line is given as for verse 1. In the original there are minor alterations in the later verses, both to the tune and to the piano accompaniment, to fit the words to the music and to give variation and emphasis. Here the original accompaniment is omitted. This is unfortunate, but you can console yourselves with the thought that unless you were rather rich you could not have afforded the original at all, either the melody line or the accompaniment. In a world where unskilled labourers were often paid around a pound a week, the sheet music was published by Weekes and Co. at a price of 4 shillings, or 20 pence in modern money.

Despite Lucy Broadwood's love of English folk songs in minor modes "Annie's Tryst" is in the key of Eb major. It would be interesting to know whether this was the composer's own choice, or whether she was influenced by the marketing preferences of the publisher. The words, as might have been expected, are characteristically lugubrious and tragic, with only the hope of heaven (see above) to lighten the general gloom.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This article was first published in English Dance & Song in December 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Ford, "Obituary: Lucy Etheldred Broadwood," Journal of the Folk Song Society 33 (December 1929): 168-9.

<sup>3</sup>Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Lucy Broadwood: An Appreciation," Journal of the Folk Song Society 8, no.1 (1927): 44-5.

<sup>4</sup>Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Lucy Broadwood 1858-1929," Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society 5, no.3 (1948): 136-8 (136).

<sup>5</sup> The guitar chords in the accompanying sheet music are modern, and are not derived from Lucy Broadwood's arrangement. They have been added since this article was published in English Dance and Song. The sheet music is in .pdf (portable document file) format, and can be opened, read and printed off with Adobe's Acrobat Reader, available free from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>