

HARRIES

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OPERA TODAY

A Pilgrim Soul

THE LIFE AND WORK OF
ELISABETH LUTYENS

Meirion and Susie Harries



Michael Joseph
LONDON

To Lettice Cooper

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the Gargoyle, all slightly south of the heartland, off Dean Street. The risk at the Gargoyle, as it became more fashionable, was that on a Saturday night it would be packed, according to Constant Lambert, 'with the two hundred nastiest people in Chiswick',² and to a limited extent that was true of Fitzrovia as a whole by the late 1930s; but during the week the ambience was that of the less inhibited intelligentsia, a self-consciously eccentric 'alternative' world.

'Fitzrovia' still existed in the 1940s, its vague feeling of community heightened by wartime conditions. (Cyril Connolly described the war for those left in London as 'five years in gregarious confinement'.³) But in practice it was a very different world from that in which Sickert, John and the young Nina Hamnett had lived. Nina was in some ways the epitome of all that was theatrical, outrageous and traditionally Bohemian in the old Fitzrovia. She took pleasure in fancy dress, in undress, in working-class 'characters', embarrassing scenes, unusual pets and getting drunk. She still haunted the same pubs in the 1940s, but she was a pitiful figure, almost a historical curiosity amidst the new Fitzrovians, whose world had a new hub – the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Radio was the medium which cemented the new society; the pubs, clubs and restaurants were now places where contacts could be made, contracts secured and programmes discussed. Poets, writers and musicians still foregathered – Dylan Thomas, Roy Campbell, Louis MacNeice, Stevie Smith, Tambimuttu, John Lehmann, Alan Ross, William Empson, George Barker, Julian Maclaren-Ross, Terence Tiller, Rose Macaulay, Muriel Spark, William Walton, Alan Rawsthorne, Constant Lambert, Humphrey Searle, William Alwyn, Antony Hopkins. But, as Hugh David makes clear in his recent study of *The Fitzrovians*, it is wishful thinking to imagine 'an easy-going, harmonious confraternity . . . cosily clustered at one end of the bar'. These new Fitzrovians drank in small groups, and they were drawn to the same pubs mostly by their employment, actual or potential, in or by the Drama and Features Departments of the BBC.

The geographical boundaries of 'Fitzrovia' had been extended to take in both Broadcasting House in Portland Place and the Ministry of Information in Bloomsbury, the other great wartime employer of artists and writers; and different pubs were favoured. The Stag's Head on the corner of New Cavendish Street was, broadly speaking, the Features pub, the George in Great Portland Street heavily patronised by musicians. (For the tendency of orchestral players to stick there between sessions, it was known intermittently as the 'Gluepot'.) Further south in

Dean Street, the Highlander and the York Minster were the focus for the film business.

Times were bleaker than in John's and Hamnett's heyday. Blitz and black-out were followed by austerity – much the same conditions without the adrenalin that had made them endurable – and this was altogether a dourer, more businesslike community. In April 1940 the *New Statesman* had predicted glumly, 'When the freelance is finally liquidated, our art and literature will be produced by little men in striped trousers, Anthony Eden hats and rolled umbrellas, who are punctual at their offices and incapable of dangerous thoughts.' This grim epoch had not yet arrived – no one could have accused Dylan Thomas of being punctual at his office – but the old irresponsible camaraderie was being diluted all the time as the freelances found regular jobs or 'succumbed to drink and despair'.

Nevertheless, into what was left of Fitzrovia Betty waded, diffidently at first but with increasing relish. She was always to claim that it was the quest for work which took her, in the end disastrously, to the pubs, and certainly that was where most potential employers were to be found. But without doubt her own instincts would have drawn her there anyway. 'That was the kind of anarchic, radical, boozy world that she really enjoyed,' James Clark remembered. 'Standing at the bar (she wasn't very tall but she was very upright), a glass of whisky in front of her, or beer if times were hard, shouting away, cigarette in hand – there she was really being herself.' Betty first entered the George for company, as a break from the lonely drudgery of copying. 'After a few years of the sole companionship of small children who, though adored, invariably limited conversation, I was hungry, with my gregarious temperament, for people with interests in common.' During 1944 Edward paid occasional visits, but in between were long stretches of solitary tedium, and she turned to the pubs for instant friendship. It was a time, according to Caitlin Thomas, when 'to be drunkenly funny was everything and to be serious was a sin of dullness'.⁴

In the writing of her music Betty guarded her independence jealously, but socially she rather regretted the fact that musicians generally tend not to flock. She loved to think of herself as part of an 'inner circle' of artistic life in London, relishing the unfamiliar sensation of belonging, and her particular friends at this time offered a neat cross-section of latter-day Fitzrovia.

William Walton was the most successful composer she could ever tolerate, though she once told him he had taken as much time and trouble getting into the upper class as she had taken getting out. (For

There were disappointments. A second attempt at a dramatic work, the radio opera *Penelope* on the theme of Odysseus's return, was a resounding flop; and amidst the confetti of grants and commissions which marked the Festival of Britain in 1951, she was given only one for a four-minute carol. Perhaps not surprisingly, her choice of text was a somewhat sour poem by W. R. Rodgers beginning, 'Hark! the Herod angels sing tonight'.

There were further contretemps too with the critics. In 1947 she had written a viola concerto which adhered to the principles of the traditional concerto form but was serial in idiom. In *Music Survey*, Harold Truscott adopted the critic's not uncommon expedient of reviewing the programme note, with a ferocity that may help to explain her later reluctance to write about her work (and prompted editors Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller to print a disclaimer). She had suggested, for example, that the second movement of the concerto was like a song in three stanzas. 'A song without a melody,' wrote Truscott, 'is not a new experience, unfortunately, but it is an illiteracy which should be fiercely repressed.' 'I will take the composer's word for it,' he added, 'that the last movement is a Passacaglia, and merely recommend her to do a little research on the exact connotation of "concerto". . . . I think it is time Miss Lutyens and others of her ilk ceased to hide behind the cover of "twelve-note" or any other technique, and came out into the open with some music or "forever hold their peace" – and ours.'⁹

Liz might well have recalled Virginia Woolf's remarks about the experience of the woman novelist. 'The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility. The world did not say to her as it said to them, "Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me". The world said with a guffaw, "Write? What's the good of you writing?"'¹⁰

The 'hack' work at least had an obvious point; and during what were perhaps the unhappiest years of her life Liz distracted and at the same time burdened herself with a flood of commissions for radio and films. 'Oh! if you knew the nightmare of these last years,' she would write to her mother in the early 1950s. 'Knowing Edward and I dependent on the quality and speed of my brain work and the brain toppling with the strain which never lets up.' She tackled a catholic selection of plays from Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* to Randall Swingler's *The Devil's Horse*, but only seems to have found a theme to which she could wholeheartedly respond when she was asked to write the music for MacNeice's *The Queen of Air and Darkness*.

In this most characteristic of MacNeice's modern morality plays, he explores the theme of the young man possessed by a false ideal, personified by the Queen of Air and Darkness. In each generation the Queen marks down one man for evil; each starts as a sensitive, creative, caring ruler and ends as an inhuman dictator. At last one of the Queen's victims descends to the Catacombs to find her where she sits blind before a mirror with two maids to tell her what is happening in the world she influences from below. He cracks the mirror, redeeming himself and humanity.

MacNeice wanted the music to have an 'organic continuity', to be more than 'incidental'. The longest passage came at the end when the hero/victim descends to the Catacombs, 'where there is never a draught, where no fly buzzes,/Where no dust settles, where the light never changes'. Here, Liz remembered with admiration, he wanted 'music like blue velvet, dripping'. Unfortunately, in the live broadcast when the hero came to smash the mirror the music was allowed to drown the words – a fact commented on by almost all the listeners canvassed by Listener Research (fifty per cent of whom found the music too dissonant for comfort).¹¹

The short features were more prosaic – *Canada, Britain and Trade, The Otter, Canterbury Cathedral*. But as she became more expert, she took great pride in sliding from one genre to another, identifying the style required and supplying it, be it to express swimming under water or the soaring arches of a Perpendicular nave. Another series for Reggie Smith and the American Exchange programme, unenticingly entitled *Export Jigsaw*, required versatility. For *Motor Cars* she was able to indulge in cod Futurist music, a reminiscence of Milhaud and the Paris of the 1920s, replete with klaxons and heavy metal crashes to evoke panel beating, the clattering of conveyor belts and the winking of indicator lights. *Jewellery* was more constricting, producing little more than jingles and a plethora of harp glissandi expressive of glittering.

The best of her short features was *The English Seaside* (1949), a suite in eight sections which passes from the 'Regency' of Brighton, along a 'Victorian Parade', into 'Sea Mist', and to 'Pierrot' at the end of the pier; then 'Brass Band' leads back into 'Busy Blackpool', and the 'Palm Court' of a 1930s hotel, ending, in contrast, in a 'Cornwall' enveloped in tantalising wafts of Debussy and even *Peter Grimes*. It is a highly entertaining piece, from which the BBC got good mileage, as snippets from it kept turning up in programmes over the years – 'Cornwall' in a television film on John Piper, and again in a feature called *The Mayflower Sails Again*; 'Regency' in *Emma*; and, more mysteriously, 'Victorian

Parade' in a programme on Christopher Wren. (Liz's music may not always have been quite as specific as she hoped, or the BBC not quite as fussy, as they felt able to use part of her suite for 'Henry VIII' to accompany *Epic Battles – Stalingrad*.)

Some of her incidental music is very touching; and it is possible that it offered her a more direct channel for emotions which lay behind all her music but were sometimes concealed by the infinitely more complex and opaque medium of her 'serious' work. There are signs of the different composer she might conceivably have been had she not followed the twelve-tone path; she was patently capable of writing 'English Renaissance' music. And there is evidence of the person she always was underneath – sensitive, even sentimental, and never cynical – even when in her concert music she was abrasive and uncompromising.

Pressure of work, however, took its toll; for if she is to be believed, it was the task of drumming up trade in the pubs of Fitzrovia which brought her drinking to crisis level. The British system of buying drinks in rounds, apart from being expensive, ensures that all keep pace with the fastest drinker; and she was constantly exposed to the social pressure often applied by other heavy drinkers.

By 1951 her condition was pitiable. It was recorded for posterity, unwittingly, by Jill Craigie in a film on which they worked together – *To Be A Woman* (1951). Craigie was at that time the only female director in the British film industry, and *To Be A Woman* was a plea for equal opportunities for women in every field. She recorded interviews with a variety of prominent women and, anxious to include a female composer, asked Arthur Bliss for his advice. Without hesitation he recommended Liz as the best of the moment – 'Amazing sounds, amazing sounds'.¹²

Her music for the film was neat, appropriate and effective. For the main titles, she made a minor key version, for percussion, of Ethel Smyth's 'March of the Women', the piece which Dame Ethel had conducted in Holloway, leaning through the bars and beating time with a toothbrush for a chorus of her fellow prisoners. But where Liz is concerned, *To Be A Woman* is most remarkable for the brief sequence in which she herself appears. Long, lank hair is parted far back on a domed forehead, and falls down each side of a thin face with set jaw and dull eyes. She is looking up slightly at the camera, swallowing nervously but with a defiant expression that momentarily softens into pathos with the faintest suggestion of a smile. It is a mesmerising face, which gives the impression of utter despair.

She was chain-smoking now, seventy cigarettes a day, constantly

throwing back her hair from her face, with her nervous intensity at its height. 'She needed someone to act as a whipping post and sounding board for her ideas about her works,' remembered Denis ApIvor. 'She held forth at considerable length, whenever she was able to find a moment, stubbing at a bit of manuscript with a pencil, pointing out the twelve-tone rows and emphasising the subtlety of her inversions and augmentations, in a rush of syllables, punctuated by snorts and or-nasal projections of tobacco smoke. . . . As soon as she had finished one cigarette she grubbed at another with ringed fingers.' She was drinking a bottle of brandy a day; many lunchtimes would find her at the French Club in St James's, already drunk and picking fights.

Glib rationales of alcoholism are futile and even dangerous. Some of the textbook phrases seem to illuminate Liz's drinking briefly, but none is the only light in which to view it. They speak of a 'script' of self-destruction, adopted in childhood in response to conflicts and tensions within the family; of a 'game' designed to show 'I'm no good – and it's your fault';¹³ a bid to attract attention from an unloving partner by hurting oneself; insecurity stemming from parental deprivation or feelings of inadequacy as a woman. She herself had an exaggerated horror of psychoanalysis, which she may have brought away with her from the 'lunatic asylum', and would undoubtedly have rejected these explanations out of hand. Drink, she claimed, was first and foremost a means of overcoming shyness, and bolstering the nerve she needed if she was to make her way in the profession.

It is safest and simplest to say that, possibly from the beginning and certainly after the war, Liz drank to escape from unhappiness. Her friends could understand it, but it was becoming hard to handle let alone ignore, and the stories were multiplying. Liz at a concert at the London Contemporary Music Centre, noisy and staggering and having to be carried out. Liz at a public discussion of serialism – 'She emerged from the back of the room,' according to Denis ApIvor, 'blowing smoke from nose and mouth and proceeded, much to the consternation of those present, to draw six lines of music stave upon the board instead of five. . . . Undeterred she growled on, slamming notes on to the board in a cloud of smoke.'

One of the most successful radio plays of 1954 was *The Private Life of Hilda Tablet*, whose central figure was a twelve-tone woman composer, heavy-drinking and gravel-voiced, given to such expressions as 'Look, old cock' delivered in patrician tones, and possessed of irresistible energy powered by monomania. Within weeks of its broadcast both Liz and Edward were talking of suing [redacted], poet,

playwright and Fitzrovia, with whom Liz had worked in 1950 on *Canterbury Cathedral*. (They had been on reasonably good terms; at some point Liz offered him a script idea entitled 'Balls: the notion of circumference'.)¹⁴

The Clarks had good reason to suppose that Liz – and particularly the Liz of 1951 – had been the model for Hilda Tablet. In general outline Hilda might have more obviously resembled Ethyl Smyth – in her homosexuality, her bluff rural heartiness, and the endlessness of her projected biography. (Dame Ethel's autobiography ran into many volumes.) And the Tablet opera *Emily Butter* (whose music was actually written by Donald Swann) drew shamelessly and at length on classical models; if any contemporary target was intended, it was the recently premiered *Billy Budd*.

But the details of her characterisation were absolutely unmistakable. Hilda had a father named Sir Eric and a mother who was campaigning forcefully for proportional representation. In youth she had played the organ in a country church (whose vicar's wife planned eventually to embalm her feet as a relic). She hailed Frescobaldi as a great musical innovator. She had set Schopenhauer (as opposed to Liz, who in 1953 had set Wittgenstein). She talked inexorably of twelve-tone music; [redacted] doubtless out of long and painful experience, makes his narrator remark, deadpan, 'Musicians, as the world well knows, are of all artists the most reluctant to discuss their own lovely art.'

Hilda believed in the 'architectonic' in music – 'I have always been mad about architecture. . . . I learned it years ago, y'know . . . the first time I ever realised Purcell – and the *Daily Telegraph* was held to have described her music as 'thawed architecture'. This was almost certainly a reference to a running joke Liz had with Constant Lambert, who had once said that if, as Goethe maintained, architecture was frozen music, it might be a good idea to melt down one or two of Edwin's banks. [redacted] could perhaps have picked this up in the pub, along with the other fragments of Liz's distinctive and oft-repeated stories.

It is important to know that in [redacted] play Hilda is, despite everything, ultimately an endearing figure, even a vulnerable one. 'I sometimes begin to think,' she remarks plaintively, 'that the sort of things some people sometimes say to me are the sort of things you'd hardly think anybody would ever say to anybody.' But she is undoubtedly ridiculous, and Liz would have minded the ridicule the more for recognising that the play, and the series in which it appeared, was extremely funny – as indeed the court case would surely have been had she been rash enough to pursue the notion of suing [redacted].

Far more deadly, though fortunately she never knew of it, was the portrait which Dylan Thomas drew after her visit to Laugharne in 1951. The visit was recorded by all three participants in the drama, Liz, Dylan and Caitlin, who was alone at the Boat House when Liz arrived, Dylan having stamped off to Swansea after a furious row. The two women went to retrieve him, and Liz in *A Goldfish Bowl* gives a vivid picture of the alcoholic reconciliation: 'Dylan was on his knees snivelling, they were both crying. They were having a whale of a time.' For her part, Caitlin claimed that once peace had been restored, it was Liz who wanted to stay drinking, though they had left the Thomases' small son alone in the house.¹⁶ In the event all three hired a car, on Liz's money, and returned slowly to the Boat House where Dylan drank the contents of Liz's sponge bag, including her shampoo, and retired to bed for days.

Liz's picture of Dylan has an element of farce but is fundamentally affectionate. His of her is not. 'Weasel-eared Lizzie,' he dubbed her in a letter to Margaret Taylor, 'lying in bed reading a book on Erasmus Darwin upside down.' From his room over the pub he could hear her 'hissing and gushing and drooling and bubbling about Edward, money, the BBC, twelve tones, Constant and babies, men, men, men, all the way from her bed in the Boat House where she lies all day monologuing herself to death.'¹⁷

By the end of 1951 Liz's life had flown apart. She could no longer achieve any kind of equilibrium between the conflicting pressures of Edward, the children, her work and the procuring of it; and at a time when, as she wrote to Lady Emily, she felt she could write better than ever before, she was compelled to waste her energies in 'musical journalism', haunted by the thought of the years rushing past.

The American composer Ned Rorem once wrote, 'We endow those we love with imagined timeless qualities which they neither possess nor (usually) want us to think they possess. When, then, our disillusion of necessity arrives as we witness the collapse we've forced upon them (but for which we take no responsibility), we hate them; and . . . they can only stare back with that blank surprised dismay of corpses.'¹⁸ To some extent Edward had been Liz's victim in this way. His life had been radically and permanently altered when she arrived on his doorstep in 1939; the changes she wrought coincided with others over which she had no control and became inextricably entangled with them, so that in one sense it is understandable that his cry should have been, 'Get on with your life and work and leave me to get on with mine.'

But by now his 'work' amounted to spending most of the day in his dressing gown, sleeping with the wireless on, uttering not a word for

days on end. In despair Liz wrote to Emily: 'He cannot keep a date, his word, or do anything but let me down utterly. . . . It is like living with a ghost in the hope that life will come back. . . . I've only got myself unpopular trying to help him when he won't help himself. . . . He should have tackled the BBC and stopped them bullying him years ago and then I would have been well away. But with all his genius [sic] and charm he is no fighter. . . . I should, I suppose, have picked a nice, kind, responsible husband for my work and brood, but I found my "dangerously attractive" E. irresistible! Alas, he's been happy about five times in ten years and when not, makes life hell. . . . I know I still love him and always shall – but sadly it's a love with no future or fruition, nor comfort or comradeship, but it will always stop one from wanting second-best whilst he lives.'

One day when drunk she was persuaded by friends to leave him. She rang him up to tell him, hoping he would say 'Stay,' and was answered only with silence. The next day she was having a drink in a pub with Alan Rawsthorne when Sebastian arrived, white-faced, to say that Edward had had a coronary. For days he was not expected to live.

In fact he made a remarkable recovery, but his convalescence was protracted (curiously enough, in a Musicians' Benevolent Fund convalescent home in Westgate on Sea, only minutes from the school where the young Betty had struggled with 'dulcrows', Microbes and 'Farm Scenes' on the piano). In the meantime, she was lodging with friends in London. The three eldest children were living with Ian, who had remarried very happily and had undertaken to pay for their education, while Conrad was boarding at Christ's Hospital School. Liz was facing a complete disintegration of her health, mental and physical; and when in August 1951 Constant Lambert died, horribly and hallucinating, of diabetes severely aggravated by alcoholism, she was frightened into halting the decline.

Liz chose to see her drinking as a physical ailment, the only kind to which no stigma, 'no smell of psychiatry' attaches, and she sought a physiological cure, from the then fashionable Dr Yerbury Dent. (The cure was possibly recommended to her by her brother Robert, who had had his own battles with drink, and certainly paid for by his second wife Phyllis Warburg.)

Dr Dent believed in a mechanistic explanation of the universe and the denial of free will, arguing that human behaviour, like all physical behaviour, was explicable in terms of the movement of matter and not mind. Alcoholism was accordingly neither a sin nor a weakness of character but a chemical disease, an imbalance between the back brain,

which initiates action, and the front brain, which inhibits it. In the alcoholic the front brain becomes over-active, Dent argued, causing a state of permanent anxiety. Because alcohol is a depressant and anaesthetic, rather than a stimulant, it drugs the front brain, temporarily alleviating the anxiety.¹⁹

Dent's remedy was to stimulate the back brain instead, using apomorphine – a derivative of morphine, but one which has the opposite effect (morphine being, like alcohol, anaesthetic). The treatment also had an important secondary aspect as an aversion therapy, because in combination with alcohol apomorphine provokes vomiting.

From 6.30 p.m. on 17 May 1952 until 10.30 p.m. on 20 May Liz was injected every two hours with apomorphine, and given gin and water, with nothing at all to eat.²⁰ For a further two days the dose was administered every three hours, in decreasing quantities until 'the desired effect' was achieved with the smallest trace of apomorphine. The desired effect was vomiting. At first, according to the nurse's records, which Liz kept until she died, she was sick every time, then she was merely shaken with violent retching. Once she became cyanosed; at other times the nurse noted hiccoughs, dizziness and hot flushes. At 4.15 a.m. during the last night of the treatment Liz woke sobbing and repeating, 'I am going mad,' and in the morning was seized with panic at the thought of going home and facing up to life. But from then on she became calmer, and after five days of starvation, her appetite began to return.

Dent claimed both to alter the personality and to change the body chemistry with apomorphine. He preferred to lay emphasis on the personality change, as reaching to the underlying causes of the problem, instead of merely obliterating the symptoms with aversion therapy. Beyond question, however, the aversion treatment worked for Liz. For twenty years she enjoyed the total freedom from addiction he had promised she could achieve provided she avoided alcohol completely; friends remembered her anxious queries in restaurants about wine in sauces and the ban on consommé or sherry trifle, where the alcohol would not have been boiled away. But there is little evidence that Dent had in any way altered her personality; Liz remained very much herself, only now she was not drinking and she was alone.

CHAPTER TEN

'Drawing Breath'

GIVING UP DRINKING changed Liz's working life far more dramatically than the long process of becoming an alcoholic had ever done. Overnight, she became the skeleton at the feast in Fitzrovia – in her own eyes at least, a reproach and an irritation to drinking friends. Better, she felt, to remove herself out of range and out of temptation; she left the room at the edge of Regent's Park, within walking distance of the George, which she had been renting from William and Helen McAlpine after she left Edward, and moved to a flat she had seen while visiting other friends, Bonamy and Valentine Dobree, in Pond Road, Blackheath.

On her own again, this time Liz was better equipped to steer her individual course. She was in control of herself, victor in a heroic struggle not just against alcohol but against self-consciousness, self-doubt, disillusionment, frustration, loneliness, and all the other spectres which had impelled her towards the bottle. And she was removed from the ambit of Edward. Much as she continued to love him, his insularity had reached a pitch where there was almost no contact at all between them, nothing he could offer her, and he told her so – 'I am not giving to anyone else that which should be yours; but I have nothing left to give anyone.' Better to be removed, at least temporarily, from the aura of his suffering, if she was to mend her own life.

'I was a composer again,' she wrote, 'and to that identity I would cling, as there was no other in my life at that time,' wife and mother having temporarily retired. In the respite after the storms of 1951 and 1952, she was at last able to hear her own musical voice, and use the practical skills she had acquired over the last ten years to formulate a distinctive language of her own, a blend of serial technique and sensuous feeling. So when in the late 1950s all the elements in her disintegrated

life finally came together again, she was in a position to take stock, and to start off in a new direction. The 1950s were a watershed in her career, the moment at which she began to suspect that the years of effort and neglect had not been wasted – that no one would ever again dismiss her as a rich man's dilettante daughter.

In the years following her cure, Liz began to cut a figure on the British musical scene – but this time somewhere near its centre, instead of as an unhappy gargoyle at the periphery. The facet of her new image which she perhaps prized most was that of the working professional, as least resembling the guise in which she had entered the music world.

The professionalism was not a pose, as some suspected; she needed the money now as badly as ever. The tendency was to assume that she had been provided for by the men in her life – by Edward, with his legacy, and by her father, who had been famous for the wealth of his clients as well as for the houses he built for them. But Sir Edwin, for all his efforts, had in the end left his children little. The bulk of the £42,000 estate consisted of the house in Mansfield Street, and Lady Emily felt, as she had been brought up to feel, that property should go to the son of the family.

The furniture – much of it designed by Sir Edwin, and of considerable commercial as well as sentimental value – was originally to be divided among the girls, as compensation. But Robert objected, and on the understanding that he would keep it all together as a collection, he got the furniture as well. He promptly sold a good deal of it, some to Barbie and Ursula, but none to Liz, who could not afford it.

Lady Emily was no longer well off herself, and was forced to stop the allowance which Liz had been receiving from her parents for over thirty years. Over the years she was given a good deal of help by her sisters, particularly in covenants for the children, and Ian paid all his children's school fees, but to meet the expenses of day-to-day living she had to find her own devices.

'All Lyttons write,' Liz once said, and she did not see why she should be any exception. Her autobiography apart, the surviving samples of her writing are not particularly polished, but her personal accents are unmistakable. In 'How to achieve privacy in family life', an article she wrote for the woman's magazine market, reminiscences of her first refuge in the cistern cupboard are strong as the secret of privacy, and arguably of all human happiness, is revealed as being a second lavatory – 'large, comfortable and warm . . . with good books and pot-pourri and a lovely view'.

Taking the precaution of adopting the pseudonym 'Josephine Grey' she tried her hand at romantic fiction. She all too palpably followed

advice to write about a world she knew – heroine Joanna, a continuity girl spurned by faithless Elstree film director Ted, meets cartoonist Jeremy, and love blossoms in the restaurant of the Royal Festival Hall – only to fall head first into the common trap of despising and writing down to her imagined readers.¹

She wrote far better when she was not aiming at any particular audience, and when she had something she actually wanted to say. Her obituary for Dylan Thomas, written for Miron Grindea and *ADAM*, shows her at her best. There are traces of the self-consciously poetic, but her piece holds up well beside those of Roy Campbell, Stephen Spender and John Lehmann. It is about Dylan alone, not ‘Dylan and me’; there is nothing in it to his discredit, and by quoting a letter where he is at his funniest and most sympathetic, she evokes a person to be remembered with affection and admiration. It is the kind of memorial that everyone would wish to have, and a good illustration of what she could be like as a friend – loyal, perceptive and forgiving.²

Liz would increasingly create her own libretti for stage works; but she could not look to her writing to pay the bills, for which her mainstay was still radio and film music. Her philosophy in the 1950s was to make the most of so-called ‘hack’ work while it lasted; for there were signs that the boom years were coming to an end in both industries.

The days of specially commissioned incidental music as a regular feature of radio programmes were certainly numbered, but before time ran out Liz produced some of her best ‘light’ work. At first, as she had feared, when she could no longer keep pace in the BBC pubs she fell behind in the race for radio work. Dr Dent had assured her jovially that he was treating so many of the BBC’s producers as well that work should be unaffected; but correspondence with the sober did not produce such instant results as social encounters with the drunk.

In 1952 there were no BBC commissions at all, and in 1953 a single feature on ~~the radio~~ which bore a certain similarity to her ~~work~~. The score has attractive moments nevertheless – a recurring theme used, on the model of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures from an Exhibition*, to convey the impression of someone walking slowly and reflectively round the building; an exciting and expressive use of brass fanfares which make one wish she had written more for the brass bands which Edward so loved; and a haunting ‘Soliloquy’ for violin and organ, shamelessly reminiscent of Vaughan Williams’s *Dives and Lazarus*.

1954 was far more productive. Two years before, when she had forced herself to write to her contacts asking for work, she had had a courteous reply from the poet, playwright and producer Terence Tiller.

‘I try on the whole to ask composers to write for my programmes the music they would in any case write if left to themselves; and it has just happened that none of my productions hitherto has in my opinion quite called for your own or “instinctive” music.’³ Now he felt he had one which did call for it – his own ‘radio concerto for solo actor’, entitled *Final Meeting*.

With the best will in the world, he could not have spelled out more clearly how Liz’s music, and twelve-tone music in general, was popularly regarded, for *Final Meeting* (1954) was in effect a horror story of the highest class. A superb exploitation of radio’s powers of suggestion rather than statement, it explores the effects of guilt on a man who, it is hinted, has killed an idiot child and cut the throat of his wife or lover, and must now re-enact their deaths over and over again as he progresses towards madness.

The distinction of scores like this earned her a rich variety of radio work in the next two years, from the classics – Ben Jonson and Calderon (translated by Roy Campbell) – to the contemporary – Jon Silkin’s *The Quality of Desert*.

For the eunuch in William Golding’s *Envoy Extraordinary* (1956) she found a harp sound which Golding himself called ‘quite enchanting’; but she was obliged to concentrate on more mundane noises for two plays by Willis Hall in the same year. Both now, like so many radio plays of the 1950s (and beyond), sound heavily influenced by *Under Milk Wood* (1954) – poetic evocations of small but richly varied communities during the course of a single day.

Any Dark Morning (1956) evokes the pre-dawn awakening of a mining village, accompanying the miners from bedroom to kitchen sink to pigeon coop to bus queue to canteen to showers at shift change and into the cage which will take them to the coal face, as up on the surface the first milk bottles are put out, cats are called in, and lace curtains begin to twitch. *Harvest the Sea* (1956), set on a trawler off Lowestoft, uses the crew’s dreams of shore life to highlight both the rigours and the dignity of their existence on board – the wheelhouse full of tobacco smoke, lit by the glow of the overhead compass; the cabin full of snores and the throbbing of engines, the smell of diesel, drying oilskins and hard-worked men; the galley thick with the steam of tea and the rattle of cutlery shifting with the roll of the ship; and, at the play’s climax, the ‘expectant dripping’ as the trawl is raised, followed by the abrupt cascade of fish.

The miner was far closer to Liz’s heart than the trawlerman, and her music for *Harvest the Sea* now sounds a little predictable. In fact the

- Op. 16 **Requiem for the Living**
for voices, chorus and
orchestra
dur. 15'
comm. Elspeth Grant
(originally ded. Lady Emily
Lutyens)
prem. Margaret Rees, Maud
Baker, Emlyn Bobb, Stanley
Riley, BBC Chorus, London
Philharmonic Orchestra,
cond. Raymond Agoult,
30.9.52
- Op. 17 **Suite for organ**
dur. 5'30"
prem. Arnold Richardson,
All Souls', Langham Place,
16.6.51
- Aptote for violin**
dur. 9'
prem. Frederick Grinke,
ICA, ?2.3.48
- Three Improvisations for
piano** ('Adumbration',
'Obfuscation' and
'Peroration')
dur. 6'
ded. Constant Lambert (who
chose the titles)
prem. ?Richard Rodney
Bennett
- Nine Stevie Smith Songs –**
'The Actress', 'The Film
Star', 'Pad-Pad',
'Progression', 'The Songster',
'The Repentance of Lady T.',
'Ceux qui Luttent', 'Lady
"Rogue" Singleton', 'Up and
Down' (plus 'Be Off' in
manuscript)
prem. Hedli Anderson,
Norman Franklin, BBC
- ***Ninepins** for two violins
- ***Baker's Dozen** for two
violins
- ***Rhadamanthus** – ballet
- ?**Song** (Dylan Thomas) –
'Paper and Sticks' – for voice
and accordion/piano
prem. Hedli Anderson,
Thomas memorial concert,
Globe Theatre, 30.1.54
- The Devil's Horse*, BBC
- Anglo-Colonial Journey*, BBC
- Children of the Ruins* (film)
- Penny and the Pownall Case*
(film)
- Op. 18 ¹⁹⁴⁹
String Quartet III
dur. 14'
prem. ?Martin Quartet, BBC.
First public performance
Vegh Quartet, LCMC,
23.1.51
- Op. 19 ***Ballet for Nine Wind and
Percussion**
dur. 15'
- Op. 20 **Prelude and Capriccio for
cello**
dur. 4'
prem. Margaret Moncrieff,
Kew Sunday Concerts, c.
8.12.69
- ***Holiday Diary** for piano
with narrator
- Bartholomew Fair*, BBC
- The Thames*, BBC
- The English Theatre*, BBC
- The English Seaside*, BBC
- The Fisher King*, BBC
- The Queen of Air and
Darkness*, BBC
- Canada, Britain and Trade*,
BBC

- Admetus*, BBC
- Op. 22 ¹⁹⁵⁰
**Concertante for flute,
clarinet, violin, cello, piano**
(Pierrot Lunaire combination)
dur. 10'
prem. London Symphony
Orchestra Chamber
Ensemble/Virtuoso Ensemble
with Peter Stadlen, piano,
cond. Francis Chagrin,
Hampstead Town Hall,
11.2.52
- ***Penelope** (Lutyens) music
drama for radio, for voices,
chorus and orchestra
(unfinished)
- Export Jigsaw – Potteries;
Motorcars; Jewellery; Wool*,
BBC
- ~~*Canterbury Cathedral*~~
- Oil Review No. 7* (film)
- Out of True* (film)
- Waters of Life* (film)
- ^{1950/1}
To Be A Woman (film)
- Op. 23 ¹⁹⁵¹
***Lyric Piece** for violin and
orchestra
- Nativity** (W. R. Rodgers)
for soprano, organ/string
orchestra
comm. Riddick String
Orchestra and Arts Council
for Festival of Britain
prem. Elizabeth Darbishire
(?or Audrey Strange),
Riddick String Orchestra,
cond. Kathleen Riddick, St
Bartholomew the Great,
5.6.51
- Henry VIII*, BBC
- The Otter*, BBC
- Shakespeare's Birthday*, BBC
- El Dorado* (film)
- British Guiana* (film)
- ?*Anglo-Iranian Oil No. 1*
(film)
- ?*Sonnblick Mountain* (film)
- British Key to Plenty* (film)
- Persian Story* (film)
- Op. 25 ¹⁹⁵²
String Quartet VI
dur. 8'
ded. Francis Bacon
prem. Macnaghten Quartet,
Macnaghten-Lemare
Concerts, 6.12.54
- ***String Quartet IV**
- ***String Quartet V**
- ***Bienfaits de la Lune**
(Baudelaire) for soprano,
tenor, chorus, strings and
percussion
- The Boy Kumasenu* (film)
- The Third River* (film)
- Scotland and the New World*
(film)
- Pipeline to the Sea* (film)
- Wimbledon 52* (film)
- Billy Boy* (Be-Ro flour
advertisement)
- This Little Ship* (film)

- Op. 27 1953
Motet – 'Excerpta
Tractatus-logico-
philosophicus'
(Wittgenstein) for
unaccompanied chorus
dur. 10/11'
comm. and ded. William
Glock
prem. London Chamber
Singers, cond. Anthony
Bernard, Dartington Summer
School of Music, August
1954
- Songs and Incidental
Music 'Homage to Dylan
Thomas'** for soprano and
flute + viola or
accordion/piano –
'Do not go gentle into that
good night'
'It is my craft and sullen art'
(? plus 'Paper and Sticks')
prem. Hedli Anderson,
Globe Theatre, 30.1.54
- We Planted A Stone* (film)
- On Closer Inspection* (film)
- School for Colonels* (film)
- ?*The Nile* (film)
- ?*Ertragreicher Kartoffelbau*
(film)
- ?*The Forest Is Not A Virgin*
(film)
- ?*Rievaulx Abbey* (film)
- Op. 28 1953/4
Valediction for clarinet and
piano
dur. 10'
ded. the memory of Dylan
Thomas
comm. Georgina Dobree
- prem. Georgina Dobree, Iain
Kendall, London Music
Club, 15.6.54
- Op. 29 1954
Infidelio (T. E.
Ranselm/Lutyens) – seven
scenes for soprano, tenor and
instrumental ensemble
dur. c. 35'
prem. Alexandra Browning,
John Winfield, New Opera
Company, cond. Leon
Lovett, Sadlers' Wells,
17.4.73
- Op. 30 Nocturnes for violin, cello
and guitar
comm. Joyce Rathbone
prem. Emmanuel Hurwitz,
Terence Weil and Julian
Bream, Wigmore Hall,
10.12.54
- * A Rainy Day for violin
and piano
- Final Meeting* (Tiller), BBC
- Death of a Town*, BBC
- Sir Hallewyn*, BBC
- Nano's Song from Volpone*,
BBC
- Two songs from Bartholomew
Fair*, BBC
- The Heart of England* (film)
- Harvest of the Forest* (film)
- Any Man's Kingdom* (film)
- ?*Tyrolean Harvest* (film)
- ?*Destination UK* (film)
- ?*World Without End* (film)

- Op. 31 1955
Music for Orchestra I
dur. 20'
prem. BBC Symphony
Orchestra, cond. Maderna,
1.6.61
- Op. 32 Sinfonia for organ
dur. 5'
comm. William Glock for
ICA
prem. Ralph Downes,
ICA/LCC concert, Royal
Festival Hall, 21.4.56
- Op. 33 Capriccii for two harps and
percussion
dur. 8'
prem. Maria Korchinska and
others, Macnaghten
Concerts 12.12.55
- Diabelleries – Variations
on 'Where's My Little
Basket Gone?' (one
movement of composite
work)
comm. for 'last'
Macnaghten–Lemare Concert
prem. cond. Iris Lemare,
Arts Council Drawing Room,
16.5.55
- The Quality of Desert*
(Silkin), BBC
- Every Man in His Humour*
(Jonson), BBC
- The Palm Wine Drinkard*,
BBC
- Life is a Dream* (Calderon tr.
Roy Campbell), BBC
- Love After Death* (Calderon
tr. Roy Campbell), BBC
- The Song of the Grape* (film)
- We Found A Valley* (film)
- Theresa* (film)
- ?*Intermezzo Antique* (film)
- ?*Little Aden* (film)
- Op. 36 1956
Chorale for Orchestra:
'Hommage à Igor
Stravinsky'
dur. 3'
ded. to Stravinsky on his
recovery from a serious
illness
prem. Royal Philharmonic
Orchestra, cond. Elgar
Howarth, 15.8.71
- The Zoo* (Hooten), BBC
- Any Dark Morning* (Willis
Hall), BBC
- Harvest the Sea* (Willis Hall),
BBC
- Envoy Extraordinary*
(Golding), BBC
- The Trial of Thomas
Cranmer*, BBC
- Bussy d' Ambois*, BBC
- The Bermuda Affair* (film)
- Pipeline into Persia* (film)
- The Year of the Princess* (film)
- ?*Odd Boy Out* (film)
- ?*Simon* (film)
- ?*The Oil Rivers* film)
- ?*'God Save The Queen'* for
the Berliner Ensemble
- Op. 34 1956/7
Three Duos –
(i) for horn and piano
dur. 10'

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Caversham; BBC Sound Archives, Broadcasting House; British Film Institute.

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