UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Celtic Twilight's Immortal Hour in British History, Literature, Music, and Culture

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Matthew J. Buchan

June 2018

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Byron Adams, Chairperson
Dr. Walter Clark
Dr. Leonora Saavedra
Dr. Linda Tomko

The Dissertation of Matthew J. Buchan is approved:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Byron Adams, and the members of my committee, Dr. Walter Clark, Dr. Leonora Saavedra, and Dr. Linda Tomko for their patience, support, and guidance.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Celtic Twilight's Immortal Hour in British History, Literature, Music, and Culture

by

Matthew J. Buchan

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, June 2018
Dr. Byron Adams, Chairperson

The Celtic Twilight is an aesthetic movement in British culture that developed out of the more commonly known Irish Literary Revival. This dissertation traces the historical and literary origins of the movement and its transference into British music, culture, and discourse. It begins by considering the movement's origins and postulates that the aesthetic developed as a response to the popularity of James Macpherson's Ossian epics during the nineteenth century. These epics had popularized a brand of Celticism that was politically compromised in regards to the agenda of the literary Irish nationalists who guided the Revival. After a brief flirtation with heroic Ossianism in his poem *The Wanderings of Oisin,* W.B. Yeats, after becoming deeply involved in folklore editing and collecting, created his singular volume, *The Celtic Twilight.* This volume was as far from an 'authentic' collection of folktales as one might imagine, and yet it gave rise to an aesthetic that blended influences from folklore, symbolism, Wagnerism, the

occult, and spiritualism, and it begged readers to seek out the liminal boundary between reality and the supernatural. It also brought the phrase 'Celtic Twilight' into popular discourse. While the Twilight aesthetic became an important touchstone for poets of the 1890s and beyond, British composers engaged with it somewhat later, and with uneven success. There were outright failures, but some excellent works emerged by Arnold Bax, Rutland Boughton, and Edward Elgar. Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour,* based on a play by Twilight poet Fiona Macleod, blends all the essential elements of Celtic Twilight, and still holds the record for the most consecutive performances of an English opera. This dissertation seeks to illuminate a connection between the opera's Twilight character, and the profound impression it made upon British post-war audiences. Finally, though Celtic Twilight inspired many artists, it was quickly appropriated into popular, non-artistic culture for the purpose of articulating racial discourses that are, by today's standards, unpleasant and unfortunate. This study hopes to revive the phrase 'Celtic Twilight,' not by denying its chequered history, but by offering it to readers in a scholarly light that, until the present time, has been unavailable.

Table of Contents

List of Figures:

Introduction

The original title of this dissertation was "The Music of the Celtic Twilight." During the period of my research, curious inquisitors frequently asked me about my subject, and this forced me to come up with a ready explanation that anyone could easily understand. My practical need to have a way of explaining in layman's terms what I was studying led me to fashion a makeshift bridge of an idea: that the "Music of the Celtic Twilight" was basically "music influenced by the Irish Literary Revival." This idea made sense in many contexts: the two terms are sometimes considered synonymous and are used interchangeably along with a few other phrases such as Celtic Revival or Celtic Renaissance.[1] Since most people can deduce that the phrase Irish Literary Revival broadly refers to a literary revival in Ireland, I began to substitute it for Celtic Twilight as a way to elide the ominously complex connotations that the phrase Celtic Twilight implies.[2] However, to do so meant to dismiss these connotations, and to dismiss the fact that the two phrases, when taken at the value of their words, connote profoundly different

---

[1] Francis Shaw, "The Celtic Twilight," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* vol. 23, no. 89 (March, 1934): 25. Shaw uses all terms synonymously. See also: Sarah Townsend, "Cosmopolitanism at Home: Ireland's Playboys from Celtic Revival to Celtic Tiger," *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter 2011): 46.

[2] These decisions were made with an even further assumption: one cannot simply use 'music of the Celtic Twilight' as a catch-all phrase that can be applied to any music with a Celtic theme or subject. To do so means to use Celtic Twilight in a way that has no regard for the phrase's actual meaning.

ideas. My elision, made for the sake of finding a convenient and sensible way to explain my work, was, in fact, an elision of the very subject I claimed to be researching.

One scholar in particular, Austin Clarke, has argued cogently that the phrase Celtic Twilight is not synonymous with the 'Irish Literary Revival.' Clarke suggests that it is a nuanced slice of the broader movement. For Clarke, works of Celtic Twilight are characterized most especially by "delicate impressionism… shadowy themes, and subtle wavering rhythms." These elements were "in accord with the *fin de siècle* movement" and not necessarily shared by all works of the Revival.[3] This study seeks to build on Clarke's engagement with Celtic Twilight as a proper subject.

Studying a phrase that simultaneously refers to an artistic movement, a literary topic, and an aesthetic has proven to be a difficult prospect that has necessitated an interdisciplinary approach. The questions I plan to answer in this dissertation include: how and why did Celtic Twilight come into existence? What are its defining characteristics? How did it grow from being simply the title of a specific volume, Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight*, into an artistic aesthetic? How did the British musical community engage in this aesthetic? And, finally, what did the term Celtic Twilight mean for the broader British community?

What follows now is therefore not a discussion of a series of musical works with Celtic elements in them. Instead, I offer a broader investigation of Celtic Twilight, one that considers history, politics, literature, music, and British culture at large. This approach has meant going over a few well-trodden paths and surveying the work of many

---

[3] Austin Clarke, *The Celtic Twilight and the Nineties* (Dublin: Doleman Press, 1969), 31.

scholars. It has also meant considering new sources, including a selection of untapped memoirs and newly digitized newspaper archives. The majority of the original research begins in chapter four, "Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*." However, the sections that consider secondary material do so by necessity and are all crafted with one intent in mind: the creation of a survey of the Celtic Twilight that is of a scope not yet attempted by the scholarly community.

The first chapter investigates the broader historical and literary trajectories that led to the Celtic Twilight to develop out of the broader Irish Literary Revival. It posits that Celtic mythology was a living tradition in the nineteenth century and that the gods of Celtic myth had only recently been imagined in the context of pre-Christian paganism. It recounts how the oppression of Celtic cultures by the English led to a popular belief that Celtic culture was dying. This led to the 'Disneyfication of Celticism' by Scottish authors like James Macpherson and Walter Scott. Macpherson's work in particular inspired artists and composers from across Europe, and created a highly stylized language that signified a brand of 'Celticism' that was politically problematic for the Revival.

The second chapter argues that folktales offered the Revivalists a language with which to combat Ossianic Celticism. However, folktales and folk music were both problematic because their 'authenticity' was always in question. Yeats's *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's *Songs of the Hebrides* both suffered from critique in this regard. However, Yeats's volume *The Celtic Twilight* overcame the ideological limitations of Ossianic literature and typical folktale collections by using creative authorial strategies, interweaving elements from the occult and

symbolist poetry, and crafting a folk-world that was distinctly supernatural. These elements developed into a grander Celtic Twilight aesthetic cultivated by many artists. However, by the turn of the century, the advent of realism marked Celtic Twilight as a dated aesthetic. To demonstrate this within the context of the Revival, I conclude this chapter by analyzing several stage plays by John Millington Synge.

The third chapter seeks to explain how the Celtic Twilight aesthetic became important to British composers, to demonstrate why they continued to engage with it well into the twentieth century, and to locate various elements of the Celtic Twilight at play in a selection of works from Edward Elgar, Joseph Holbrooke, Arnold Bax, Granville Bantock, and Charles Villiers Stanford.

The fourth chapter takes a close look at Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour.* It seeks to explain the work's astonishing popularity in 1920s London, and to do so in the context of its Celtic Twilight resonances. I argue that the key to its popularity is its engagement with the most essential feature of Celtic Twilight: treatment of the liminal space between this world and the 'otherworld' of Celtic mythology. This chapter also considers Rutland Boughton's Glastonbury festivals and their connection to the Great War. Finally, it places Rutland Boughton's opera in the broader context of Celtic Twilight infused nostalgia and argues that Boughton's work was distinctly 'anti-realist.'

The final chapter examines the use of the phrase Celtic Twilight in British discourse. It discovers that the phrase took on unfortunate connotations and was used for various race-and-gender based essentializations. It further problematizes Celtic Twilight in the context of the Wilde trials and a perceived 'flight to masculinity' in the British

musical community. Finally, it investigates Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling's theory that a conspiracy headed by the Royal College of Music actively worked to marginalize Celtic works and composers. I argue that these scholars may have missed the broader point: that Celtic Twilight could not help but be a locus for anti-establishment composers, ideas, and people.

Prologue: Remembering The Irish Literary Revival

One must accept that there is no exact definition of the 'Irish Literary Revival,' nor is there agreement regarding what the phrase is specifically meant to connote, or what dates bind the movement to a set chronology. Much as Carl Dalhaus makes arguments for three different versions of the nineteenth century in his volume *Nineteenth-Century Music*, so too can one offer several vantage points from which to consider the development of the Irish Literary Revival.[4] One of the first volumes about the movement, W. P. Ryan's *The Irish Literary Revival,* dates from as early as 1894. In his introduction, Ryan declares that "the Irish literary movement, of which so much has been heard of late, has now passed its decade."[5] However, in *The Genres of the Irish Literary Revival*, Ronald Schleifer states, "it is no accident that the Literary Revival in Ireland found its beginnings in the Irish Literary Theatre."[6] These quotations both offer radically differing starting points for the Revival, the former suggesting the early 1880s, and the later the late 1890s. These inconsistencies reveal that the boundaries and defining characteristics of the Irish Literary Revival are in a state of flux.

Those who lived through the Revival experienced it in a way that is impossible to reconstruct. Ryan suggests as much when he questions the work of future historians.

---

[4] Carl Dalhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music* (UC Press: Berkeley, 1989), 1-53.

[5] W.P. Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival* (self published: London, 1894), v.

[6] Ronald Schleifer, "Introduction," in *Genres of the Irish Literary Revival,* ed. Ronald Schleifer (Dublin: Wolfhound press, 1980), 6.

While he states that "the historian who will come when the work is done and the harvest gathered, will have far greater results than I to chronicle," he also wonders whether such a historian will be able to capture the spirit of the movement:

> Will he not miss much of the happy enthusiasm, the gaily-going life of the morning and the forenoon? The great reaper will have gathered some of our reapers to himself. There will be fewer songs and more shadows.[7]

Over a century has passed since Ryan raised these questions, and his prophecy proves true. There are more facts available than ever before, but the passing of time has made it difficult to capture the "happy enthusiasm" and "gaily-going life" of the Revival. Before embarking on the project at hand, it may be helpful to consider some of Ryan's observations about the Revival, made when the movement was its stride.

Ryan locates the grassroots of the Revival not in Dublin, but rather in 1880s London, an area where "thousands of children were growing up Irish in nothing but name."[8] In these London neighborhoods, the Irish were frequently the brunt of brutal stereotypes casting them as "a lazy, drunken, thriftless race."[9] Among the "happy

---

[7] Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival*, vi.

[8] Ibid., 12.

[9] Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival,* 15.

The practice of using stereotypes to denigrate the Irish and Ireland is at the heart of British colonialism in Ireland. As Edna Longley observes, Seamus Deane, in *Strange Country* "rebukes Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849: Edgeworth was an early nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish writer) for believing that 'Ireland was backward, unenlightened, poor, ill-led, even Romantic, not because it was a colonial culture, but because it was Ireland.' He terms her fiction 'not an analysis but a symptom of the colonial problem the country represented.'" "Postcolonial versus European (And Post-Ukanian) Frameworks for Irish Literature," *The Irish Review* (no. 25, winter 1999-spring 2000): 77.

Deane also criticizes Edgeworth's perception that the cultural and political conditions of Ireland in the nineteenth century were "the consequence of quaint Irish behavior rather than of

enthusiasms" of this dark side of British cultural politics, a positive youth education movement sprang up hoping to offer to young Irish expatriates a positive self-image. Here the Southwark Junior Irish Literary Club began to create a cultural revival for Irish youth, one with "lectures to be given, songs to be learned, examinations to take place, Irish prizes to be furnished, (and) children's Irish concerts to be arranged."[10] Out of this grew the Southwark Irish Literary Club, pioneered by teachers from the junior club and designed for adult members of the community. As Ryan suggests,

> not only was the club keeping a warm Gaelic spirit, and inspiring to the literary effort, but it was a rendezvous, a little theatre of congenial spirits, common ties, and common interests; not the less interesting for the knowledge of little romances in the background.[11]

These little known clubs are reminders that the Revival was a community-wide movement as much as it was the product of the small number of literary elites upon whom scholars often focus.[12] As this study unfolds within its limited scope, it will be helpful to remember the broader cultural milieu, myriad social interactions, gatherings, and other events that formed the cultural bedrock of the Revival. One may also keep in mind the thousands of unpublished poems by amateur writers, the long forgotten school

---

colonial conditions." *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 33.

[10] Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival,* 14.

[11] Ibid., 22.

[12] As Shakir Mustafa observes, "the Revival did, indeed, originate in a small group of intellectuals who embraced a move toward native culture, but they did not work in a vacuum. Revisionist assessments of the movement usually depict a structure of activity unrelated to a grassroots base." "Revisionism and Revival: A Postcolonial Approach to Irish Cultural Nationalism," *New Hibernia Review* vol. 2, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 39.

plays, and the countless other ways that average citizens engaged not only in the Revival but its offshoot, the Celtic Twilight.[13]

The Gaelic Revival is also an essential part of the story of both the Irish Literary Revival and the Celtic Twilight. The Gaelic Revival and the Irish Literary Revival share common origins but later split apart over differences in their political agendas. The works of the Irish Literary Revival and the Celtic Twilight were principally written in English by Protestant, Anglo-Irish writers with whom the Gaelic Revival – which was pro Irish Roman Catholicism – did not sympathize. The story of the battle between pro-Gaelic and Anglo-Irish factions is another subject for another time. However, the thread that unites both revival movements is the fact they contributed to a general rise in literacy in Ireland in the late 1880s and 90s. Caitriona Clear suggests that literacy in 1890s Ireland, whether of the Gaelic or English variety, took on new importance and meaning. By 1892 school attendance had become compulsory, and "even the poorest people had embraced the idea of schooling." The result was that "Irish literacy rates were on the eve of the First World War among the highest in Europe."[14]

Finally, while various writers have puzzled over why the movement is called a 'revival,' for Ryan, the word 'revival' isn't referring to a return to a previous era of great

---

[13] Catherine Morris, whose work focuses on uncovering the Revival's forgotten and overlooked artists, argues that, "the familiar Revival narrative suppresses as much as it illuminates, however, because it has tended to bury numerous artists, activists and initiatives beneath the sediment of accreted myths." "Becoming Irish? Alice Milligan and the Revival," *Irish University Review* vol. 33, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2003): 79.

[14] Caitriona Clear, *Ireland in 1913: social conditions.* http://www.centenarymayo.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Ireland-in-1913-Social-Conditions.pdf

Irish literature.[15] Instead, it refers to a return to an era when the Irish were not subject to British colonialism. Those who wished to take up to Douglas Hyde's (1860-1949) challenge to "De-Anglicize the Irish Nation,"[16] understood that literature offered one of the best vehicles for such a project. Though the exact dates of when Irish Literary Revival began and ended are debatable, the link between literacy and cultural nationalism that the movement created is not.[17]

---

[15] Schleifer offers an amusing anecdote from George Moore's novel *Hail and Farewell* regarding the cynical attitude that critics contemporary to the Revival had about the idea of 'reviving' any type of artistic movement in Ireland:

"… He is all for Art, and you who have been talking Art and buying beautiful things all your life, now repudiate the one man who comes to Ireland to revive the art of painting."
"It never existed in Ireland."
"Never mind. It will be revived just the same."
Genres of the Irish Literary Revival, 4.

[16] Ibid., 4.

[17] As Ryan states, "one aim (of the Revival) is to turn the minds of the scattered sections of the Irish people more intently to the realization of their Celtic selves… a second aim is largely educational… realizing this inborn love of the Celt for knowledge and lore of so many kinds, it is no wonder that there should be to-day a band of Irishmen whose first purpose is to convince their brethren that devotion to those scholastic and literary ideals is the surest sign of their being true to themselves." Ibid., 5-6.

Chapter 1: The Antecedents of Celtic Twilight: History, Ossian, Folklore

Identifying four genres important to the Irish Literary Revival

To demonstrate how the Celtic Twilight aesthetic developed out of the broader Irish Literary Revival it will be necessary to investigate four genres of key importance to the Revival.[18] These genres include: works that are influenced by or are in the style of James Macpherson's Ossian epics; works that are derived directly from Irish folklore and which often take the form of volumes of folktales transcribed and edited by revivalists; works that are peculiarly imbued with what shall be called the 'Twilight aesthetic,' beginning with Yeats's volume aptly titled *The Celtic Twilight*; and, finally, works intended for the Irish Literary Theatre and that broke with romanticism by embracing realism. Before taking a closer look at each of these categories individually, it will be helpful to consider Irish Nationalism, Irish Mythology, Romanticism, and folklore/folk-culture.

Irish nationalism lies at the heart of the Irish Literary Revival. The Revival's significant figures, including W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-

[18] The Revival is certainly not limited to four types of literature. When P.J. Mathew describes Synge's *The Aran Islands* as a "the acknowledged progenitor of the sub-genre of Irish island memoirs," he suggests the innumerably various genres that can be considered part of the Revival. P.J. Mathews. "Re-thinking Synge" in *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge,* ed. P.J. Mathews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3-14.

1932),[19] Douglas Hyde (1860-1949),[20] and John Millington Synge (1871-1909), though their aesthetics and endeavors varied, were all dedicated to the to the cause of Irish independence. Whether or not a given work of the Revival dealt directly with hegemony, its creation was itself a form of resistance to British dominion.[21] This resistance developed from a cultural politics that posited Ireland in dialectical opposition to Great Britain and most especially England. By extension this dialectic pitted 'Irishness,' and the associated quality of 'Celticism,' against "Britishness' and 'Englishness.'

The above genres all share a relation to ancient Celtic mythology. There are many sources for this mythology, as well as many centuries worth of reinterpretations and translations. The four primary Irish literary cycles that constitute Irish/Celtic mythology include the confusingly named Mythological Cycle, as well as the Fenian Cycle, the Ulster Cycle, and the Cycle of Kings. The primary sources of these cycles include a range of manuscripts kept in libraries across Britain and Ireland, and date roughly from the late eighth century through to the fourteenth century. Some of the most important of these

---

[19] Lady Augusta Gregory was an ardent Irish nationalist who patronized Yeats. The two collected folktales together throughout the 1890s. She was also a founding member of the Irish Literary Theatre/Abbey Theatre.

[20] Douglas Hyde was a friend and associate of Yeats and assisted him in compiling his folktales volumes. Hyde eventually split with the Anglo-Irish revival and became a leader of Ireland's pro-Gaelic faction, establishing the *Gaelic Journal* (1892) and co-founding the Gaelic League (1893). He later became Ireland's first president (1938-45).

[21] As Mary McCann states, "Culture is central to ideological control, hegemonic or counter hegemonic. Irish music, as well as language, literature and religion, became centrally involved in power relations and in the construction and reconstruction of identities of both colonized and colonizer." "Music and Politics in Ireland: the Specificity of the Folk Revival in Belfast," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* vol. 4, special issue presented to Peter Cooke, (1995): 51.

Shakir Mustafa argues that the Irish nationalist movement resisted "colonial development by preserving indigenous cultural traditions." "Revisionism and Revival," 37.

sources are the *Lebor na hUidre*, *Book of Leinster*, *Book of Hy Many*, *Book of Ballymote*, and the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, the source of the Etain myth which is the subject of Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*. There are also Welsh, Cornish, and Breton cycles that are also considered Celtic.

Running in parallel to and blending in with this textual mythology is a folk-based mythology cultivated by the illiterate Irish peasantry. Cultural historians have long made the case for a connection between the Romantic movement, folklore, and the waves of nationalism that swept Europe in the nineteenth century. The following ideas were generally accepted in the nineteenth century as 'true': that a nation's authentic identity and character came from its 'folk,' and that folklore, traced back far enough, became mythology.[22]

"Pre-Christian Irish paganism," The *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe* and Celtic mythology as a living tradition

As Mark Williams illustrates in his volume *Ireland's Immortals*, Irish mythology has always existed in a state of flux. Though the numerous manuscript sources listed above problematically suggest that there are a set of stories that can form a canon of Irish mythology, the subject matter of these manuscripts has been continually reinterpreted. In

[22] These ideas were formulated by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). For a valuable synopsis of Herder's ideas see: William Wilson. "Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism" in *The Marrow of Human Experience.* Jill Terry Rudy, ed. (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2006).

the nineteenth century, the burgeoning fields of anthropology, Celtology, and mythological studies inspired pseudo-historians and pseudo-antiquarians to continue this tradition. Most importantly, they re-imagined the religious significance of the Celtic mythological landscape in ways that would become advantageous to the budding Revival. Standish James O'Grady's (1846-1928) *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* (1878 and 1880) and *History of Ireland: Critical and Philosophical* (1881) are two significant examples in this revisionary process. While both titles may suggest that they are works of history, they were in fact "imaginative literature" which had "ransacked" the work of the "new comparative mythologists and Celtic scholars."[23] Nevertheless, it is thanks to these works that "ancient Irish paganism and the *Túatha Dé Danann* became firmly established as part of the imaginative furniture of the Literary Revival."[24]

The *Túatha Dé Danann* or 'people of the Goddess Danu' are a set of Irish gods that populate the various mythological cycles transcribed during the Christian period in Ireland and that resurged in popularity and political significance during the nineteenth century. They first appear in Irish manuscripts in the tenth century, where they are an important part of the *Book of Invasions*, one of the chief sets of stories chronicled in Lady Gregory's *Complete Irish Mythology.* Understanding who precisely the *Túatha Dé*

---

[23] Mark Williams, *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myth* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 300.

Patrick Maume notes that "Standish O'Gady's role as a late nineteenth-century populariser of the Gaelic sagas and romantic social critic has earned him the title 'father of the Irish Literary Revival.'" "Review: 'Standish O'Grady: AE and Yeats: History, Politics and Culture' by Michael McAteer," *Irish Economic and Social History,* vol. 30 (2003): 180.

[24] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 299.

Danann were (or are) is complicated by some bewildering circumstances. Depending on one's interpretation, either they are, are not, or overlap with another mystical group of beings known as the *Sídhe*. The *Sídhe* are also a group whose identity is constant flux, and they predate the *Túatha Dé Danann*, first appearing in early eight-century manuscripts. The status of either group changes from text to text all the way up to the late nineteenth century. In one writing they may be magical or godlike immortals, and, in another, they are presented less grandiosely as the fairies of Irish folklore.[25]

Ultimately there is no clear division or unification of these two mythical groups of beings, and their status is based on authorial intention. For example, Fiona Macleod "attempted to address the disparity between centre and periphery in the medieval *Túatha Dé Danann* by distinguishing the core pantheon from the less differentiated people of the *Sídhe.*[26] Meanwhile, Yeats thoughts on the matter can be "distilled into a three way equation: *Túatha Dé Danann* = the ancient Gods of Ireland = the fairies or *Sídhe* of

---

[25] To maintain my sanity, as well as that of my readers, this essay will posit *Lady Gregory's Ancient Irish Mythology* as containing a generally accepted translation of Irish mythology and history of both the *Sídhe* and *Túathe Dé Danann*. According to Lady Gregory's mythology, the *Sídhe/Túatha Dé Danann* are a race of people who populate Ireland after defeating the *Fir Bolg,* the island's previous inhabitants, are eventually themselves defeated by the *Míl* or 'sons of Miled.' They then retreat underground to continue living as a type of mystical, immortal people. At this point in their history it logically makes sense that they are or become the *Sídhe,* who have long been described as immortal, youthful people that dwell under the hills. See: Lady Augusta Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Complete Irish Mythology: Gods and Fighting Men, Cuchulain of Muirthene* (Reed International Books ltd: Finland, 1994, originally published in 1902 and 1904).

[26] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* 391.

Fiona Macleod was the pseudonym of Scottish author, poet, and critic William Sharp (1855-1905). However, this was more than the average pseudonym; Sharp cultivated Fiona as a real person, and convinced a number of people, including Yeats, of this. The poetry of Sharp and Macleod are both drastically different, and it was only through the personality of Macleod that Sharp felt he could appropriately convey his most profoundly Celtic feelings. For more on Macleod/Sharp, see chapter four.

folklore."[27] The greatest difficulty associated with what may seem like a rather fine point of differentiation is that the overlap between the *Túatha Dé Danann* and the *Sídhe* also blurs the cultural value of these two groups. Some revivalists wished to associate the *Tuatha Dé Danann* with the classical myths of ancient Rome and Greece, as Macleod does in her introduction to the play *The Immortal Hour*. On the other hand, the folkloric beliefs about the *Sídhe*, often based on the oral traditions of the Irish peasantry, present them as 'fairy folk' who are tricksters or 'wee men' who descend on moonbeams. Such characters incorporate all types of fancifulness and mischief and seem altogether less

---

[27] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* 315.
The desire to reconcile and categorize who exactly the fairy-folk of Ireland continued into the mid-twentieth century. For example, K.M. Briggs believes that the Fairies can be easily grouped, and combines together the *Sídhe* and the *Túatha Dé Danann*:

> `"The fairies of these (the British) islands may roughly be divided into for main types, each with some sub-divisions. There are first the Fairy People, as they are seen in their own habitations and tribes. They may be divided for convenience into three groups, though these may well be three aspects of the same people. First there are the Heroic Fairies of human stature or sometimes rather beyond it. These fairies generally live in a Fairyland removed a little from the common world, often underground or in fairy knolls. Times passes there at a different rate from human time. They revel, dance, hunt and sing like humans, only upon a grander scale. Their perfect type is the O'Shee of Ireland, who are supposed to be the Gods of the Danaans [sic]…"
>
> Second there are the small Trooping Fairies, such as the Little People of Cornwall. They have a King and Queen and regular government like the Heroic Fairies, but are generally rather homelier in their habits. They delight in music and dancing and are great friends to cleanliness and order. Some types of the Trooping Fairies are almost wholly benevolent, some are mischievous and thieving and child-stealers.
>
> Third, there are the fairies who live in small family groups. These fairies often borrow human beings as nurses, or put their children to be nursed by humans. They are homely little people, who often have occasion to borrow pots or get their tools mended…."

K.M. Briggs, *The Personnel of Fairyland: a short account of the Fairy People of Great Britain for those who tell stories to children* (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1971, originally published 1953), 15.

serious.[28] One can imagine how these two competing narratives might serve the interests of the authors who engaged with them in vastly different manners. For now, it will do to remember that this strange group, the *Túatha Dé Dannan/Sídhe* are culturally, textually, and ontologically in flux.

The next difficulty with these gods is the question of whether either group or both are Ireland's pre-Christian pagan Gods. The presence of Iron Age mounds in Ireland, known as *Síd* mounds, seems to fit neatly with the idea that the *Sídhe* were a race of immortals living in the 'hollow hills.'[29] The idea of people living under the hills dates to the earliest manuscript texts, and it seems tempting to believe that Irish paganism involved worshipping these beings. Yet whatever is known or imagined about Irish paganism comes from documents written during the Christian era, hundreds if not thousands of years after the time that such religions would have been openly practiced. Furthermore, the ancient *Síd* mounds do not contain enough evidence to prove that they

---

[28] In his collection of Scottish rather than Irish fairy tales, Sir George Douglas writes that "the Fairies of Scotland are represented as a diminutive race of beings, of a mixed, or rather dubious nature, capricious in their dispositions, and mischievous in their resentment." Sometimes Douglas' stories can take on a humorous air, as the story of Sir Godfrey MacCullough does. One day while "taking air on horseback," he is "suddenly accosted by a little old man arrayed in green, and mounted upon a white palfrey. After mutual salutation, the old man gave Sir Godfrey to understand that he resided under his habitation, and that he had great reason to complain of the direction of the drain, or common sewer, which emptied itself directly into his chamber of dais." *Scottish Fairy Tales* (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., date of publication uncertain, introduction noted to have been delivered first as a lecture in 1892), 103, 107.

[29] "A '*síd,*' as Jacqueline Borsje tells us 'is a hill, a megalithic tumulus or pre-Celtic grave-hill. Its inhabitants look like human beings but they are different. In general, they are superior to humanity: they live longer or are even immortal; they are more beautiful and possess supernatural powers. *Síd* mounds are usually synonymous with the 'otherworld' (in fact, rather various otherworlds), an intermittently accessible parallel dimension." Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* 30.

were used for religious purposes, and there is no actual hard evidence proving that pre-Christian paganism was ever practiced in Ireland.

The god-like status of the *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe* is similarly ambiguous within the actual mythological texts. As Williams notes, "medieval texts had vacillated for centuries between supernatural and euhemeristic ontologies for the *Túatha Dé (Danann)*."[30] He also observes that,

> it is a fundamental oddity of Irish mythology that while its divine personnel may be strangely 'other' – gifted with supernatural powers, great beauty, or immortal life – before the nineteenth century those beings were only occasionally acknowledged to be, or to have once been, pre-Christian gods.[31]

As a result, it was "entirely possible as late as the early 1860's for a scholar to immerse his mind in the oldest records of Ireland's past and yet for it not to occur to him that the *Túatha Dé* [*Danann*] had been Ireland's pagan gods."[32] It was not until the publication of Standish O'Grady's volumes that a version of Irish mythology in which "the inhabitants of … ancient Ireland explicitly worship the *Túatha Dé Danann* as the focus of their religion" came to into existence.[33]

---

[30] Ibid., 289.

[31] Ibid., xv.
The earliest mythological texts are believed to have been transcribed by the 'filid,' a scholarly class who have been "continuingly regarded as quasi-pagan (in some nebulous manner) and thus invested in the preservation of pre-Christian material."(46) Some scholars believe that the filid refrained from making the *Túatha Dé Danann* actual gods to avoid committing blasphemy. As Williams suggests, "it may be that the concept of the *síd*-mounds grew in importance because Christian intellectuals found it a discreet way to signal the divinity of originally non-Christian figures without directly describing them as gods." Ibid., 39.

[32] Ibid., 295.

[33] Ibid.,, 300.

Even as a late as the eighteenth century, the idea of a set of gods that might rival the Christian worldview was problematic. This can help explain why in his infamous Ossian epics author James Macpherson (1736-1796) "made no attempt to introduce Gaelic deities hovering over the action."[34] Williams argues that Macpherson took the Gods out of his pseudo-mythologies because he could not "render a set of pagan gods aesthetically persuasive" on account of his "historical distance from the ancient world."[35] However, the period of the eighteenth century when Macpherson wrote his poems was one of heightened religious tensions in England between anti-papal and pro-Anglican groups, and the extreme religious persecutions of the most recent centuries were no doubt still fresh in the historical air. Publishing texts with a degree of religious ingenuity unpleasing to the Anglican church may not have been in Macpherson's best interest. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Christianity's stranglehold on European culture finally began to weaken, and it was precisely at this moment and not before that O'Grady's new conception of the *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe* as Ireland's pre-Christian pagan gods could be offered to the masses.

These volumes changed the mythological landscape for Irish writers and "exerted an influence out of all proportion… on an entire generation of young Anglo-Irish writers." Ibid., 308.

[34] Ibid., 291.

[35] Ibid., 281.

As one early writer put it in an article that discusses the supposed discovery of the real Ossian poems, "the wily Scot, Macpherson, to give them (the Ossian poems) a greater air of antiquity, omitted all allusions to the religious subjects which the originals posses."
Anon., "Discovery of the Original Ossian's [sic] Poems," *Liverpool Mercury,* Friday, August 18, 1820, 6.
https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000081/18200818/011/0006?browse=False

O'Grady's revision of the Irish mythological landscape was a significant step in a process that saw the *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe* transform into a race of gods that was politically expedient for the Revival. This transformative process reached its zenith during the late 1890s with the 'classicizing' of the *Túatha Dé Danann*, a project of a number of revivalists, notably Yeats, A.E. (George William Russell (1867-1935)), and William Sharp. Inspired by their involvement in occult or esoteric systems such as Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and the even more radical Golden Dawn, these poets sought to conjure visions in their minds of pre-Christian pagan Irish gods and to note their various outfits, regalia, accouterment, etc. Casting the *Tuatha Dé Danann* as pagan gods like those found in the mythologies of ancient Greece and Rome was tempting because it could elevate Ireland's cultural cachet. As Williams states, "shaping a national culture requires an epic, and epic requires a pantheon and a myth-world."[36] However, this endeavor was doomed to failure. The very act of creating a pantheon demanded that its gods be imbued with characteristics that could not help but be oddly reminiscent of those of the gods of Greek and Roman mythology.

It seems that Yeats and his cohort, caught up in their various enthusiasms, did not appreciate that the of lack of descriptions in the ancient manuscripts of what the gods looked like was a saving grace. It allowed these Irish gods to exist in a vein entirely outside of classical mythology.[37] However, the spirit of their project was entirely in

---

[36] Williams, *Ireland's Immortals,* 291.

[37] As Williams observes, "the medieval material [unfortunately our closest link to this forgotten period of history] failed to provide individualized descriptions… [and] no Irish manuscript provides visual images of the gods." *Ireland's Immortals,* 281.

keeping with the broader character of Celtic mythology. It was yet another step in a transformational process spanning centuries, one that suggests that arguments about 'authenticity' don't apply Celtic mythology. It was and is a genre continually being reshaped by the authors who choose it as their subject matter: it is a living tradition.

The rise of Ossian as a consequence of the persecution of Celtic cultures by the English

James Macpherson's *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books* (1762 – hereafter 'Ossian epic/s'), mentioned briefly above, had an immense impact on European culture and became one of the essential documents of the early Romantic period, despite its apparent lack of gods. It brought the idea of an exoticized Celticism into the popular consciousness and created a lasting bond between Celticism, Romanticism, and Ossian. To understand how a late eighteenth century work like the Ossian epic could have such an incredible influence, it will be necessary to look back over the vast and troubled history of conflict between the Irish, Scottish, and English (or, as one author has termed it, the battle between "Anglo Saxons and Celts").[38]

Here it will be helpful to explain what cultures are considered Celtic and why. Celtic is a linguistic term, describing the surviving similar languages of Celts in Ireland,

[38] L.P. Curtis Jr. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A study of Anti-Irish prejudice in Victorian England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

Scotland, Wales, Brittany, and parts of the Iberian Peninsula.[39] While Celts are presumed to be some of the earliest inhabitants of the British Isles, events such as the Anglo Saxon invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries forced them to migrate to the region's geographical extremes, where they remain today.[40] This early conflict between the Celts and the Saxons gave rise to the semi-historical legend of King Arthur and is the basis for tension between the English and the Celts throughout history. This tension was also exacerbated by the spread of Catholicism throughout Ireland at approximately the same time as the Saxon invasions. In summary, the Celts are opposed to the English because they have their own languages; have been relegated to the most distant parts of the British Isles due to various invasions; have cultural traits that are supposed to be traces of the ancient "original" inhabitants of the British Isles; and, until recently, maintained a staunch Roman Catholicism that made them the victims of Anglican persecution, especially in Ireland.

During the reign of Charles the Second of the house of Stuart (1660-1665),[41] penal laws which persecuted Catholics (as well as dissenting Protestants such as Puritans

---

[39] For a discussion of the term "Celtic" see: James Porter, "Locating Celtic Music (and Song)," *Western Folklore* vol. 57, no. 4 (Autumn, 1998): 208.

[40] A recent genetic study by Oxford University has revealed that, "there was no single Celtic genetic group. In fact the Celtic parts of the UK (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Cornwall) are among the most different from each other genetically. For example, the Cornish are much more similar genetically to other English groups than they are to the Welsh or the Scots." "Who do you think you are? A Genetic map of the British Isles," *University of Oxford,* published March 19, 2015. http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2015-03-19-who-do-you-think-you-really-are-genetic-map-british-isles.

[41] The Stuart's were the Scottish royal family. They reigned over England beginning with James I and VI, crowned king of England in 1603.

and Baptists) were greatly strengthened by a parliament wary of a possible Catholic take-over of the throne. Charles didn't agree with parliament's bias and suspended the laws, but this only stoked Anglican fears that Charles' Roman Catholic brother, James II and VII would become King. When the feared event happened, parliament, preferring anything but a Catholic King, invited William of Orange to invade England. The Irish supported King James and saw in his reign the potential to bring an end to penal laws, confiscation of land, and other injustices carried out by the English against the Irish. Since the Irish had so much to gain from having a Catholic on the throne, the main battles of the Glorious Revolution (1688) were fought in Ireland where James had the most support. When King James' forces were defeated at the Battle of the Boyne, he fled to France. Later, Irish, Scotts and Scottish Catholics alike were doubly insulted when, after William died without an heir, parliament imported King George I, the erstwhile Duke of Hanover, from Germany, rather than reinstate King James. This led to a series of rebellions in the eighteenth century, known as the Jacobite rebellions, which originated in the Scottish highlands and attempted to reinstate the house of Stuart.

While the issue of who would be king had initially been a religious one, Celts across Scotland and Ireland supported the Jacobite rebellions whether they were Catholic or not because they had endured a shared history of repression at the hands of the English. Therefore, these rebellions were not so much religious as cultural. To silence these rebellions once and for all, the English disarmed the Highlanders. They prohibited them from wearing their traditional dress and engaging in other distinctly Celtic cultural activities such as playing the bagpipes. Finally, they destroyed the clan system that had

allowed the Highlanders to present a unified front to the English, and forced them off of their familial lands. Once a source of subsistence living for the Scottish peasantry, these lands now became profit sources for the crown, and many Highlanders were forced to emigrate.[42]

Meanwhile, in Ireland most of the country's land was controlled by absentee Anglican-English landlords.[43] Working this land was one of the few options available for the impoverished Irish peasantry, and yet such employment left them constantly at the point of destitution. This subjugation of land and people at the hands of a landed and moneyed English class known as the 'Protestant ascendancy' continued until Ireland gained its independence on January 7, 1922.

Ossianic Celticism in the nineteenth century

It is precisely during the time when the anti-Highland laws were most in effect, the 1760s, that a 'vogue' for collecting Celtic poetry arose (a precursor to folk song collecting inspired in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the effects of industrialization and its potential to destroy the 'folk' culture of various countries such as

---

[42] For a second and third version of this troublesome history, see Matthew Wickman, "The Allure of the Improbable: Fingal, Evidence, and the Testimony of the 'Echoing Heath,'" *PMLA* vol. 115, no. 2 (March 2000): 181-194, and Peter T. Murphy, "Fool's Gold: the Highland Treasures of Macpherson's Ossian," *ELH* vol. 53, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 567-591.

[43] Even as late as 1870, ninety-seven percent of Irish land was "owned by men who rented it out to tenant farmers." http://www.historyhome.co.uk/c-eight/ireland/ire-land.htm
See: Michael Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question* (London: Methuen, 1984).

England, Hungary, etc.).[44] This vogue led James Macpherson to publish *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books*.[45] Macpherson proclaimed that he had discovered a lost third-century epic poem. At first accepted as legitimate, the work's ancient and fictitious author, the fabled third-century bard known as 'Ossian,' was hailed as the Celtic Homer. While the English quickly sought to discredit the authenticity of Macpherson's 'translations,' the Ossian epics had a tremendous influence across Europe.[46] The work's

---

[44] One of the causes of this vogue was a bizarre association with poetic genius that the Highlands gained after the harsh, recriminatory English laws had devastated the communities of northern Scotland. As Matthew Wickman argues, "despite or perhaps because of the legally enforced changes and the perpetuations of social stereotypes, the Highlands came to be perceived as a land inherently conducive to the type of inexplicable literary productivity associated with genius. Rustic Highlanders were romanticized for supposedly innate poetic abilities despite meager opportunities for education and high rates of illiteracy. The Gaelic language spoken in much of northwestern Scotland came to be celebrated by translators for its intrinsic poetic vitality despite the fact that fewer than one hundred books were printed in Gaelic until well after 1800 and that reform-minded legislation had consistently banned the teaching of Gaelic in local schools. The sheer improbability of Highland literary productivity intensified the allure of Highland literary acclaim. Seemingly divested of material and political sovereignty, the Highlands came to represent a cultural preserve, an outpost of pristine humanity in Britain's backyard, holding out against metropolitan corruption and the vices of commerce." "The Allure of the Improbable," 191.

[45] Thomas A McKean credits Macpherson as an early participant in this newly awakened interest in the folk and oral traditions of the highlands. Macpherson spoke Gaelic, and yet also attended University of Aberdeen where the primary language was English. McKean argues that "his upbringing and subsequent immersion in an Anglophone world, between them, provided warning that his local traditional knowledge, poetry, and tales needed attention or, perhaps, even to be rescued from oblivion." McKean also recounts anecdotal evidence of Macpherson as a collector: "One of Macpherson's childhood friends described his own father being adjured to write down the old tales for their moral and educational qualities." "The Fieldwork Legacy of James Macpherson," *Journal of American Folklore* vol. 114, no. 454 (2001): 448.

[46] "A recent resurgence of research has done much to exonerate Macpherson from accusations of fraud. Research by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford, Derick Thomson, and others have shown that Macpherson's poems were largely authentic, as many of the poems have since been corroborated with other Gaelic sources… many of his poems that have been corroborated show that he was often rather liberal in his translations which was typical for the time. Most modern scholars on the subject now agree that the majority of the poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry, but

success was partially due to the fact that its poetry dovetailed with the burgeoning Romantic movement. It was sublime in its dense prose, elevated language, and claims to antiquity. Its stories of another world, characterized by great heroes, consuming passions, and prideful battles set in a locale distant both in terms of time and space, made Scotland and 'the North' an ideal locale for the exotic.

As Clare O'Halloran notes, Ossianic poetry was expedient for the purposes of a number of important eighteenth and nineteenth century writers. It was especially popular in Germany, inspiring both Friedrich Gottleib Klopstock (1724-1803) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803).[47] Translations of Ossian even made it as far as Russia, where they encouraged "the production of a native literature, hitherto stifled by the dominance of Eurpoean classicism." Authors in Nordic countries, even Ireland, were "similarly involved in using the example of Ossian in counteracting the barbaric image of

---

that Macpherson's claim he had found a lost epic was overly ambitions." Paul F. Moulton, "A Controversy Discarded and 'Ossian' Revealed: An Argument for Renewed Consideration of 'The Poems of Ossian,'" *College Music Symposium* vol. 49/50 (2009/2010): 393. For more see: Seamus Dean, *Celtic Revivals* (London 1985), 20-21; Robin Flower, *Byron and Ossian* (Nottingham 1928), 7-11.

[47] As Clare O'Halloran notes, "Herder had worked out his ideas of language development and of oral poetry before Ossian was translated into German… [however] his misguided enthusiasm for the poems can be attributed in part to their apparent support for his thesis."
Meanwhile, John Greenway "has identified the poems as a type of mythic narrative which legitimized the values of sentimental primitivism and gave authority to several primitivist fantasies of the Nordic past." Clare O'Halloran, "Irish re-creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian*" Past & Present*, No. 124 (August, 1989): 71-72.
See also: John Greenway, "The Gateway to Innocence: Ossian and the Nordic Bard as Myth, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture,* vol. 4 (1975): 166.

their ancient cultures." These are just a few of the examples of Ossians' sweeping influence upon European writers.[48]

Ossianic poetry also became a major influence for a number of composers, especially on the Continent, who often read it in translation. Composers engaged with Ossianic texts and themes in all manners of arrangement, and one can find Ossianic works "encompassing dramatic and choral forms, Lieder, and purely instrumental compositions" from throughout the nineteenth century. These include Fraçois-Hippolyte Barthélemon's opera *Oithóna* (1768), Gaetano Donizetti's *Malvina, Scéne dramatique* (1845), Louis Moreau Gottsschalk *Danse ossianique* (op.12, ca. 1850), Bizet's *Chasse d'Ossian* (1860-1861), Saint Saëns *Le Lever de la Lune* (1855). John Daverio argues that Ossianims is "perhaps best represented" not only by Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* and *Scottish Symphony*[49] but also by "Schubert's *Ossians Gesänge* (A collection of settings of Ossianic texts for voice and piano published in1830), Niels Gade's overture *Nachklänge von Ossian* (op. 1, 1840) and cantata *Comala* (op. 12, 1846), and Johannes Brahms' *Gesang aus Fingal* (op. 17, no.4) and *Darthulas Grabgesang,* (op. 42, no. 3.)".[50]

---

[48] For Ossian and the visual arts see: Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815* (Chicago, 1990), 54-72, 447-452. See also: Werner Hofmann ed., *Runge in seiner Zeit* (Munich, 1977), 99-103. Both suggested in: John Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," *Nineteenth-Century Music* vol. 21, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 248.

[49] Larry Todd argues that these symphonies were directly influenced by Ossian, resulting in "Mendelssohn's Ossianic Manner." *Mendelssohn: The Hebrides, and Other Overtures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 308.

[50] Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," 248-249. For a complete list of Ossianic works compiled by Daverio see also p. 250.

For Daverio, the connection between Ossianism and music is as follows: "Ossianic texts abound in references to the harp and to the power of music to act as a bridge between this world and the hereafter," and therefore they "clearly invite musical treatment."[51] A scene with these characteristics occurs in act four of Jean François Le Sueur's *Ossian ou les Bardes* (1804). Ossian has been "taken a prisoner and cast in to the 'Circle of Bruno' described as a 'fearsome place' to await execution." Awaiting his fait, "Ossian gradually falls asleep." This begins a dream sequence in which "visions and ghosts appear to succor Ossian." This section is scored for "violins, violas, two flutes and *six harps*." When Ossian begins seeing visions of heroes, "A four part chorus is heard beginning very softly in unison" singing to Ossian.[52] This scoring is not unlike that from Brahm's *Gesang aus Fingal,* which is set for women's choir, two French horns, and harp.

In addition to such 'Ossianic' orchestrations, other 'Ossianic' musical characteristics have been noted. Consider, for example, Berlioz's own comments about *Ossian ou les Bardes.* Berlioz argues that "the strangeness of the melodies" as well as the harmonies of "an antique and dreamlike color" work to convey the atmosphere of the Ossianic world in such a way that it "could not have been translated more nobly or more faithfully into music."[53] Larry Todd notes a number of features "peculiar to the Ossianic compositions of Felix Mendelssohn [1809-1847] and Niels Gade [1817-1890]" which

---

[51] Ibid., 249.

[52] Aubrey S. Garlington Jr., "Le Sueur, 'Ossian," and Berlioz," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1964): 206.

[53] Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," 251.

include "open spacing, parallelism in voice leading, pentatonic or modal melodies, striking orchestral colors, and fanfare-like motives emblematic of the hunt." [54] Daverio also locates in the work of Niels Gade, in addition to the usual 'otherworldly' harp passages, characteristics distinctly considered 'Ossianic,' such as "spiky, rhythmically animated martial topics," "plangent strains of folk-like melody," and an "archaic ballad tone… emerging from a confluence of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic factors," that "point to folk song."[55] These various compositional techniques are today regarded as the essential elements of the "Ossianic" musical style.

The popularity and influence of Ossian also inspired composers to treat works of other Celtic authors.[56] For example, though there is little music by Schumann about Ossian, there are copious examples of Schumann engaging in the works of Walter Scott and Robert Burns. Scott's works, in particular, inspired many European composers. Musical works based on Scott's books include: Berlioz's *Rob Roy* (1828) and *Waverly* (1831) overtures, Bizet's *Jolie Fille de Perth* (1866), Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche* (1815), Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), Rossini's *La Donna Del Lago* (1819), and Schubert's *Sieben Gesänge aus Walter Scott's "Fraülein vom See."* The

---

[54] Ibid., 251.

[55] Ibid., 257-258.

[56] Peter Murphy notes that Walter Scott's novels followed in the footsteps of Ossian's poems in their function as important reading in the nineteenth century. He states that "the Ossian books figure in the education of all major writers though about 1830, most often as a fond memory of youth (just as Walter Scott's novels will for the later nineteenth century)" "Fool's Gold," 567.

popularization of Celtic themes in musical compositions reached its apex with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde,* whose plot is based on Celtic mythology.

The consequence of the popularity of Macpherson's Ossian epics was the 'Disneyfication' of Celticism.[57] Celtic characters were perceived as romantic, idealized 'others.' The heroes, for example, of both Walter Scott's *Waverly* and *Rob Roy,* are not Scotsmen, but are instead Englishmen. They are both swept away by the romance and adventure of Scottish/Celtic culture and its associated trappings; whiskey, brigands, waterfalls, harps, and ramshackle castles.[58] Such images and fancies became the stock and trade of Celtic romance. [59] Scott's ultimate act of invented tradition manifested itself

---

[57] Longley argues that "the Celticism initiated by Macpherson," mainly served "to denigrate the Irish character." But she also states that "Ossianism has influenced perceptions of Ireland in multifarious and often positive ways. The supposed spirituality of the Celtic Fringe has not only been a literary asset but a propaganda and *tourist* asset." Today the 'Disneyfication of Celticism' as I have phrased it resonates with this idea of tourism. However, Deane argues that the process of turning Irish culture into an industry merely fulfills a colonial narrative in which "they (Enlightened British protestants) will redeem the other Irish from their native and unreliable, if endearing, romanticism." (Deane). Longley, "Postcolonial versus European (And Post-Ukanian) Frameworks," 82. Deane, *Strange Country,* 33.

[58] J.Th. Leerssen links this kind of Celtic imagery to the influence Macpherson's poetry, which "evoked mountains, dark and stormy nights, tragic heroes, and hoary sages sadly strumming the harp: in short, an iconography evoking (to use Burke's aesthetic distinction) sublimity rather than beauty, and harking back to medieval romance as well as foreshadowing the onset of Romanticism." Leerssen argues that an important scene from *Waverly* in which Flora MacIvor "sings an old Scottish ballad for Waverley, accompanying herself on the harp" is "overtly reminiscent of Ossian." (This ballad features lines such as: "There is mist on the mountains, and night on the vale, But more dark is the sleep of the Sons of Gael!") He also argues that the setting is likewise Ossianic; "the waterfall is called 'romantic,' set in a 'sylvan amphitheater,' described as 'the land of romance.'" "Fiction Poetics and Cultural stereotype: Local Colour in Scott, Morgan, and Maturin," *Modern Language Review,* vol. 86, no. 2 (April, 1991): 274.

[59] James Porter argues that this homogenizing effect has been difficult to escape from, and argues that "caution is… necessary in generalizing about 'the Celts' because we need do to "disentangle the 'myth,' or composite image of Celtic culture that has been constructed over the past few centuries" "Locating Celtic Music (and Song)," *Western Folklore* vol. 57, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 207.

not on the page, but in reality, when he choreographed a visit to Scotland by King George IV, who briefly wore a kilt during his memorable stay. With this symbolic gesture, the kilt lost its symbolic fearsomeness and became a piece of kitsch, endorsed by a King known as a voluptuary.[60] This tale is symbolic of the unfortunate consequences of Celtic-mania: the 'north' was not a place for serious diplomacy; it was a location of fantasy and pseudo-danger, of imaginative hijinks and romantic escapade. After a century of oppression and cultural exploitation, the Celt had been transformed from something dangerous and politically destabilizing into something now distant and whimsical.[61]

The association of Celticism with the north, the exotic, the ancient, and the heroic had charged the nineteenth century with romantic energy. One only has to recall that it is Macpherson's epics that so inspired Goethe's romantic archetype, the unfortunate lovesick youth known as "Young Werther."[62] Yet this romanticized Celticism brought

---

[60] The actual reason that George IV was in Scotland was so that he might not attend the Congress of Vienna and impede British diplomacy.

[61] As early as 1814, the Scottish historian John Pinkerton bemoans Celtic mania: "this may be called the Celtic century, for all Europe has been inundated with nonsense about the Celts. When we come to the truth about them, and time will always draw truth out of the well, the Celtic mist will vanish, or become a mere cloud." *An enquiry into the History of the Scotland, vol.2* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1814), 124. See also: Nick Groom, "'The Celtic Century' and the Genesis of Scottish Gothic," in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. Carol Margaret Davison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 14-27.

[62] Goethe signaled Ossian's quintessentially romantic aesthetics, and the power of Ossianic verse to stir the emotions into a frenzy, in a pivotal scene from *The Sufferings of Young Werther*: (Charlotte) "asks Werther to read out to her his translations of the Songs of Selma… Instead of calming her emotions, however, the recitation, with its emphasis on melancholy sentiment, only serves to drive both Charlotte and Werther into a state of fearful agitation." For more on Ossian's captivating powers see: Michael McCraith, "The Saga of James Macpherson's 'Ossian,'" *The Linen Hall Review* vol. 8, no. 2/3 (September, 1991): 9.

with it a host of ideological problems that complicated the nationalist agenda at the heart of the Revival.

Ossianic images and language: a problematic inheritance for the Revival

Macpherson's legacy presented a conundrum for the Revival. Indulging in the popular Ossianic vein could help spread the message of the Revival, but to do so meant to work against the very aims of the movement. Many believed that 'Ossian' was a theft of the Irish character 'Oisin' and that Macpherson had co-opted Celtic mythology for the Scots.[63] Furthermore, the romantic primitivism of Ossianic Celticism, its invocation of

---

[63] O'Halloran notes that "Ireland was the only country which seemed, at the time, to lose from the popular acceptance of Macpherson's creation. The traditional tales that he had exploited were of Irish origin and his heroes, Fingal and Ossian, were versions of Fionn Mac Cumhal and Oisín of the Fionn or Fianna cycle, part of a pre-Christian oral tradition, for which the earliest surviving manuscripts, according to Gerard Murphy, are the twelfth century." Macpherson sought to destroy the idea that his Ossian epics were derived from Irish sources. In the preface to *Fingal*, "he dismissed the Irish tales of the Fianna attributed to Oisín as 'spurious pieces' by later Irish bards who had passed off their compositions as Ossians's and had caused the Irish to believe that Fingal was of Irish extraction." "Irish re-creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian*" Past & Present*, no. 124 (August, 1989): 74.

The 'Ossianic Society' was formed in Ireland largely to combat this perceived Scottish appropriation of Irish mythology. However, the complex internal politics of Ireland further complicated the society's agenda. As Daniel Gomes observes, "the Ossianic Society assembled various scholars and antiquaries form competing societies, notably the Celtic Society and the Irish Archaeological Society, in order to provide translations, introductions, and commentary on poetic material pertaining to Oisin and the Fianna… (its) pledge to neutrality, however, belies the fact that the society was in large measure formed as a reactionary attempt to wrest control of important manuscripts and source materials from similar societies thought to cater to Anglo-Irish landholders and their English patrons." Gomes offers the example of Herbert Frances Hore's study of the Fianna texts, which concludes that "Fenian myths and legends, far from being a testament to the Celtic imagination, should in fact provide the grounds for an alternative history of Anglican pride," to illustrate just how politically contested Irish mythological materials really were. Hore was a 'staunch Unionist descended from large landowners of the Anglo-Norman

the "innocence of a former age," or what Clare O'Halloran calls the "primitivist paradigm," went "hand in hand with the belief that late-eighteenth-century England was the epitome of a well-ordered, wealthy and progressive society." In other words, the Ossianic vision of Gaelic culture only reaffirmed anti-Irish bias and England's claim to colonial domination.[64] However, authors could not resist treating the subject matter of their own history and mythology with the language most familiar to them.

Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisin*, which he worked on between 1887 and 1889, is his earliest major poem, and it makes recourse to Ossianic tropes and language while at the same time struggling to affirm the agenda of the Revival. It takes the form of a dialogue between Oisin and St. Patrick in which Oisin recounts a strange three-hundred year journey. It begins when Oisin meets a beautiful woman, Niam, who declares that her father and mother are Aengus and Edain [sic. Etain], of the *Túatha Dé Danann*. She states that she has traveled to meet Oisin after hearing so many stories of him from the *Danann* poets. Once they have agreed to wed, she grants Oisin immortality, and they embark on a journey that eventually takes them to three strange islands. The first is similar to the Irish *Tír-na-nOg* or 'Land of Youth,' where the *Sídhe* live in a youthful

---

invasion." "Reviving Oisin: Yeats and the Conflicted Appeal of Irish Mythology," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter, 2014): 379, 382.

[64] O'Halloran, "Irish re-creations of the Gaelic Past," 73.

For more on Ossianic primitivisn see Peter France, "Primitivism and Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Scots," *The Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 15, Anglo-French Literary Relations Special Number, (1985): 64-79.

state of immortality.[65] The second is a sea-Castle where Oisin battles the sea-gods, and the last is a land of dreams. Oisin grows weary of each island in turn and finally asks Niam to let him see Ireland once again. She grants him his wish, on the condition that if he should touch the ground he will lose his immortality and die. Journeying on horseback through Ireland, Oisin learns that his heroic comrades, the Fenians, are long dead. Finally, he meets two unfortunate peasant laborers:

> And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a sack
> full of sand,
> They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell with
> their burden at length.
> Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung it five
> yards with my hand,
> With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the
> Fenians old strength.

Oisin falls from his perch as he throws the sack, and becomes a withered, dying old man. In his last moments, he discovers the cause of the peasant's labor:

> …the men of the sand-sack showed me a church, with its
> belfry in air;
> Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my dim eyes
> the crozier gleams[66]

In this new Ireland, the bishop's staff has replaced the sword, and the Fenians, Oisin's warring companions, have been reduced to weak peasants whose strength has been

---

[65] Alternatively, John Unterecker proclaims that the first island is "Aengus' island" because of Yeats's reference to "the birds of Aengus." *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1959), 52.

[66] Yeats, "The Wanderings of Oisin," in *W.B. Yeats: The Poems, Revised,* ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 384-385.

sapped by labor. As Oisin dies, St. Patrick warns him that his fate will be hellfire if he does not accept the Church, but Oisin defies him in the poem's last lines:

> I will go to Caolite, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair,
> And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast.[67]

The Wanderings of Oisin is a dire pronouncement regarding the influence of Christianity upon Irish culture.[68] It suggests that if Ireland is to regain its national strength and dignity, it must do so through the power of its own gods and heroes, not through those that it shares with its English oppressors.[69] By invoking Niam and her forebears Aengus and Edain, Yeats plays with the idea of *Túatha Dé Danann* as pre-Christian gods. However, it is only when St. Patrick condemns Ireland's "demon love of its youth" that Yeats articulates Irish paganism and its intrinsic value to the nationalist cause.[70] On a more personal level, Yeats also uses *Wanderings* to articulate his belief in the importance of the poet in society. By making the bard Oisin immortal, if only for three hundred years, Yeats elevates the role of the poet, and by consequence himself.

---

[67] Ibid., 386.

[68] As Daniel Gomes suggests, "Oisin's defiant stance against both St. Patrick's dispensation and the debilitated conditions of modern Ireland can be read as an allegory of Yeats's own ambition to resurrect the vigor of the Celtic imagination against the foreign invasions of Roman Catholicism and English Protestantism alike." "Reviving Oisin," 376.

[69] In Yeats's era, the Roman Catholic Church frowned upon the rise of Irish cultural nationalism.

[70] Yeats, "The Wanderings of Oisin," 386.

This elevation is part of a strategy of oblique self-aggrandizement that Yeats would continue to use throughout his career.[71]

Wanderings certainly articulates the Revival's nationalist agenda – as well as some of Yeats's personal philosophies – but there is a problem. The heroic past that Oisin longs for has a distinctly Macphersonian and therefore Scottish aura. Furthermore, the poem patently imitates Macpherson's Ossianic language. Scholars have already observed that Yeats's poem is quite similar to Michael Comyn's "The Lay of Oisin on the Land of Youth," which was published in Gaelic in approximately 1750, and later translated into English by Brian O'Looney for the Ossianic society (approx. 1850s). Sections of Yeats version are so close to O'Looney's translation that, in its review of *Wanderings*, *The*

---

[71] Gomes discusses the question of whether the poem's dominant figure is Oisin or actually Yeats. He writes,

> the poem's tendency toward monologue complicates Oisin's clean identification as a Celtic hero sent to redeem modern Ireland. Unlike his dialogue with Patrick, Oisin's recollection of his flight to the Isles of Faerie evinces little connection to Yeats's desire to trumpet his political alignments. Yeats admits as much in a letter sent to his friend and fellow poet Katharine Tynan in the summer of 1888, in which he confesses that he loaded his poem with cryptic symbols: "In the second part of Oisin under disguise of symbolism I have said several things, to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers, they must not even know there are symbols anywhere," Yeats's arch claim of having privileged access to the symbolic meaning of the poem, one that is necessarily hidden from the reader, indicates how Oisin's identifiably nationalistic associations are counterpoised by his role as a vehicle to the esoteric.

This division of meanings within the poem, one which Yeats claims to have tried to keep hidden, is part of a broader thread in Yeats oeuvre that struggles to balance something "distinctly Irish" by which the nation "could be reclaimed," and Yeats's own imaginative theorization of a "primordial imaginary." "Reviving Oisin," 391. For more on Yeats's life long advocacy of the Poet and his special role in society, see: Bernard Levine, "'High Talk': A Concentrative Analysis of a Poem by Yeats," *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter, 1966), 124-129. For more on Yeats and the esoteric, see chapter two.

Spectator "even suggested plagiarism," a charge "Yeats was at pains to deny."[72] Looming on the periphery of Yeats's imitation of Comyn's poem is the specter of the Romantic period's chief Celticist, James Macpherson.[73] While G.J. Watson argues that "Yeats's intimacy with Macpherson's texts was not extensive, and when he does speak of the Ossianic material he sounds skeptical,"[74] he also observes that some of Yeats's few references to Macpherson come "at the time of the publication of Yeats's own *Wanderings of Oisin*." For example, in one of his letters from this time Yeats claims "a man down the country who know(s) well all old Irish legends finds my 'Oisin' gives better idia [sic] the mingled savagery and nobility 'of ancestral Irish' than Macpherson's Ossian."[75] If Yeats did indeed paraphrase Comyn, Macpherson's predecessor, then one could attribute the similarities between the language of *Wanderings* and Macpherson's epics to possibly shared sources. However, one cannot know to what degree O'Looney's *translation into English* was itself influenced by Macpherson's style.

---

[72] Gomes, "Reviving Oisin," 387.

[73] As Clare O'Halloran notes, "Historians and literary critics have, for the most part, failed to appreciate the importance of Macpherson as a catalyst in Irish cultural development, confining themselves mainly to the damaging influence which his 'spurious and bardic sentimentality' had on Matthew Arnold's stereotypic of the Celt in the second half of the nineteenth century." "Irish re-creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian," *Past & Present* no. 124 (Aug., 1989): 70.

[74] G.J. Watson, "Yeats, Macpherson, and the Cult of Defeat," in *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, ed. Fiona J Stafford, Howard Gaskill, (Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi, 1998), 216.

[75] "One should not discount the Ossianic effect on Yeats." Ibid., 216.

The similarities between selections from Macpherson's "Comala a Dramatic Poem" and Yeats *Wanderings* are evident:

Macpherson:

> O Carun of the streams! why do I behold thy waters rolling in blood? Has the noise of the battle been heard; and sleeps the king of Morven? Rise, moon, thou daughter of the sky! Look from between thy clouds, rise that I may behold the gleam of his steel, on the field of his promise. Or rather let the meteor, that lights our fathers through the night, come, with its red beam, to show me the way to my fallen hero. Who will defend me from sorrow? Who from the love of Hidallan? Long shall Comala look before she can behold Fingal in the midst of his host; bright as the coming forth of the morning, in the cloud of an early shower.[76]

Yeats:

> Sad to remember, sick with years,
> The swift innumerable spears,
> The horsemen with their floating hair,
> And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,
> Those merry couples dancing in tune,
> And the white body that lay by mine;
> But the tale, though words be lighter than air,
> Must live to be old like the wandering moon.
>
> Caoilte, and Conan, and Finn were there,
> When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
> With Bran, Sceolan, and Lomair,
> And passing the Firbolgs' burial-mounds,
> Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill
> Where passionate Maeve is stony-still;
> And found On the dove-grey edge of the sea
> A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
> On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
> And like a sunset were her lips,
> A stormy sunset on doomed ships;

---

[76] James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian translated by James Macpherson with an introduction by William Sharp* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, 1896), 24-25.

A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams,
As her soft bosom rose and fell.[77]

Though even the words themselves seem to overlap from one author to the next, what is most striking is a certain similarity of tone created through their repeated invocation of stock images and ideas. For example, Macpherson raises the passage of time to lend his subject matter a romantic gravitas: "Long shall Comala look before she can behold Fingal in the midst of his host…." Yeats, in patent imitation uses the same strategy multiple times within a single page: "Sad to remember, sick with years," followed by, "But the tale, though words be lighter than air / Must live to be old like the wandering moon." Both poets repeatedly invoke the prowess of male warriors:
"that I may behold the gleam of his steel on the field of his promise." (Macpherson)
"The swift innumerable spears, The horsemen with their floating hair" (Yeats)
They also offer similar idealizations of feminine beauty: "Rise, moon, thou daughter of the sky!" (Macpherson) … a suggestion of a pale nude female figure that is only to be outdone by Yeats's description of a woman that is, "found on the dove-grey edge of the sea / A pearl-pale, high-born lady." Curiously, in Macpherson's lines following the one above, he writes: "the meteor, that lights our fathers through the night, come with its red beam, to show me the way to my fallen hero," whereas Yeats continues his description of

[77] Yeats, "The Wanderings of Ossian," 386.

the pale female figure with similar images of redness: "And like a sunset were her lips…" paired with, "…down to her feet white vesture flowed, And with the glimmering crimson glowed of many a figured embroidery…."

Perhaps Yeats's distraction with the "citron colour" of the maiden's hair can be attributed to his father's dutiful teachings about the splendors of pre-Raphaelite aesthetics.[78] However, despite their varied levels of description, the two works share a similarly constant flowing from image to image; images of the hunt, the moon, windswept seas, pale maidens, feasts, the gleaming of swords, the brandishing of spears, the celebration of glories long past, the call to long lost or presumed dead warriors, etc.

The Ossianic language that Yeats's imitates in *Wanderings*, particularly the highly characteristic passages above, were an Ossianic trope. Throughout the nineteenth century, similar passages were repeatedly chosen as texts for musical works. An excellent example of this is Brahms' *Gesang aus Fingal* (op. 17 no. 4). Its words come from the middle of *Fingal: An Epic Poem, Book 1*:

> Weep on the rocks of roaring winds, O maids of Inistore! Bend they fair head over the waves, thou lovelier than the ghost of the hills, when it moves, in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven. He is fallen! Thy youth is low! Pale beneath the sword of Cuthullin![79]

---

[78] Yeats's father John Butler Yeats (1839-1922), an only somewhat successful painter, was as well known for his stimulating discussions of culture and his outspoken opinions regarding art. See: Keith Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats: The Man and the Milieu* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1997).

[79] James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* 45.

Roger Fiske suggests that Brahms' interest in Celtic subjects may have developed out of Schumann's interest in Scotland. Fiske argues that the finale of his op 1 piano sonata as well as its only A minor episode were inspired by Schumann's settings of poetry by Robert Burns. For

Once again, fairness, paleness, sunbeams, gleaming swords, etc., are brought to mind. Brahms next setting of Ossian, *Darthula's Grabgesang,* also features similar passages:

> Maiden of Colla, you sleep!
> Around you the blue streams of Selma are silent.
> They mourn for you, the last branch
> of Thruthil's line!
>
> When will you rise again in your beauty?
> Fairest of the fair in Erin!
> You sleep the long sleep of the grave;
> The glow of morning is distant…
>
> Never will she rise gain in her beauty!
> Never again will you see her lovely wandering.[80]

Consider as well that Schumann's *Das Madchen von Inistore* sets the same text as *Gesang aus Fingal.* Such passages feature elements of what Daverio calls the "chief stylistic features of Ossianic poetry," including:

> A pervasive melancholy tone emanating form the bard's consciousness of the transience of all things… images of absence, withdrawal, or diffusion of light in nocturnal landscapes… and invocations to the harp, the bard's instrument of choice, by way of extravagant metaphors or epithets.[81]

---

more regarding Brahms' engagement with Celtic topics, see: Roger Fiske, "Brahms and Scotland," *The Musical Times* vol. 109, no. 1510 (December, 1968): 106-111.

[80] English translation obtained from *The Lieder Net Archive.* http://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=26526

[81] John Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," *Nineteenth-Century Music,* (vol. 21, no. 3, Spring 1998), 247.

These features locate the poetry of Yeats, Comyn, and Macpherson, as well as the settings of Ossianic texts by Schubert, Brahms, and a host of other composers, in the same imaginative space.[82]

As eloquent as Yeats's invocation of a Macphersonian strain of Celticism may have been, and as valuable as it may have been for aiding aspects of the Revival's agenda, it was founded on a rather undifferentiated and incomplete appropriation of Celtic and Irish culture originally created for the benefit of a non-Irish opportunist. Furthermore, its verses bore the trace of the very familiar: the Ossianic language that had taken Europe by storm in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This language had become a topos signifying an essentialized brand of 'Celticism.' Such Ossianic 'Irishry' was at cross-purposes with the aim of the Revival to 'revive' Irish identity.

Much of the poetry that Yeats published along with *Wanderings* does not fall into the Ossianic trap – though there are a few lines here and there, such as "the woods were round them, and the yellow leaves fell like meteors in the gloom," found in his poem, "Ephemera." [83] However, what this patent Ossianism suggests is that Celticism had to be rebranded. One way to do this was to continue the project of reimagining the *Túatha Dé*

---

[82] T. W. Rolleston has observed a similar trademark in what he describes as "Ossianic Literature," a genre that contains "a conscious delight in wild nature, in scenery, in the song of birds, the music of the chase through the woods, in mysterious and romantic adventure." He argues that this "speaks unmistakably of a time when the free, open-air life 'under the greenwood tree' is looked back on and idealized, but no longer habitually lived, by those who celebrate it."
Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race, (London: Constable, first published 1911), 254.

[83] Yeats, *The Collected Works,* 15.

Danann as Ireland's pagan gods, which *Wanderings* effects to some degree. These gods existed in a part of the Celtic imagination untouched by Macpherson and stood against the exploitative Irish Roman Catholic Church.[84] However, there was another avenue to follow, one that by the late nineteenth century was becoming an increasingly popular endeavor throughout Europe, and that was for writers to make recourse to folk materials (the same strategy that Macpherson had deceptively invoked in his own time).[85] Folklore had long been associated with cultivating national identity, but Irish folklore had the added benefit of a linguistic style that offered itself as a Celtic/Irish alternative to Ossianesque prose.

[84] This anti-Catholic bias could only have accelerated the approaching schism between the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic/Catholic factions of the Revival.

[85] Indeed, "the most important aspect of Irish folklore was that it could be used to provide the basis for a new Irish literature." Hirsch, "The Poet as Folklorist," 21.

Chapter 2: Irish Folklore, the Antidote to Ossianic Influence

Folklore: A dying tradition lends itself to the national identity

Folktale collecting in Ireland did not begin with the Revival. Various authors throughout the nineteenth century made there own collections and contributions to the field, including Thomas Crofton Croker (*Fairy Legends and Traditions in the Sough of Ireland*, 1825, volumes 2 and 3, 1828), Thomas Keightly (*The Fairy Mythology*, 1828), and Patrick Kennedy (*Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* 1866, *The Fireside Stories of Ireland*, 1879, and *The Bardic Stories of Ireland*, 1871).[86] Of special interest to this essay are two important folktale collections, Dr. Douglas Hyde's *Beside the Fire: A Collection of Irish Gaelic Stories* (1890), and Yeats's *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888).[87] These two collections, published within such a short time of one another, came during a period of heightened interest in folktales stemming from the perception that the

---

[86] Edward Hirsch, *Yeats and the Commonwealth of Faery* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 5-6.

[87] Yeats met Ernest Rhys, the London editor for the Walter Scott Company, at William Morris's Kelmscott House in 1887. Yeats and Rhys shared an enthusiasm for Celtic culture, and Rhys encouraged Yeats to edit a volume of folklore. This was to become his *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry.* Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats,* 59-61.

Folksong collecting in Ireland also has a storied history. Two noted folksong collectors from before the era of the Revival include Thomas Moore (1779-1852) and George Petrie (1790-1866).

oral tradition that kept folktales alive would soon vanish due to the arrival of universal literacy, not to mention modernity.

The oral tradition of the Irish peasantry had, because of its insular nature, avoided the influence of Macpherson. However, this same insularity, while preservational, also threatened the genre's existence. In his introduction to *Beside the Fire: A Collection of Irish Gaelic Folk Stories,* Douglas Hyde gives a sense of the important part that oral tradition had played in the lives of the Irish, and comments on the impending disappearance of oral tradition from cultural practice. He laments that, "Irish and Scotch Gaelic folk stories are, as a living form of literature, a thing of the past," and reminisces that

> until quite recently there existed in our midst millions of men and women who, when their day's work was over, sought and found mental recreation in a domain to which few indeed of us who read books are permitted to enter.[88]

For Hyde, one of the most alluring elements of this "domain" is that folktales have, unlike the novel's single author, an untold number of authors each influencing the story in their own way over a span of generations. As these tales were stitched together,

---

[88] "But no one can tell us with certainty of the genesis of the folk-tale, no one has been consciously present at its inception, and no one has marked its growth. It is in many ways a mystery, part of the flotsam and jetsam of the ages, still beating feebly against the shore of the nineteenth century, swallowed up last in England by the waves of materialism and civilization combined." Douglas Hyde ed., *Beside the Fire: a collection of Irish Gaelic Folk Stories,* notes by Alfred Nutt (London: David Nutt, 1910, originally published 1890), iv-x.

Though it is generally accepted today that "oral tradition remains influential on written literary genres and is influenced in turn by the written word," (Khasawneh, "Irish Oral Tradition," 81) this was not always the case. As Diarmuid Ó Giolláin has remarked, "'Folklore' appeared as it was disappearing, it was discovered as it was being lost, (and) it was recovered as it ceased to be." *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity,* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 8. See also: Anne Markey, "The Discovery of Irish Folklore," *New Hibernia Review,* vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 2006): 22.

they revealed texts that, thanks to their origins in oral tradition, were of a style altogether different from Ossianic literature. Furthermore, in Irish folktale collections, the history of suppression, marginalization, and exoticization that had become the baggage of the Ossianic style was negated. Finally, folktale collections offered a cultural record not defined by battles and dates, but by the invocations of shared cultural tropes like the *Sídhe*, the lore of storied contemporary locations in Ireland, and the everyday lives of the Irish people. Thanks to these characteristics, folktales presented themselves to the revivalists as a native literature capable of combating English cultural hegemony.[89]

An essential aesthetic feature that folktales brought to the cause of the Revival was a new style of language through which to disseminate notions of Celticism, one not subject to the same ideological problems accompanying the romanticized diction of Ossian-influenced prose. The language of folktales avoids high-flown phrases and repeated images and instead offers the reader the most straightforward means of storytelling and description. Consider the following passage from Hyde's "The King of Ireland's Son":

> There was a king's son in Ireland long ago, and he went out and took with him his gun and his dog. There was snow out. He killed a raven. The raven fell on the snow. He never saw anything whiter than the snow, or blacker than the raven's skull, or redder than its share of blood, that was a'pouring out.
>
> He put himself under *Gassa* and obligations of the year, that he would not eat two meals at one table, or sleep two nights in one house, until he should find a

[89]As Eric Venbrux and Theo Meder suggest, across Europe during the nineteenth century, "recovering a 'superior, national poetic heritage' by means of folklore lent a legitimizing authenticity to the aspirations of nationalist or ethnic groups." "Authenticity as an Analytic Concept in Folkloricists: A Case of Collecting Folktales in Friesland," *Etnofoor,* Vol. 17, No. ½ (2004): 200. For further discussion see: Nicholas Wolf, "'Scéal Grinn?' Jokes, Puns, and the Shaping of Billingualism in Nineteenth century Ireland," *Journal of British Studies,* vol. 48, no. 1 (January, 2009): 56.

woman whose hair was as black as the raven's head, and her skin as white as the snow, and her two cheeks as red as the blood.[90]

In this passage, one encounters a similar situation as that found in passages of Macpherson and Yeats above: a maiden is described in comely and fantastical terms. However, this passage stands apart because the symbolic parallels it offers to complement the sought after maiden's beauty are not found in the moon, tide-swept shores, or rare fabrics, but rather in the glaring image and stark coloring of a murdered raven.

A poem from William Allingham (1824-1889), "The Fairies," found in Yeats's *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry,* bears a similar simplicity:

Up the airy mountain,
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a-hunting
For Fear of little men;
Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather![91]

---

[90] Hyde, ed., "The King of Ireland's Son" in *Beside the Fire*, 19-21. (*Gassa*: in Irish, *geasa*—mystic obligations)

[91] W.B. Yeats, ed., *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* (originally published 1888) in *Fairy and Folktales of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), 13.

William Allingham was an Irish poet and folksong collector and disseminator. His poetry was greatly influenced by folksong, and John Hewitt attributes his pioneering use of the refrain to his knowledge of so-called 'Border Ballads.' Though he wrote no more than a "fistful" of actual songs, he was a prolific poet that "pioneered a mode and a technique which has had its lasting triumphs at the hands of Yeats, Colum and Joseph Campbell." Celine McGlynn, *The best of William Allingham*, int. by John Hewitt (Donegal: Voice Books Ltd., 2003), iii.

The plot of Allingham's poem "The Abbot of Innisfallen" reminds one of Yeats's "Wanderings." In "The Abbot" a kindhearted Abbot follows a singing-bird into the nearby forest. When he returns to his Abbey, strangers alert him that two-hundred years have passed:

But when he came to his Abbey,
he found a wondrous change;

Once again the descriptive language is evocative and yet stripped down to its essentials. By comparing all four examples (two Ossianic and two folkloric), it is evident that the style of the second group is simpler: things are stark, red, green, and white. Gone are the vermillion and alabaster hues that enliven Ossianic writing and its later pre-Raphaelite-esque variations. This clear language, that, as my notes on Allingham suggest, owes a debt to folksong, brings a certain degree of dignified restraint to the endless variety of strange tales that folktale collections contain, and acts as a soothing salve for minds and hearts wearied by the overindulgent Ossianic prose.

Though the straightforward language described above imparts to the world of Irish folklore a seeming simplicity, it is a world that nevertheless cannot escape from and the constant state of flux that characterizes the *Sídhe* and the *Túatha Dé Danann*. In folktales, the *Túatha Dé Danann* have a shared or overlapping identity with the *Sídhe,* also known as the "fairy folk." Yeats addresses the multifaceted nature of the spiritual beings that populate Irish folktales with the following line of commentary that belies the three-part equation regarding his thinking on the issue mentioned in the first chapter:

> The Irish word for fairy is *sheehogue* (sidheóg), a diminutive of 'shee' as in *banshee.* Fairies are *deenee shee* (*daoine sidhe* [sic]) – fairy people.
>
> Who are they? 'Fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved, nor bad enough to be lost,' say the peasantry. 'The God's of the earth,' says the book

---

he saw no friendly faces there,
for every face was strange.

The strange men spoke unto him;
And he heard from all and each
The foreign tongue of the Sassenach
Not wholesome Irish speech. (36)

> of Armagh. [A 9th century Irish illuminated manuscript; one of the earliest texts pertaining to St. Patrick] 'The gods of pagan Ireland' say the Irish antiquarians, 'the *Tuatha De Danãn'* [sic], who when no longer worshipped and fed offerings, dwindled away in the popular imagination and are now only a few spans high.[92]

That the *Sídhe*, as a host of fairy folk, and the *Túatha De Danann*, as a cast of gods with names like Angus, Bobd Dearg, etc., could somehow co-exist and overlap as the same people is difficult to imagine. Yeats manages to make some sense of these co-existing identities by offering the idea that the *Danann* gods had become the *Sídhe* after they "dwindled away" till they were only "a few spans high." However, the conflation of a grand panoply of gods – as Yeats's would strive to contrive them – with "little green men," rushing up and down the local glen, brought to the surface yet another ideological problem. These two co-identified groups had a way of canceling each other out. If Yeats's explanation uses a sense of mystery to lend a degree of gravitas to *the Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe*, the poem by William Allingham quoted above that directly follows after the introduction undoes this impression. The idea of "little green men… trooping altogether" may have been amusing in the context of fireside stories, but such amusing images would not advance the nationalist agenda of the Revival. These green men were too diminutive, literally and politically, and propagating them in the cultural imagination might only fuel deprecatory views of the Irish that were so important to the English domination of Ireland. Well aware of this, Yeats asked his publishers to remove the images of green shamrocks and leprechauns that frequently decorated folktale collections of the time. Yeats would soon find more literary ways of dealing with this complex issue.

---

[92] Yeats, ed., *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry,* 11.

Interlude: Folktales collections and literacy

If the transcription of folktales was motivated the by the perception that Ireland's oral tradition was dying, it was a death that also brought with it new life. The mass production of these stories in a readable format spread them beyond their insulated communities and contributed to Irish literacy. As mentioned in the prologue, Irish nationalists recognized literacy's fundamental importance to their agenda. One voice calling for a literate Ireland was that of John O'Leary, who had been jailed for his participation in a rebellion against the English during the 1860s. He spent twenty years in prison and exile, but by the 1880s was allowed to return to Ireland. While giving a homecoming speech to his supporters, he discussed the importance of literacy to the new destiny he and other Irish nationalists imagined for Ireland:[93]

> I am here to call upon you, to imitate and emulate that body whose name you have taken… shortly speaking, we have as much need as ever for such aid and inspiration as is to be got from ballad and song, from story, essay, or history.

He concluded with the epithet: "Educate that you may be free."[94] This call to educate – to read – added yet another layer of anti-hegemonic power to folktale collections.

---

[93] Six years in penal servitude and Fourteen years exiled in Paris.

[94] Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats*, 39.

The troubled ideology of folktale collecting

Despite spending a year in County Sligo researching and collecting stories for *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry*, much of Yeats's time working on the project was spent finding folktales in the British Library. The value of this observation is not to discredit Hyde's claim that folktales derive from oral tradition, but instead to raise an issue that plagued Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and many other musicians and composers who were transcribing folk melodies and folk song during roughly the same period: authenticity. The intrinsic problem with any such effort is that the border between source and author, and editor and transcriber is unclear. If the act of transcription is inevitably a form of creation, then how can folktales collections, compiled by editors removed from the populations they claim to represent, speak on behalf of a nation's people, its 'folk'?

Not beholden to 'authenticity,' it is well known that Yeats took great license with his subject matter. As Edward Hirsch observes, in *Folktales*, "Yeats cut, sifted, and re-shaped the prose of the writers he was reprinting." Furthermore, Yeats "disliked rationalizations of the fairies and warned [in the volume's introduction] that, 'the reader will perhaps wonder that in all my notes I have not rationalized a single hobgoblin.'" [95]

[95] Rationalizing "undermined the mystical authority of his folk sources." In other words, rationalizing submitted fairytales to the hegemony of the rationally-minded Englishman's world-view. Edward Hirsch, "The Poet as Folklorist" in *Genres of the Irish Literary Revival,* 16,17.

In Yeats's eyes, rationalizations downplayed what for him was most fascinating and politically expedient aspects of folktales: the supernatural. As a consequence of this preference, *Folktales* actually contains very few folktales, but is instead composed mainly of "memorats:"

> brief accounts of encounters with the supernatural…(hence, when there were different versions of the same story, Yeats would choose the most localized one, just as he would select the most extreme and eccentric versions).[96]

Edward Hirsch has similarly observed that that in *Folktales*

> It was precisely what was most extravagant in the folk imagination that fascinated Yeats; indeed, he had a clear preference for the most supernatural, extravagant, strange and imaginatively abundant stories told by the country people.[97]

For example, Yeats's treatment of the character known as the "Pooka" in *Folktales* "emphasized the mysterious and de-emphasized the humorous aspects of the Pooka's character."[98] Similarly, Bjron Sundermark observes that, "another aspect of fairy tales that Yeats downplays is that fairy tales are almost invariable comedies (in the Dantean sense)."[99] I believe that eliminating the comic element from folktales was crucial to Yeats's project of conveying that the supernatural was real. However, noted folklorists

---

[96] Bjron Sundermark, "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," *Nordic Irish Studies* vol. 5 (2006): 101.

[97] Hirsch, "The Poet as Folklorist," 16.

[98] Ibid., 17.

[99] Sundermark, "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 103.

Andrew Lang (1844-1912) and Alfred Nutt (1856-1910) criticized *Folktales*' heightened supernaturalism and lack of scientific treatment.[100] Nutt believed that,

> (Folklorists) must seek for objective truth, not for the subjective pleasure to be derived from reshaping the rude products of folk-fancy in accordance with a more sophisticated aesthetic temperament.[101]

Yeats was aware of the opposition to his approach. He took a strong side in what Schleifer calls the

> murky debate about whether folktales should be collected and reprinted scientifically or artistically, [by writing], "I deeply regret when I find some folklorist is merely scientific, and lacks the needful subtle imaginative sympathy to tell his stories well."

Yeats's solution to the problem of authenticity was not to reduce his role as an editor and transcriber, but rather to endure what criticism would come his way. He "called for the Irish folklorist to provide 'some equivalent for the lost gesture, local allusions and quaint manners of the storytellers.'"[102] Such an approach violated all his critics' demands for 'authenticity,' but, for Yeats, only such an 'aesthetic' presentation could contextualize folktales appropriately.[103]

---

[100] Ibid., 102.

[101] Sundermark, "Yeats and the Fairy Tale, " 2.

[102] Hirsch, "The Poet as Folklorist," 18.

[103] Modern scholars have recognized non-textual elements as a significant, if difficult to convey, element of the Irish oral tradition. As Hana Khasawneh suggests, "the Irish oral performance occupies a middle space between oral and literary forms and it is certainly one of the most well-known of this type. Central to oral tradition is its performance; that keeps it alive. Irish oral tradition involves visual and auditory dimension that tend to heighten its emotional and dramatic impact and bring a high degree of audience participation." "Irish Oral Tradition and Print Culture," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* vol. 103, no. 409 (Spring, 2014): 81.

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's folksong collection *Songs of the Hebrides* (1909) suffered from similar critiques.[104] Initially Kennedy-Fraser's volume was hailed as a success. M.N. Munro, writing for the *Celtic Review,* proclaimed:

> It is a most valuable interpretation not only of Celtic music but of the true inwardness of the life and manner of thought and feeling of the people of the Isles. All Highlanders, and particularly Islanders, who use this work will feel that they owe a debt of gratitude to the Editors for the technical skill, musical and literary talent, and loving enthusiasm they have put into their work.[105]

Ezra Pound also praised the collection:

> These traditional melodies of the Gael are among the musical riches of all time, and one need use no comparatives and no tempered adjectives to express the matter. They have in them the wildness of the sea and of the wind and the shrillness of the sea-birds.[106]

For Munro, Kennedy-Fraser had successfully conveyed the essence of musical Celticism, however, this did not mean that her transcriptions were a dead match to their sources. Kennedy-Fraser was aware of this, and admitted that it was impossible to transcribe the melodies of the Hebrides accurately. She argued in her introduction that the scales used by the Islanders "differ slightly from anything we can convey by any system

---

[104] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857-1930) was the daughter of "Celebrated Scots tenor" David Kennedy. She grew up touring the British empire with her father, often accompanying him on the piano. In the 1880's, she began to give lecture-recitals on Celtic folk song. Later, inspired by John Duncan (1866-1945), the Scottish symbolist artist, she traveled to the Hebrides to collect new material. The success of her lecture-recitals led her to continue her work in the Hebrides and culminated with the publication of several volumes of *Songs of the Hebrides*. See: Anne Lorne-Gillies, *Review: A Life of Song, The Autobiography of Marjory Kennedy–Fraser (1857-1930),* (2011). http://www.electricscotland.com/history/women/MKF05LifeOfSongReviewByAnneLorneGillies.pdf

[105] M.N. Munro, "Review: Songs of the Hebrides by Marjory Kennedy Fraser, Gaelic Editor, Kenneth McLeod," *The Celtic Review* vol. 6, no. 22 (October, 1909): 185.

[106] Lorne-Gillies, *Review: A Life of Song.*

of notation in use." She also conceded that "some sacrifice of character is unavoidable when we note them down in the usual way." For her, an added piano accompaniment could "to some extent compensate for [the loss of non-textual elements] by emphasizing characteristic features,"[107] and a sympathetic Munro found her accompaniments to be "of great originality, beauty, and fitness."[108] However, for others, the bourgeois connotations of a piano accompaniment' were too much to bear:

> Soon the young poet Sorley Maclean (1911-1966) was inveighing against the "travesties of Gaelic songs" that Kennedy-Fraser conjured out of the mists of "a Celtic twilight (that) never bore any earthly relation to anything in Gaelic life or literature: a cloudy mysticism lapped up by old ladies of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie in the drawing rooms of Edinburgh and London."[109]

Such critiques rest upon the notion that there exists a perfect, non-ideological way in which to transcribe folk melodies. However, regardless of the 'authenticity' of Kennedy-Fraser's collection, it would prove highly influential for British composers of the Celtic Twilight.[110]

---

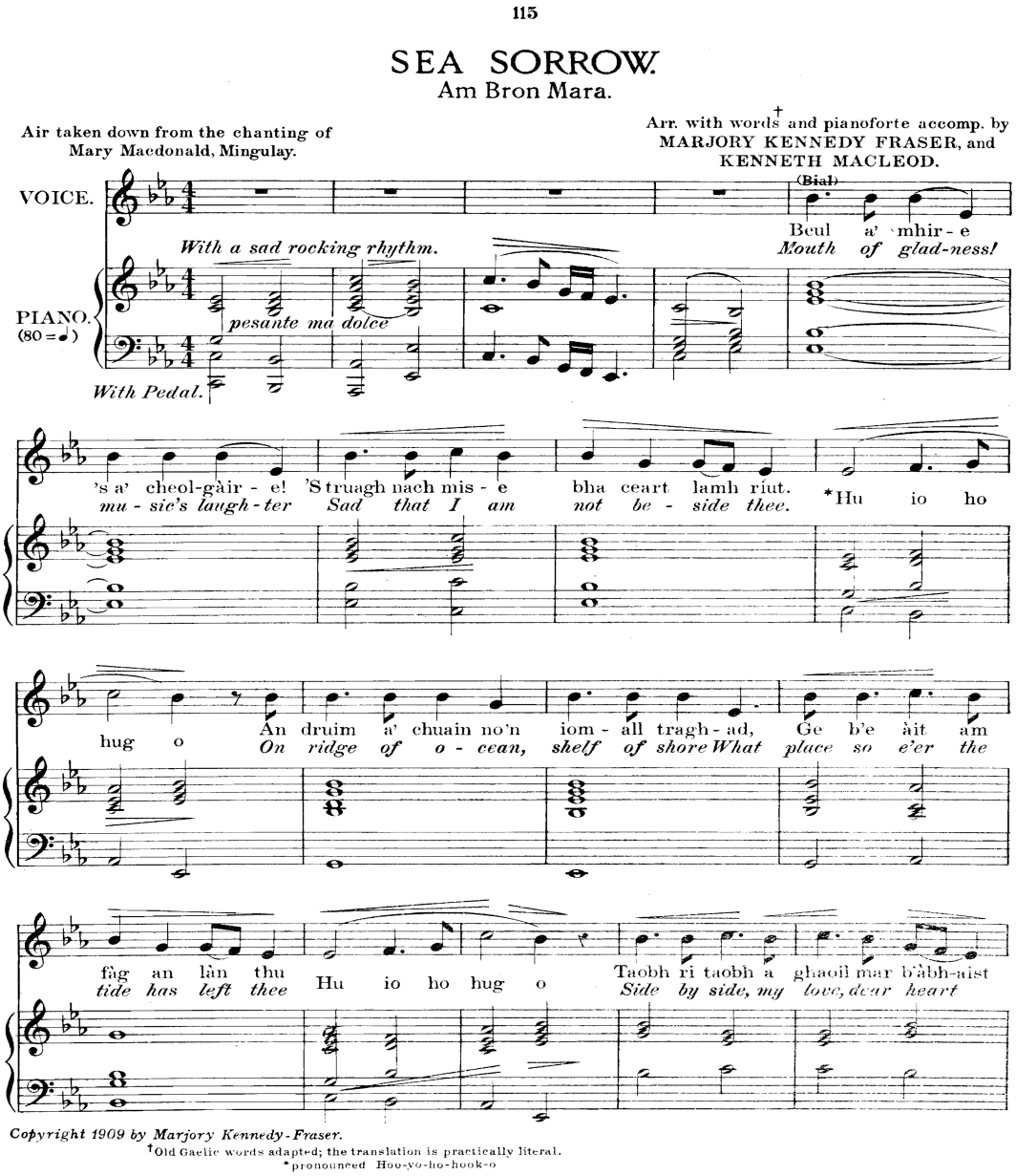
[107] Munro. "Review: Songs of the Hebrides," 185.

[108] Ibid., 186.

[109] In addition to questions regarding her accompaniments, Kennedy-Fraser was also critiqued for the translations of Gaelic songs included in her books. Anne Lorne Gillies has critiqued her for relying "upon the fanciful poetic inventions of her collaborators." Anne Lorne-Gillies. *Review: A Life of Song, The Autobiography of Marjory Kennedy–Fraser (1857-1930)* (2011). http://www.electricscotland.com/history/women/MKF05LifeOfSongReviewByAnneLorneGillies.pdf

[110] Yeats and Kennedy- Fraser's stance against anthropological methods mirrors the division between two important English folk-song and dance collectors, Cecil Sharp and Mary Neal. Sharp advocated for the anthropological approach, whereas Neal advocated for one that sought to capture the character of folk song and dance, rather than some 'scientific' equivalent.

Figure 1: "Sea Sorrow" *Folksongs of the Hebrides,* Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 113.



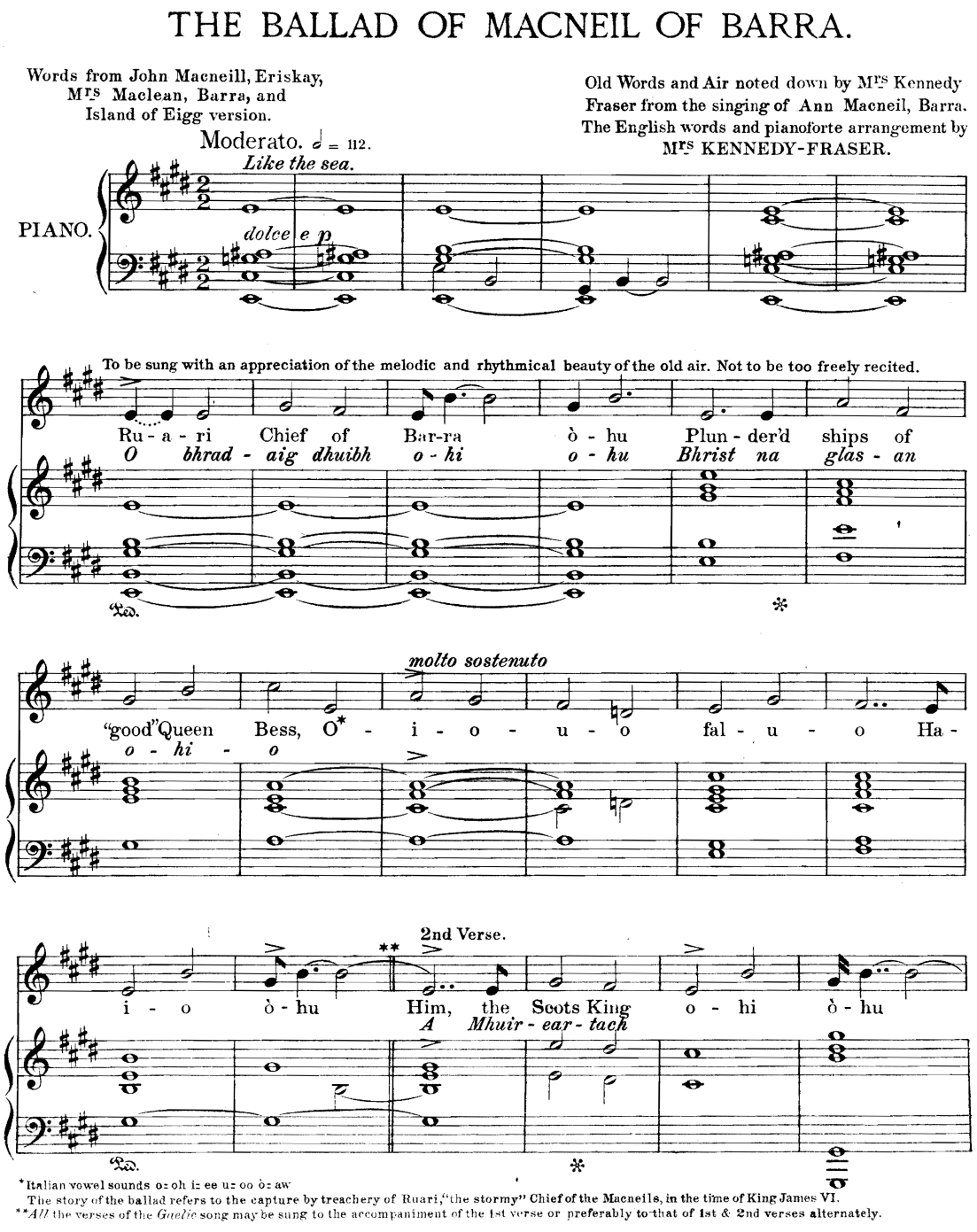
"Sea Sorrow" evinces the characteristic features of Kennedy-Fraser's settings. The subject is classically Celtic – addressing the sea and its many tragic dangers. On the third page, the singer proclaims:

Ah my wound!
He hears no more
Wave drown'd is my cry of woe[111]

The transcription features a pentatonic melody marked by a dotted rhythm and accompanied by plain chords in an open voicing. Here Kennedy-Fraser is highly restrained, avoiding even the slightest touch of chromaticism. On the other hand, "The Ballad of McNeil of Barra" betrays a subtle hint of this 'cosmopolitan' feature in its opening chords, whereas the D natural in the third system is more likely a nod to modality:

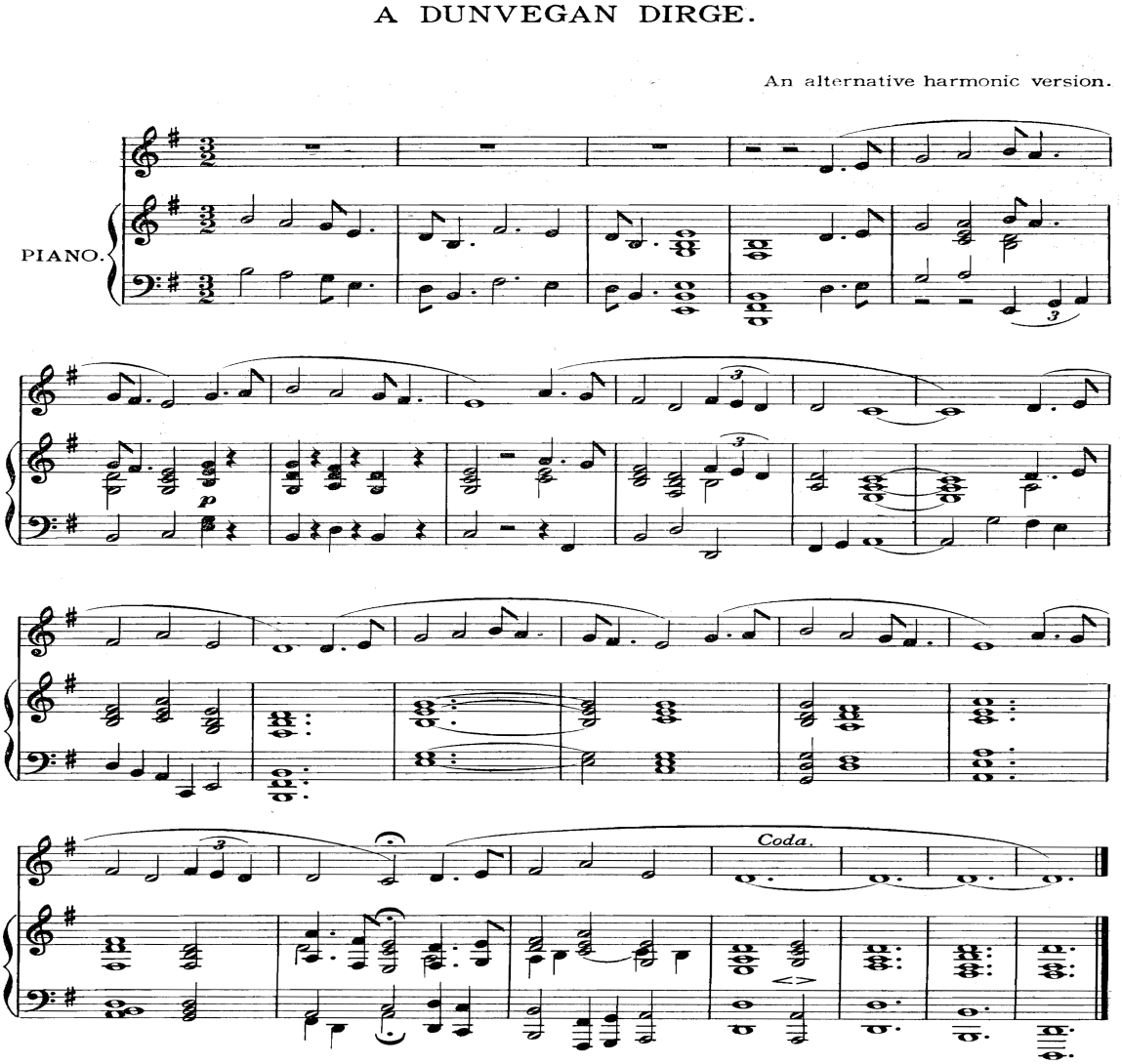
[111] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *Song of the Hebrides, and other Celtic Songs from the Fishlands of Scotland,* Gaelic editor Kenneth Macleod (London: Boosey and Co. 1909), 116.

Figure 2: Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, "The Ballad of McNeil of Barra," *Folksongs of the Hebrides,* 5.



Though pentatonicism is one of the defining features of these folksongs, Kennedy-Fraser's collection is no means limited to this scale alone. The melody of "A Dunvegan Dirge" is in D mixolydian:

Figure 3: "A Duvegan Dirge," *Folksongs of the Hebrides,* 10.



Calling the dirge an "alternative harmonic version" could not have helped Kennedy-Fraser convince her detractors of her work's authenticity. Yet Kennedy-Fraser went to great length to include many unaccompanied melodies, as well as lengthy explanations describing the culture and circumstances of various melodies:

Figure 4: "A Mhairi Bhoidheach," *Folksongs of the Hebrides,* xxi.

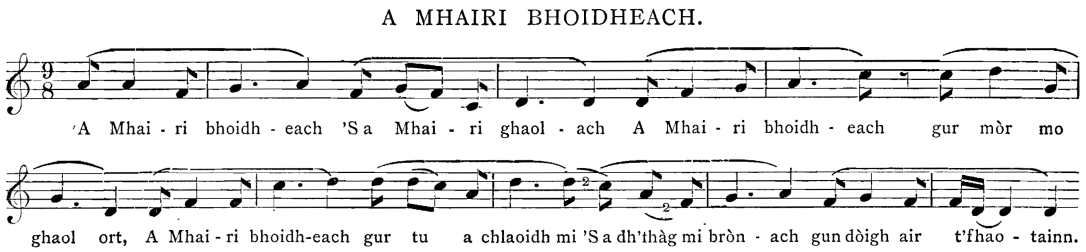


Figure 5: An untitled chant, *Folksongs of the Hebrides, xx*

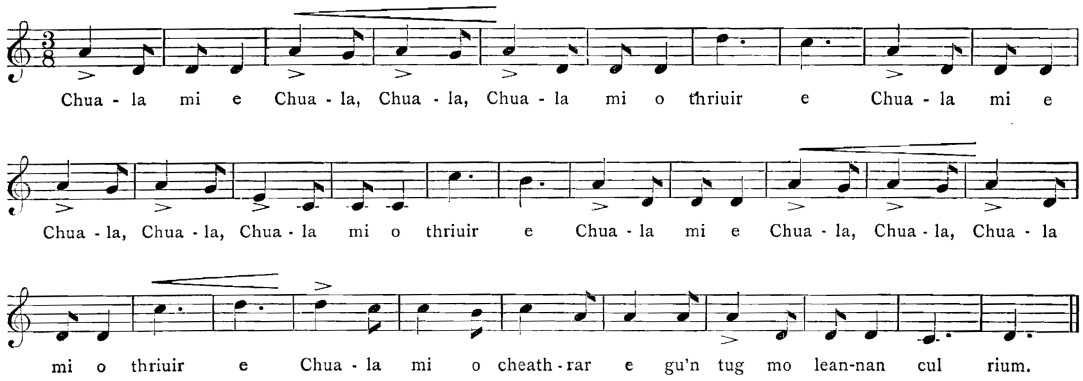
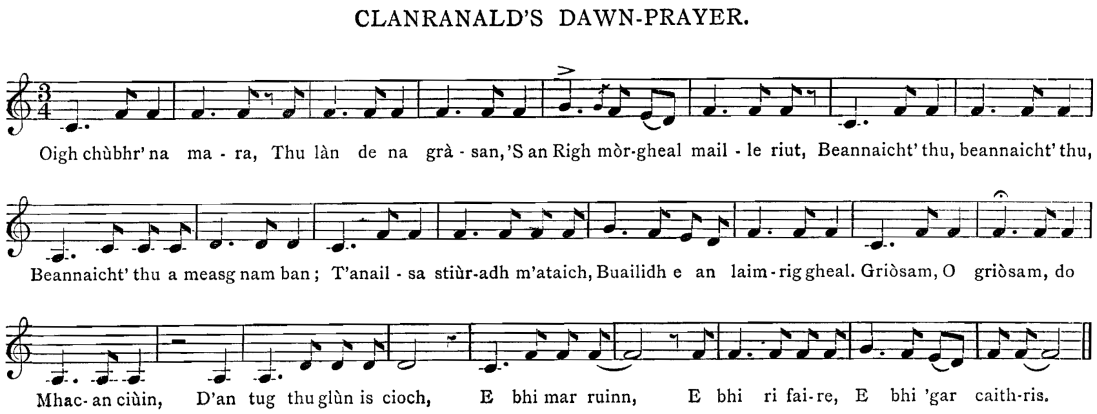


Figure 6: "Clanranald's Dawn-Prayer," in *Folksongs of the Hebrides,* xix.



Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight*: essential features

Yeats's innovative approach to folkloric material in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) did not involve bowing before critics like Lang and Nutt. Instead, he took even further liberties with his material than he had in *Folktales*. His flexibility in this regard allowed him to articulate the very qualities of Celticism and Irishness that folktale purists sought to protect and to do so without compromising his poetic vision. In *The Celtic Twilight,* Yeats uses two authorial strategies that set the volume apart from other works of folklore. First, he carefully crafts many of his narratives so that they read as if they had been

experienced in Ireland at the turn of the 1890s; second, as the volume's narrator, he casts himself in the role of 'bard.'[112]

Time in *The Celtic Twilight*

In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats brings a powerful contemporary urgency to the folktale genre. He does so by rising from the editor's chair and stepping into the pages of his very own work. He narrates many of his chapters not in the actual present tense but rather from the first person in a manner that retells events he has experienced in the recent past. Even as he discovers old stories, he hears them in the context of the present, and the effect is to lend them a sense of immediacy. The stories he encounters are told by real people, in real places, and are a real part of their lives.[113] For example, the chapter "Enchanted Woods" begins with the following:

> Last summer, whenever I had finished my day's work, I used to go wandering in certain roomy woods, and there I would often meet an old countryman, and talk to him about his work and about the woods, and once or twice a friend came with me to whom he would open his heart more readily than to me.[114]

---

[112] One of the reasons for this innovative approach may be that some of Yeats's chapters were originally published during 1891 as part of W.E. Henley's newspaper the *National Observer.* Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats,* 109.

The 'bard' was the same authorial position that had been essential to Macpherson's work in the previous century.

[113] Sundermark notes that even in *Folktales,* a much more traditional and less experimental volume than *The Celtic Twilight,* Yeats's approach to time is innovative. As Sundermark explains, Yeats does not set his stories in *Folktales* in "the *illud tempus,* the no-place-no-time typical of the *Märchen* ('wonder tale'),*"* rather, "he presents them as Irish legends, complete with specific historical, biographical and geographical data." "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 102.

[114] W. B. Yeats, "The Celtic Twilight," *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats,* (Stratford-on-Avon: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1908), 82.

The use of the phrase "last summer" locates the tale in the recent past: the 'present' of 1890s Ireland. The "roomy woods" may not be a specific location, but it allows the reader to imagine a context through which to understand the ensuing stories of the man's interactions with the faery folk. Another chapter "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum Veni" starts with the following anecdote:

> One night a middle-aged man, who had lived all his life far from the noise of cab-wheels, a young girl, a relation of his, who was reported to be enough of a seer to catch a glimpse of unaccountable lights moving over the fields among the cattle, and myself were walking along a far western sandy shore. We talked of the Forgetful People as the faery people are sometimes called, and came in the midst of our talk to a notable haunt of theirs, a shallow cave amidst black rocks, with its reflection under it in the wet sea sand.[115]

"One night" is ambiguous, but Yeats reveals more to the reader when he states that the old man has lived his life "far from the noise of cab-wheels." The man, though far removed from the city, lives within modern-day Ireland. Another juxtaposition of modernity and the ancient past occurs in the chapter "The Golden Age." As Yeats is riding the train back to County Sligo, something unusual happens:

> a man got into the carriage and began to play on a fiddle made apparently of an old blacking box, and though I am quite unmusical the sounds filled me with the strangest emotions.

As Yeats listens to the music of the fiddler, he seems to hear a voice of lamentation that fills him with thoughts of "our fallen world" and conjures images of "the wind-tossed

---

Note: this is the earliest edition of *The Celtic Twilight* that it was feasible to acquire. Yeats revised the content of this volume at various points, but particularly by adding some chapters in a new edition released in 1902. This particular edition notes the date of the newer chapters, allowing one to discern with reasonable surety which chapters are form the original version and therefore reflect Yeats earlier, 1890s period.

[115] Ibid., 73.

reeds," the "song of the birds," and the "moan of the waves."[116] Upon arriving at the train station, the fiddler vanishes. Yeats's encounter with the lamenting voice of the faery world remains as the volume's most potent blending of modernity and mythology. It collapses the past and present, and makes a powerful statement about the relevance of the ancient folkways to modern Ireland.[117]

With the 'presentness' of Yeats's text well established, the questions raised by his writings can be considered with new urgency by his readers. These questions include the following: what are the boundaries between the realms of the natural and supernatural; between man and faery; between the ontological world and the otherworld? How does this boundary manifest itself, how is it crossed, and what are the consequences and possibilities of doing so? Key to Yeats's Celtic Twilight aesthetic is the constant pursuit and foregrounding of these queries.[118]

---

[116] Ibid., 144.

[117] Other scholars have commented on Yeats's innovative approach to time in folklore and its effect upon the genre's conception of time. Recently Mary Helen Thuente has argued that both Yeats and Joyce created "traditional innovations" in their work by returning to Irish oral sources. Oral legends especially, (Mary Helen) Thuente argues, achieve "Kenner's sense of the presence of the past," by "depicting past events as simultaneous rather than chronological." Schleifer, "Introduction," 9.

Schleifer further argues that "the past can be revived, made present, discovered to be already present, in a world where the language of the past is itself present and public in a living oral discourse that 'remembers' past literary forms." This act of 'remembering' in the present is one of the chief innovations of *The Celtic Twilight.* Ibid., 10.

[118] Sundermark has also noted that Yeats's folk-work is primarily concerned with such questions. He writes that "Yeats was not especially interested in the fairy tale itself – not the form, nor the genre; what interested him was the 'folk,' especially the Irish peasant and the Irish poet (himself)," (and that) they/he come in contact with the 'supernatural.' The legend and the memorat do that well, whereas the fairy tale, which is a world unto itself, does not." From this observation, it is possible to conclude that Yeats's method of tale-telling in *The Celtic Twilight* is

Consider again, the cave "amidst the black rocks." Yeats describes the reflection of the cave as being seen below "in the wet sea sand." Here he takes advantage of a classic image of a portal to another world: the reflection of an image seen through water. This invocation of a fungible threshold or boundary between this world and the next is augmented by Yeats's act of locating the reflected image of the cave not in some deep pool, but on the shallowest traces of the water on "the wet sea sand." Such nuances are part of Yeats's project of convincing the reader to believe that faery abodes are real, encounterable, and even crossable. For Yeats, elemental forces such as water, light, reflections, and topographies are the cracks and crevices through which one may encounter the supernatural. Such points of entry to the folkworld move the folktales of *The Celtic Twilight* away from the cozy fireside and into a mysterious realm at once real and imagined.

Consider as well the strange fiddler from Yeats's train-ride. One can only imagine whether the fiddler's music is a haunted Irish reel, or something akin to the shepherd's lament from the third act of *Tristan und Isolde.* However, more critical than making such a determination is noting that while Yeats was known to be particularly unmusical, he still chose music as the metaphorical vehicle to express the essence of Celtic Twilight. During the *fin de siècle,* music was considered the most liminal of all the arts, and *The*

---

explicitly cultivated to raise issues of the supernatural, matters which are in fact not the domain of folktales. "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 101.

Celtic Twilight is a volume whose primary subject is the liminal boundary between this world and the next.[119]

Yeats as 'Bard' – the new Ossian

The next important strategy that Yeats uses in *The Celtic Twilight* is to posit himself as Ireland's chief bard.[120] Of course, Yeats's present status is built upon his life's work. However, in *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats claims the role of 'Bard' – the storyteller of a nation – in a clandestine manner: by acting as the filter through which the reader experiences Ireland's folklore. He achieves this filtering effect by deferring to other poets and storytellers or by taking on a multitude of authorial positions that range from reporter to amateur anthropologist, social and religious commentator, and omniscient narrator.[121] In the opening of the book, he claims an authorial position for himself, writing, "I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and

---

[119] Sundermark finds the anecdote of the cave similarly revealing, writing that, for Yeats, "evidently fairyland has to do with a dangerous and visionary state of mind, a liminal experience, characteristically enacted in the Celtic twilight [Bjron here literally means a twilit evening in a Celtic land], on a 'far western sandy shore.'" "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 105.

[120] For more on Yeats's life-long advocacy of the Poet and his special role in society, see: Bernard Levine, "'High Talk': A Concentrative Analysis of a Poem by Yeats," *James Joyce Quarterly* vol. 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1966): 124-129.

[121] Again, some of these innovations may have stemmed from Yeats's work for the *National Observer.* Many of Yeats's stories read like 'reports from the field.' Sundermark's observes the stunning modernity of this approach, claiming that it, "anticipates the kind of self-reflexive and autobiographical ethnographic writing that has emerged in the field of ethnography and social anthropology since the 1980s." "Yeats and the Fairy tale," 106.

significant things of this marred and clumsy world."[122] However, immediately after this statement, he attributes much of the contents of the book to the imagination and experience of another by invoking the figure of "Paddy Flynn" as the source of many of the volume's tales. Flynn is "a little bright-eyed old man, who lived in a leaky and one-roomed cabin in the village of Ballisodare, which is, he was wont to say, 'the most gentle' – whereby he meant faery – 'place in the whole of County Sligo.'"[123] As a man intimately connected with the gentle faery folk, the reader imagines Flynn as possessing the inimitable qualities of the teller of tales and the seer of faeries, whereas Yeats is merely the inquisitive writer or perhaps a thoughtful social researcher.

Not only does Yeats decline to pose as the creator of his tales, he often requires a special interlocutor in order gain access to the peasantry's well-guarded folklore. For example, Yeats often visits the man who "dwells in the roomy woods." However, to hear this man's finest tales, Yeats must bring along a certain friend to whom the old man will "open his heart more readily." In another instance, Yeats obtains important poetry, but only through a third-hand translation from the original Gaelic provided to him by a

---

[122] Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 1.

Here Yeats once again plays with the notion of time in regards to the world of folklore. His catalogue of stories comes not from the past, but from the "beautiful, pleasant, and significant things" of the world. Schleifer argues that "in Ireland the past is not other, neither continuous nor discontinuous with the present; it is simply identical with it, and this creates a world where the surface of things- the *style* of things – is identical with their meaning." Yeats pre-occupation with treating folktales *stylistically* rather than authentically seems synchronous with this notion. "Introduction," 5.

[123] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 3.

helpful informer whose favor he has won. By stressing the difficulty of obtaining his materials, Yeats makes himself their exclusive guardian.

Another key element to the rhetorical sleight of hand that transforms Yeats into the 'bard' of the Celtic Twilight is the multitude of voices that are represented on his pages. His chapters are filled with the stories, commentaries, and quotations of an untold numbers of peasants. This multitude of voices creates a powerful effect: The authorial line between Yeats and the Irish peasantry is blurred. For example, in the chapter "Dust Hath Closed Helen's Eye," Yeats remembers a poet named Raftery whose poem about the Irish beauty Mary Hynes has become a local legend. Yeats obtains a translation of this poem from a friend:

> Going to Mass by the will of God,
> The day came wet and wind rose;
> I met Mary Hynes at the cross of Kiltartan,
> And I fell in love with her then and there…
>
> There is sweet air on the side of the hill when you are looking down upon
> Ballylee;
> When you are walking in the valley picking nuts and blackberries,
> There is music of the birds in it and music of the *Sídhe* [124]

Here, Yeats's own role as poet recedes into the background; it is the song of Raftery which brings the image of Mary Hynes to life. Yet Yeats slowly builds up his authorial power in the development of the chapter, a process that starts notably when he observes his own perspicacity in obtaining a translation that has "more of the simplicity

---

[124] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 30.

of the Irish verses than one finds in most translations."[125] Yeats further usurps Raftery's prominence when he adopts the guise of village reporter and provides his readers with quotation after quotation about Hynes given by the townspeople who remember her. As Raftery's lines begin to share imaginative space with the townspeople's recollections, Yeats's role as the reader's guide through the village culture of County Sligo becomes more significant. Yeats goes so far as to question some inconsistencies regarding Raftery, asking one old man "how could Raftery have admired Mary Hynes so much if he had been altogether blind?"[126] Finally, he saves for himself the story's last words:

> it may be that in a few years Fable, who changes mortalities to immortalities in her cauldron, will have changed Mary Hynes and Raftery to perfect symbols of the sorrow of beauty and of the magnificence and penury of dreams.[127]

Of course, the fable Yeats speaks of is the one that the reader has just finished, one in which Yeats inhabits the multiple roles of reporter, editor, observer, witness, and bard.[128]

In another chapter, "A Visionary," Yeats invokes the figure of young poet who talks of "the making of the earth and the heavens and much else." This young man is very much like Yeats, though the classic interpretation is that it is actually Yeats's friend and

---

[125] Ibid., 30.

[126] Ibid., 36.

[127] Ibid., 38.

[128] Sundermark states that "rather than seeing 'hybrid social authority' and 'cultural translation' as a fault… I would say that Yeats's methods and editorial practices appear groundbreakingly modern today." "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 106.

fellow poet, A.E.[129] This young poet shares Yeats's interest in symbolism and the occult, and has "written many poems and painted many mystical designs." He also recites poems from memory, something for which Yeats was well known. For Yeats, the young man's poems are filled with "wild music as of winds blowing in the reeds" and seem to him to be "the very inmost voice of Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen.[130] Soon the young man has a vision and sees a "shining, winged woman, covered by her long hair… standing near the doorway" – an encounter with the faeryfolk reminiscent of many that Yeats recounts in his personal letters.[131] The young man, for his pleasure, takes to wandering "about upon the hills, talking to a half-mad and visionary peasant," and finally delivers to Yeats a book of poems that share the property of endeavoring "to capture some high, impalpable mood in a net of obscure images."[132] If indeed this portrait is of A.E., it is a description that evokes Yeats quite neatly. He could have easily identified A.E., but by keeping him somewhat anonymous, there is a subtle overlap between this mysterious man and the author of the very chapter at hand.

---

[129] "There is a piece in it called 'The Visionary,' which gives us a glimpse of his friend, A.E. [George Russel – 1867-1935] and his own mystical interests." Clarke, *The Celtic Twilight,* 35.

[130] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 12.

[131] Yeats, visiting the Aran islands, writes in a letter to William Sharp of such an experience: "I have had some singular experiences myself. I invoked one night the spirits of the moon and saw between sleep and waking a beautiful woman firing an arrow among the stars. That night she appeared to Symons who is staying here, and so impressed him that he wrote a poem on her, the only one he ever wrote to a dream, calling the fountain of all song or some such phrase. She was the symbolic Diana. I invoked a different spirit another night and it appeared in dreams to an old French Count, who was staying here, and was like Symons ignorant of my invocations. He locked his door to try to keep it out. Please give my greetings to Miss Macleod." Ed. Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1954), 266.

[132] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 12, 13.

The liminal boundary: the essential feature of Celtic Twilight

As suggested earlier, the liminal boundary between this world and the next is the key theme of Celtic Twilight. For Yeats, this boundary exists not just in mysterious caves by the seashore but within the mind. Consider the first paragraph of the chapter "The Untiring Ones:"

> It is one of the great troubles of life that we cannot have any unmixed emotions. There is always something in our enemy that we like, and something in our sweetheart that we dislike. It is this entanglement of moods which makes us old, and puckers our brows and deepens the furrows about our eyes.[133]

Here he observes that the moods of life are in a constant state of entanglement, twisting perpetually in a gray, twilit area, and that one is never clearly on one side of something emotionally but always some where in the middle. In another passage, Yeats hopes for a message from "those beings or bodiless moods, or whatever they be who inhabit the world of spirit."[134] Here Yeats makes a direct connection between the notion of "mood" and the spirit world of the *Sídhe*. In his introduction he asks, "what is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbol and incident?" And in yet another passages he again puts such a question to his readers:

> Nay, are there not moods which shall find no expression unless there be men who dare to mix heaven, hell, purgatory, and faeryland together, or even to

[133] Ibid., 106.

[134] Ibid., 144.

> set the heads of beasts to the bodies of men, or to thrust the souls of men into the heart of rocks? [135]

Finally, he invokes the role of the poet as the arbiter in all these mixed elements, and bravely calls out,

> go forth, the tellers of tales, and seize whatever prey the heart longs for, and have no fear. Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under out feet.[136]

In these quotations, Yeats invokes the foundational elements of Celtic Twilight; mood, spirit, literature, and religion. In Yeats's twilit Ireland, these elements exist in a perpetual state of mixture and ambiguity. This ambiguity acts as an invitation to the reader to linger between the boundary of the real and faery worlds. It transforms the humorous tales of poor peasants into passageways leading to the mysterious and powerful world that exists just below the surface of this one, a world more real and more alive than the "shrunken world" of those less inclined to believe in the power of spirits, faeries, and gods. Folktales may challenge readers in such a way occasionally, but Yeats crafts his volume with the direct purpose of bringing the reader to this twilight space.[137]

Finally, with Yeats guiding the reader through his Celtic Twilight, the Irishness and Celticism of the Irish peasantry no longer come to the reader through a distorting foreign lens, or through a procession of stock images and ideas, but rather from the perspective of a fellow countryman, a sympathizer, one who walks from village to village

---

[135] This passage was found worthy of quotation by an early reviewer of *The Celtic Twilight* in *The Flag of Ireland,* Saturday, 23 December, 1893, 5.

[136] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 5.

[137] "As a poet Yeats accepted the role of informant, testifying to *the reality of the supernatural* world." Hirsch, "The Poet as Folklorist," 21.

and is cognizant of Ireland's geographical and cultural topographies. This Ireland, presented through Yeats's eyes, is an immediate and direct vision of a modern day Ireland that has not succumbed to English materialism and is still aglow with supernaturalism and fantasy. It is an Ireland ideally suited to fulfill the mission of the Revival and bring about its own independence.[138]

Symbolism and the Occult in *The Celtic Twilight*

There is evidence that Yeats's involvement with symbolist aesthetics dates to his earliest days as a poet. While writing *Wanderings*, he revealed in a letter to his friend and fellow poet Katharine Tynan (1861-1931) that he had loaded the poem with cryptic symbols: "In the second part of Oisin under disguise of symbolism I have said several things, to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers, they must not even know there are symbols anywhere."[139] Still, there is some debate as to when exactly Yeats came into contact with the works of the French symbolists. A.J. Bate claims that

---

[138] A number of scholars have noted a connection between the nationalism at the heart of Yeats's folklore, and a strain of anti-materialism, a connection predicated on the notion that the English represented the ultimate materialist culture. As Daniel Lenowski suggests, "Yeats felt that it was absolutely essential for the modern artist to interest himself in folklore and legend, because materialism seemed to be winning the day in the contemporary world." "W.B. Yeats and Celtic Spiritual Power," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* vol. 5, No. 1 (June 1979): 27. Similarly, Edward Hirsch states that, "Yeats uses folklore… to make gibes at the English and, of greater consequence, to stand as a foil to the modern materialistic spirit of the age. For Yeats, folklore and the imagination stand in direct opposition to materialism and contemporary urban life." "The Poet as Folklorist," 23.

[139] Gomes, "Reviving Oisin," 391.

Yeats's earliest direct experiences with Verlaine and Mallarmé came via Arthur Symons, who, sharing rooms with Yeats at Fountain Court in 1894, read passages to a young Yeats unfamiliar with French. Nevertheless, Bate states, "it is tempting to imagine that he (Yeats) knew the *Fétes Galantes* as early as 1891, well before Symons made his translations." He argues that "the striking image 'Unhook the stars out of the sky' in 'Your Pathway,'" an unpublished poem of July 1891 to Maude Gonne (1866-1953), echoes "'si/Je ne vous décroche une étoile' in *Sur l'herbe*."[140] This suggests that Yeats was indeed aware of the French Symbolist movement during the period in which he wrote *The Celtic Twilight.* Therefore it is possible to trace the symbolic elements in *The Celtic Twilight* back to the influence of the French symbolists, and, in turn, to one of their primary inspirations; the works of Richard Wagner.[141]

The symbol of the Rose, so essential to many of Yeats's works, is also an important element of *The Celtic Twilight.* In a chapter titled "The Last Gleeman," Yeats finishes a story about a strange and cranky tale-teller with the following quotation:

> Perhaps he may have found and gathered, ragamuffin though he be, the Lily of High Truth, the Rose of Far-sought Beauty, for whose lack so many of the writers of Ireland, whether famous or forgotten, have been futile as the blown froth upon the shore.[142]

In another chapter, 'The Untiring Ones,' Yeats remarks,

---

[140] A.J. Bate, "Yeats and the Symbolist Aesthetic," *MLN,* vol. 98, no. 5, Comparative Literature (December,1983): 1216.

[141] Yeats himself would acknowledge in his 1897 essay *The Celtic Element in Literature* that "the symbolical movement… has come to perfection in Germany in Wagner." Ibid., 1220.

[142] W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 72.

> It seems that when mortals have gone amid those poor happy leaves of the Imperishable Rose of Beauty, blown hither and thither by the winds that awakened the stars, the dim kingdom has acknowledged their birthright, perhaps a little sadly, and given them of its best.[143]

As Morton Seiden notes, for Yeats, the Rose stood for

> a beautiful woman, ideal love, the alkahest, the poetic imagination, Ireland as a reborn Goddess of the spring, the resolved antinomies, politics as an occult passion, and the spirit of beauty in nature.[144]

Seiden's elaboration on the multivalence of meanings that the Rose held for Yeats is important here because it links symbolism and Yeats's occult (or esoteric) interests.

Yeats's occult influences are easily traceable in *The Celtic Twilight.* In his chapter "The Sorcerers," he describes encounters with men who have access to the "dark powers."[145] These men are not peasant folk, but rather are "small clerks and the like" who promise to show him "spirits who will talk to you face to face, and in shapes as solid and heavy as our own." His description of what follows is reminiscent of the ceremonies he participated in as a member of the occult group The Golden Dawn during the same period:

> On the night arranged I turned up about eight, and found the leader sitting alone in almost total darkness in a small back room. He was dressed in a black gown, like an inquisitor's dress in an old drawing, that left nothing of him visible except his eyes, which peered out through two small round holes. Upon the table in from of him was a brass dish of burning herbs, a large bow, a skull covered with painted symbols, two crossed daggers, and certain implements shaped like

---

[143] Ibid., 108.

[144] Morton Irving Seiden, *William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1962), 153-154. Used as well in: Alana White, S*ymbolism in the Poetry of William Butler Yeats*, Masters Thesis (Kentucky: Western Kentucky University, 1972), 33.

[145] Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 49.

> quern stones, which were used to control the elemental powers in some fashion I did not discover.

This collection of paraphernalia is similar to the sacred objects that were part of The Golden Dawn's ceremonies. Interestingly, Yeats resists the sorcerer's conjurations, sensing black clouds that he eventually manages to drive off. Yeats recounts that,

> for some days I could not get over the feeling of having a number of deformed and grotesque figures lingering about me. The Bright powers are always beautiful and desirable, and the Dim Powers are now beautiful, now quaintly grotesque, but the Dark Powers express their unbalanced natures in shapes of ugliness and horror.[146]

In this symbolic, occult world of bright, dim, and dark powers, where does Yeats locate the *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe*, the Irish gods whose problematic nature has already been touched on above? I believe that the "dim powers" Yeats discusses are those allotted to the *Sídhe*, a mysterious force capable of stealing mortals from this earth and forever altering the lives of those they encounter, and who are nevertheless not necessarily evil. Another problem relating to the *Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe* is their questionable status as Ireland's pre-Christian pagan gods. To assert them as the true ancient gods of the Irish people might have been practicable for Yeats's political agenda. However, this would not have mirrored the reality of the peasantry's conception of the situation. For them, whether the gods were pre-Christian or not, they coexisted along with Roman Catholicism and its myriad saints, legends, and relics. In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats wisely leaves the religious ambiguity of peasant beliefs intact. This open-minded

---

[146] Ibid., 53.

approach to religion, one in which multiple beliefs can co-exist, is, again, an example of the occult element at work in *The Celtic Twilight*.

Yeats's *laissez-faire* approach to religion in *The Celtic Twilight* mirrors that of Madame Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, of which Yeats was a member.[147] As a way of handily dealing with the problem of religious antagonisms as well as Theosophy's status as a religious con job, Madam Blavatsky posited the doctrines of the Theosophical movement in a way that did not stand against other religions. Instead, Theosophy craftily incorporated them under a capacious umbrella. Embracing all religions as 'true' to a certain degree was an important part of Madame Blavatsky's pop-culture occultism that, as Ken Monteith observes, "incorporated current fads, scientific discoveries, and age-old philosophy in an evolving cosmology that claimed to be the *one* ancient truth of the universe." This incorporation was essential to Theosophy's claim to relevance, and "Blavatsky had a ready answer for any question posed to her, claiming that all religions, faiths, and philosophies were corrupt imitations of her own 'truth.'"[148] It is this same type of logic that Yeats uses to elevate Paddy Flynn as a storyteller. By having access to "heaven, hell, fairyland and purgatory," Flynn can synthesize a story-world more dynamic and truthful than that of the "common romancer."

Another Theosophical persuasion technique Yeats employs in *The Celtic Twilight* is the practice of attributing one's own claims to another authority ('deferred authority').

---

[147] Yeats joined the society in 1887 and later resigned to participate in the more extreme 'Golden Dawn.'

[148] Ken Monteith, *Yeats and Theosophy*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.

Blavatsky's use of the strategy involved stating that her revelations were unveiled to her by Tibetan teachers who communicated through spiritual means. Yeats does much the same when he defers to Paddy Flynn, the mysterious fiddler, or the poet Raftery. This technique allows Yeats to portray himself "as a student of the very ideals he advocates and has also partially created" and to seduce the reader into accepting his ideas as both timeless truth and ancient wisdom.[149]

Theosophy was also useful to Yeats for another reason: it was a movement that was decidedly supportive of the Irish. Blavatsky credited the assistance of certain Irishmen for defending her when under attack in India and for saving her life during a treacherous incident in Greece.[150] This made her favorable towards the Irish. Thanks to Blavatsky's preferences and her belief "that the people living in Ireland were a distinct race from the people living in England," Theosophy "validated [the] political interests" underpinning *The Celtic Twilight*.[151]

Another of Theosophy's creative appropriations of nineteenth-century assumptions into its doctrines was its adoption of the 'scientific method.' This did not

---

[149] Ibid., 2.

[150] It is difficult to know what of Madam Blavatsky's statements are true; however, the above information comes from one of Blavatsky's letters regarding the participation of Irishmen in the Theosophical Society: "… I am glad to see such genuine sincere thirst for knowledge in the Irish Fellows. It is the Irish invaluably who were, and are the best members of the TS [Theosophical Society] and my best loved and trusted friends. When all the Anglo-Indians arose against me in India and several English fellows deserted me in 1884 it is Captain Bannon, Capt. O'Grady and five or six others who remained my staunch supporters and defended me through thick and thin. I trust in the Irish and love the Irish ever since 1851 when Jonny O'Brien saved my life in Greece and got nearly killed himself." Ibid., 1.

[151] In *Isis Unveiled*, "Blavatsky details seven different races and ages of man, firmly planting the Celtic race as a *precedent* of the British race." Ibid., 5.

mean that Theosophy's claims were to be tested scientifically – though Blavatsky conjured various cons to simulate this. Instead, 'esoteric' knowledge was believed to exist 'scientifically' because it was passed from generation to generation. The notion of the 'availability' of esoteric knowledge for discovery became an important part *The Celtic Twilight*. Monteith, discussing Yeats's broader aims as a revivalist, testifies to this by stating that "Yeats uses Theosophy's methods of investigation and argument to 'discover' a metaphysical literary tradition which incorporates all of Yeats's own literary heroes into an Irish cultural tradition of Yeats's own design."[152] This sense of discovery is key to *The Celtic Twilight.* The book takes Yeats from discovery to discovery as he investigates the people, places, and stories of the Irish countryside in a search for esoteric knowledge. Whether these discoveries consist of unheard folktales, scraps of poetry, the mournful tune of the peddler's fiddle, or tales of exotic faery haunts, each one brings Yeats to an encounter with the very Celtic Twilight that he is pursuing in his investigations. Thus Celtic Twilight becomes a synonym for what Yeats seeks both as a Celtic spiritualist and as a theosophical investigator. For Blavatsky such knowledge originates in Tibet, for Yeats, it lies within the hollow hills. But once again, liminality is key; to reach the threshold between this seemingly real world and the metaphysical realm is the goal of the Theosophist, the spiritualist, and so forth. This is a goal that Yeats handily transplants into the genre of Irish folklore, animating it with a new significance

[152] Ibid., 3.

and immediacy, and, as a consequence of this, he also irreversibly intertwines his brand of Celtic spiritualism with the occult.[153]

Other Celtic Twilight authors, especially Fiona Macloed, also pursued the knowledge and experiences that occult movements offered and leavened their works with occult philosophy. However, while the occult certainly reached unprecedented popularity during the 1890s and would surface again during the Great War, its ideas from the fringe left a mark on Celticism and Celtic Twilight that audiences could find alienating. Not everyone believed that there were ancient truths to be discovered in the Celtic Twilight. For those that mocked such pursuits, the 'dreamer' lost in Celtic Twilight would become another unfortunate stereotype.

After the Celtic Twilight: realism at the Irish National Theatre; Synge and the end of decadence

Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* soon became a prominent landmark in British and Irish culture, and its aesthetics would become popular during the 1890s. Meanwhile, the phrase Celtic Twilight would become common parlance.[154] However, the turn of the century brought with it fresh ideas and artistic approaches that would leave the romantic decadence of Celtic Twilight behind. To conclude this survey of the Irish Literary Revival, this essay will now investigate a series of plays by John Millington Synge.

---

[153] Sundermark notes that in Charles Perrault's *Contes*, "fée (fairy) comes to be synonymous with magic." Yet Yeats's fairyworld is more than a 'magical' space, rather, "he associates 'fairy' with *the occult* and with inspiration." "Yeats and the Fairy Tale," 103.
[154] See chapter five.

These plays stylistically eclipsed the Celtic Twilight by turning to a vein of realism noted for its humor and irony. Such new currents were cause for celebration in many circles, but there were also many artists and dilettantes who could never get over Romanticism. British Composers particularly suffered in this regard, as will be discussed in upcoming chapters.

Though Yeats had done much to champion late romantic aesthetics in his own works, he was not blind to change, and he recognized the cracks developing in romanticism's veneer. By the time the twentieth century reached its tragic coming of age with the First World War and the 1916 Easter Uprising, Yeats would find himself abandoning his Celtic, mythical phase altogether and embracing modernism. Though his relationship with Ezra Pound certainly played a role in this change, his early realization of romanticism's demise began during a fateful trip to Paris in 1899. On this journey he had a decisive experience that foreshadowed what lay ahead, an experience which, in turn, led him to convince Synge, with whom he was newly acquainted, to venture out in new artistic directions.

In the late 1890s, Yeats, along with collaborators including Lady Gregory and George Martyn, had begun to advocate for an Irish national theatre that led to the creation the Abbey Theatre.[155] Yeats had declared that the Irish were "weary of misrepresentation" and that Ireland needed its own national theatre to show that it was "not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home

[155] For a detailed account of the complicated history of the Abbey Theatre and its formation, see: Tony Jordan, "Machiavelli at the Abbey Theatre: Reflections on W.B. Yeats, *An Irish Quarterly Review,* vol. 94, no. 374 (Summer, 2005): 181-187.

of an ancient idealism."[156] During this time, he undertook his second trip to Paris with the purpose of furthering both his artistic endeavors and his ever-faltering relationship with Maud Gonne. Among his many recreations on this sojourn, he attended, at the Neaouvea Théâtre in Montmarte, the first performance of *Ubu le Roi*, by Alfred Jarry. This work "debunked high seriousness and tragedy." Consequentially, "the audience quickly divided into two noisy groups:" one in favor of the new work, and another unwilling to accept a jab at an entrenched romanticism that many forward-thinking artists had begun to regard as trite and banal.

Yeats was supportive of the new work and he had a keen sense of the validity of its new direction and what it meant for artists across Europe, for himself, and for the Revival.[157] He realized that "his own romantic aesthetic was now being challenged by grim naturalism and by an idea of drama based on things conspicuously lacking in his own work to date – humor and irony."[158] As Aldritt suggests, *Ubu* left the symbolists, whose work had been influential to Yeats's development of the Celtic Twilight aesthetic, with "no further agenda." In *Autobiographies*, Yeats penned his acceptance of the upcoming sea change that he perceived would cause a crisis among artists across Europe:

---

[156]The Manifesto was written in 1897. Lady Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 8-9.

[157]One cannot underestimate what the shock of *Ubu* meant for Yeats. Romantic aesthetics had been ingrained in him from his earliest days by a father who, despite a paltry career as a painter, was renowned as one of England and Ireland's great conversationalists in matters of art, and who had also been a diehard pre-Raphealite. For Yeats, Romanticism was no erstwhile companion; John Yeats had indoctrinated his son with the ruthless tenacity of a military drill sergeant.

[158] Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats,* 160.

> After Stéphane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible?[159]

On this same trip to Paris, Yeats, perhaps inadvertently, would precipitate an incredibly quick transmission of this new aesthetic to the stage and literary-imaginative space of the Revival. Shortly after his attendance at the Nouveau Théâtre, Yeats found himself dissuading John Millington Synge, six years his senior, from a career as a critic. He proposed that Synge "abandon the international and comparative view of literature taken by [critics] such as Georg Brandes, and return to his Irish roots," and take it upon himself to "give expression to the life and traditions" of the people of the Aran Islands.[160] Despite being only briefly acquainted with Yeats, Synge accepted this advice, a decision that would soon lead to the creation of some of the most celebrated works of the Revival; a series of plays that, despite their author's short life, have had a lasting influence on Irish dramaturgy.

Perhaps the most famous of Synge's works inspired by his time spent on the Aran Islands, is his *Riders to the Sea*.[161] Like many creations of the Revival, *Riders* deals with the Irish peasantry, but it does so with a shocking and striking realism. However, before the cold tragedy of *Riders* came to the stage, Synge's earliest play, the lesser-known *In the Shadow of the Glen* (debuted at an Irish National Theatre Society performance, 8

---

[159] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 234, 266.
[160] Aldritt, *W.B. Yeats,* 161.

[161] For a discussion of Ralph Vaughan Williams' one-act opera *Riders to the Sea,* see chapter four.

October 1903),[162] participated in a humorous flirtation with realism whose significance is now easily overshadowed by Synge's better known works. *Glen* grafts the humor and irony so crucial to *Ubu* onto the Revival's theatrical developments by doing something that for those accustomed to the dreamy Celtic Twilight verged upon heresy: making light of the border between this world and that beyond which Yeats had held so sacred.

Glen begins as a penniless and overworked wife broods with uncertainty over the supposedly dead body of her curmudgeonly farmer husband. She is afraid to test whether or not he is really dead by touching him because the previous evening he has warned her that if she touches his body on his deathbed she will be cursed for the rest of her life. Have the *Sídhe* taken this poor peasant farmer on a rapturous journey of poetic agony and ecstasy? No – he has faked his death to exact some bizarre revenge on his wife. Ironically, when his wife discovers the truth, it is she, rather than the one who has flirted with the sacred boundary between this realm and the next, who goes of on a journey of wandering – with a man much younger and more handsome than her loathsome husband.

Glen's ribald take on the boundaries between the real and spirit worlds may have taken those accustomed to Yeats's severe treatment of the subject by surprise.[163] Synge's

---

[162] For information on the source of Synge's play, see: Éilís Ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist, "Synge's Use of Popular Material in 'The Shadow of the Glen,'" *Béaloideas,* Iml. 58 (1990), 141-180.

[163] Scholars and critics have made comparisons between *Glen* and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which both end when the female protagonist leaves her home and husband. Irina Ruppo Malone argues that both works explore the idea of freedom and feminism, and states that, "it is indeed possible that the allusion (to *A Doll's House)* is deliberate, its purpose being to challenge the artistic norms of the Irish Revival and to shatter the idealistic expectations of contemporary audiences." "'A Doll's House': Irish suffragists, J.M. Synge and Seán O'Casey," *An Irish Quarterly Review* vol. 99, no. 934 (summer 2010): 190.

bold divergence signaled an early step away from the cultivation of the fantasy world that Yeats had so carefully crafted. *Glen* deconstructs the high seriousness of the world found within the moody, misty pages of *The Celtic Twilight,* and that had also become the signature of Yeat's works for the stage. Indeed, this quasi-seriousness was one of the weaknesses of Celtic Twilight, and the recognition of this was to become a significant part of the cultural understanding of Celtic Twilight.[164]

There were many reasons that 'seriousness,' once the foundation of so much Romantic work, could be problematic, especially on the stage. One of the problems with folktales – as evinced by Allingham's poem about little green men – was that they were imbued with what today might be considered kitsch. Pseudo-seriousness, rather than dispelling this kitschy quality, only intensified it.[165] While kitsch lends a charming

---

[164] For more on this matter, see chapter five.

[165] It is possible to locate this quality of 'seriousness' as an important facet of 1890s culture. Richard Ellman, in his article "Robartes and Aherne: Two Sides of a Penny," discusses this issue in terms of "Wilde's view… that man is really two men: the natural man and the manufactured one." The heightened pseudo-seriousness of Yeats's overtly symbolic works reflects this concept of the 'manufactured,' though taken from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of London and transplanted into a Celtic, mythical environment. As Ellman states, Yeats's "own divided consciousness had its origin in his attempt as a child to revolt against the rationalist, scientific, materialist world of intellectual Dublin with which he associated his father." Ellman believes that Yeats sought "desperately… to ally himself instead with the spontaneous, instinctive, unself-conscious life which his mother's family lived in Sligo." And so Yeats, like many others of the time, faced a conflicting internal division: "he would have liked to dream the days away in Sligo, but he wanted also to be a success in the world." In the town, a mannered disposition betrayed a manufactured personality. In the Celtic/mythical folk world of Yeats and others, the manufactured manifested itself as a highly charged spiritualism marked by the same overt seriousness found in the pages of *The Celtic Twilight*. Cultivating this inward split in man reached its limits in both directions. As Ellman reminds us, "The last decade of the century is thronged by extravagant poseurs like Lionel Johnson and Aubrey Beardsley; even James Joyce, growing up in this age, says he felt compelled to 'cultivate the enigma of manner.'" Ellman selects William Sharp as the ultimate example because of his creation of 'Fiona Macleod,' an alternate personality with which he became "so obsessed" that "he almost collapsed under strain."

character to folktales and folk poetry, when combined with the pseudo-seriousness of "Celtic twilight," it creates a "mawkish sentimentality." The seriousness of Yeats's works might have been intended to combat what Oona Frawley calls the "tomfoolery and false naivety"[166] that had become essential to the "Irish peasant's representation on the English stage" – also known as "stage Irishry" – but it was an approach that yielded limited success at best.[167] With *Glen*, Synge attacks the idea of the tom-foolish and naive peasant from within by de-entwining pseudo-seriousness, and its potential for inciting mockery, from the real power and value of Irish peasant folk beliefs.

In *Glen*, the mischievous peasant farmer who wishes to play tricks and commit a blasphemy upon the sacred boundary between Celtic life and death is ultimately outsmarted and made to look the fool. On the other hand, his wife, who is both a worldly-

---

What Sharp's near collapse suggests is that the "manufactured" element did not always correspond to a cosmopolitan disposition of the sort made famous by Johnson and Beardsley. The supposedly natural, spontaneous Celtic 'self' was also a product of manufacturing and could lead to the same obsessions and airs as the veneered personalities of the London drawing room. Richard Ellman, "Robartes and Aherne: Two Sides of a Penny," *The Kenyon Review* vol. 10, no. 2 (spring, 1948): 179.

[166] The 'foolish peasant' stereotype is an example of 'Stage-Irish.' Though Synge, Yeats, and others fought against Stage-Irish, it has continued into modern times. Consider the following review for 1990 staging at the Abbey Theatre of Seán O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman:* "In place of genuine theatre we had a parade of hackneyed 'characters' and 'jokes'… gunfire… was invariably used to raise a laugh at the characters' expense… the audience was constantly encouraged to easy laughter at drunkenness (of course), domestic violence and cruelty… had this been presented by an English company in London it would have been execrated for its patronizing stage-Irishry." Angela Wilcox, "Stage-Irish," *Fortnight* no. 282 (March, 1990): 30.

[167] See, again, chapter five. Oona Frawley, "The Shadow of the Glenn and Riders to the Sea" in *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge,* Ed. P.J. Matthews (New York: Cambridge 2009), 15-27.

For more on how Celtic Twilight developed unflattering connotations, see chapter four. A musical example of stage-Irishry can be found in Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's opera *Seamus O'Brien* of 1894. It contains every Irish cliché that can be imagined.

wise skeptic and yet entirely respectful of the Celtic superstitions that have kept the *Sídhe* alive in the spiritual life of the Irish peasantry, comes out as the winner. Here the play's significance comes clear: those who do not respect the liminal boundaries will indeed become the fool. By respecting peasant spiritualism without making recourse to 'psuedo-seriousness,' Synge's *Glen* upholds the same values of Yeats's twilight world, but does so through an entirely different artistic mechanism.[168]

While Synge uses humor in *Glen* to redeem the kind of peasant spiritualism cultivated by *The Celtic Twilight*, in *Riders to the Sea*, he combines realism with tragedy to again make a dignified case for Irish spiritualism. *Riders* does this by divorcing the folk beliefs at the heart of *The Celtic Twilight* from the element of fantasy. *Riders* doesn't present the Irish peasantry lost in rapturous daydreams or stumbling upon sea-caves as if on holiday. Instead, with a realism "never seen before on stage,"[169] it depicts them struggling against the inscrutable severity of life on the windswept and dangerous Aran Islands.

Riders is the tale of an old mother, Mauyra, who has lost husband and sons to the sea. Two remain. Her next-to-last so, Michael, hasn't returned from fishing, and she fears he has been drowned. Meanwhile, her youngest son, Bartley, departs to take a grey pony to the marketplace. Forgetting to give him his slice of bread and a blessing, the old lady hurries to catch Bartley at a bend in the cliff-side path that leads to the harbor. She sees Bartley riding his red mare, and, on the grey pony in tow behind him, sees the ghost of

---

[168] Frawley, "The Shadow of the Glenn," 8-9.

[169] Ibid., 15-27.

Michael. She can only stand dumbstruck by the vision. Soon Bartley's dripping corpse is brought back to the house and placed on the kitchen table, having fallen over the cliff's edge.

The spirit that the mourning mother sees is not a fanciful conjure. It is a brutal omen reminding the viewer that, on the Aran islands, the salvation promised by Christianity pales against the immediacy of death. The dreadful reality of her vision, makes Mauyra's lifetime of prayers seem useless. It suggests that Christian religion offers no real consolation for those living on the fringes of humanity and confronting a pitiless and amoral natural world at once violent, deadly, and without conscience.[170] She states, "It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying." In the play's last line, she sums up her acceptance of fate with the following: "No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied."[171]

Riders's liminality derives from its setting. The Aran Islands themselves are the threshold, a place where life and death are within the step of a man or the tread of a horse. Here again, Synge finds an ingenious way to combat the image of the peasant fool. Mauyra encounters Michael's ghost, not in a twilit forest, but in broad daylight – she is not playing at "stage-Irishry."

---

[170]Nicholas Greene and Ann Saddlemyer describe Synge's religious views as follows: "Protestantism he detested. He often spoke against the superstitious elements in Catholicism and disliked the confessional and certain abuses of the Catholic Church. He had no religion himself being absolutely convinced that his death would end his existence." "Stephen MacKenna on Synge: A Lost Memoir," *Irish University Review* vol. 12, no. 2 (Autumn, 1982): 148-149.

[171] John Millington Synge, "Riders to the Sea" in *The Works of J.M. Synge in Four Volumes, Vol.1* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 1910), 49-52.

Synge's works brought the Irish peasant, as represented on the stage, into the modern era without sacrificing the integrity of the folk-beliefs that had become both an invaluable source of Irish identity and yet an unfortunate avenue for ridicule. His works fulfill through unexpected ways the Irish Literary Theatre's mission to fight against misrepresentation. However, audiences at the time did not always read Synge's works in this way. For example, at the premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World*, Dublin audiences read the appearance of maids in their 'schiffs,' or nightgowns, on stage as a scandalous incarnation of stage-Irishry. It was seen as a slanderous smear upon the dignity of Irish womanhood – the easy-going maid being the feminized incarnation of the typical male fool character – and riots ensued.[172]

Synge's Irish realism may have catapulted to the forefront of Europe's new artistic agenda, but his controversial presentation of Irish life was at odd with the "'ancient idealism' (that) the (Revival) movement had hoped to present."[173] This was particularly evident in Synge's treatment of the boundary between life and death as a place of comedy, rather than as a sacred space.[174] Synge's works mark the beginning of a period in which this sacred boundary could just as likely be the subject of jest and

---

[172] *Glen* also caused division and controversy. Maude Gonne described it as "horrid" and organized a walkout at its premiere. See: Jordan, "Machiavelli," 184.

[173] Frawley, "The Shadow of the Glenn," 15-27. See as well: Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre,* 8-9.

[174] *The Playboy of the Western World* also treats this boundary as a comic space. In *Playboy,* the son of an Irish peasant farmer lies about the death of his father. He claims to have murdered him, after being pushed to the limit by years of abuse, by bludgeoning him with a shovel. In consternation of the son's newfound agency as a feared and respected man, the incorrigible father continuously finds ways to raise himself from the dead. Both he and the son are ultimately punished for their disrespect of the boundaries of superstition when they are forced into a life of wandering at the play's conclusion.

mockery as a site of spiritual transcendence. The apex of Synge's career with the Abbey Theatre, therefore, signaled an end to the period during which Yeats, at the very least, if not his audience, could rapturously engage their artistic fancy in a spiritualist fantasy. Such spiritualism could only live in a world that had as its foundation an unquestioning acceptance of a kind of hyper-seriousness intimately tied to the Romantic period.

Chapter 3: The Celtic Twilight Aesthetic in British Music: a Brief Survey

Celtic Twilight beyond the Revival

Before the onset of the demise of seriousness and the rise of realism began signaling the end of Romanticism, Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* stood out as a pioneering work that gave rise to a broader Celtic Twilight aesthetic. Regardless of the latest artistic innovations, the Twilight aesthetic continued to be significant well after the 1890s and into the twentieth century, particularly for a certain set of British composers. What about the Celtic Twilight, helped it develop into an aesthetic, and how did this phenomenon of literary origins appear so suited to musical treatment?

Celtic Twilight had characteristics which appealed to other artists and composers. The Rhymers club did not share Yeats's passion for Irish nationalism, but the "aestheticized Celticism" that Yeats cultivated was acceptable "as one more variant of the exoticism that had fed a decadent taste for artistic novelty."[175] Indeed, Celtic Twilight was an ideal vehicle for decadent explorations of great variety, and Yeats had captured well the volume's decadent bonafides in a line from the book's closing poem, "Into the Twilight": "Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn."[176] The spiritualism at the heart of Celtic

---

[175] Terrence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1999), 62.

[176] Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 193.

Twilight, and its accompanying occult associations, were also "fashionable in many London circles."[177] These were avenues through which non-revival poets, artists, and composers could experiment with Celtic Twilight. Such veins were not burdened by the Revival's nationalism, nor by the controversies which divided the Revival itself, specifically that raging between its pro-Gaelic (Irish Roman Catholic) and English language (Anglo-Irish) participants. These spats were irrelevant details to the world of mystic revelation and ecstatic despair that Yeats had brought to life with his volume.

Furthermore, by foregrounding the theme of liminality, and making the 'liminal boundary' the essential element of Celtic Twilight, Yeats brought the world of fairy-folklore into step with the French symbolist aesthetic which had crossed the channel to infiltrate Yeats's Rhymers Club. Music had already been established as the ideal medium with which to encounter the 'liminal;' the French symbolists had taken inspiration from music's liminal qualities, and had hailed it as the art form capable of transcending the senses and experience itself.[178] Now Yeats had transformed the world of faery and folklore from a "fanciful" place, as it appears in William Allingham's poem, into one

---

[177] Clarke, *The Celtic Twilight,* 36.

[178] In Baudeliare's famous review of *Lohengrin,* he wrote, "I felt as if released from gravity, with rekindled memories of voluptuous pleasures that circulate in lofty places." For other French symbolists writing in the *Revue wagnérienne* (1885-1888), the liminal boundary was not between the floor and the ceiling of the opera house, but rather between the senses, especially hearing and seeing. J.K. Huysmans wrote of "synesthesic images communicat(ing) sensory overload, the huge cymbals of 'blinding purples and sumptuous golds' followed by 'adorably blue and airily pink sounds.'" Meanwhile, Hans von Wolzogen believed that Wagner's Germanic art, "resonated with a shared Christian ethos and primeval tribal past" – not unlike Celtic Twilight's dual embrace of Christianity and Celtic 'paganism.' See: Steven Huebner, "The *Revue Wagnérienne"* in *Richard Wagner and His World,* ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 373-375.

characterized by, "music, enchantment, and allurement," and filled with "delicate cadences and evasive rhythms:" the genre begged for musical treatment.[179]

Behind all these elements of Celtic Twilight, its liminality, symbolism, decadence, and artistic spiritualism, loomed the mage of Bayreuth, Richard Wagner. As Terrence Brown suggests, "the 1890s were a decade of perfect and imperfect Wagnerians."[180] During this time it seemed that almost all artistic currents were traceable to the 'great master.' Visual artists, playwrights, and poets engaged with Wagner's aesthetics without having ever heard his music or read any of his prose. As noted earlier, Yeats's adoption of Wagnerism had come to him through the influence of friends like Arthur Symons and George Moore, and had influenced the writing of *The Celtic Twilight*. Yet Yeats had managed to avoid being overwhelmed by Wagner's influence (perhaps because he was notoriously unmusical). Rather, he had seen his own Twilight works as a means of going a step beyond Wagner's achievements:

> Yeats seems quickly to have realized the potential for Irish mythology in this climate, for its strangeness meant that it seemed to operate not in a familiar world of known narratives, but in a primitive yet symbolist dimension which bore on the ramifications of the self and of the psyche in a more arresting way than in Wagner's works.[181]

Composers found themselves in a similar situation. The musical world in which they moved and created thrived on a late-romantic style that was pervaded by Wagner. They had studied German romantic music, and adopted its conventions, but now it

---

[179] Clarke, *The Celtic Twilight,* 35.

[180] Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats*, 83.

[181] Ibid., 83.

appeared that Wagner had taken musical experimentation to its limits. Just as Yeats had seen his Irish heritage as a place for experiments possibly 'more arresting' than Wagner's own journeys through the 'self' and 'psyche,' so to did many composers see Celtic Twilight as the last frontier of a romantic compositional palette whose every former 'terra incognita' now bore the imprint of Wagner's heel.

Celtic Twilight and British Composers of the early twentieth century

One of the earliest transferences of Celtic Twilight aesthetics to the world of music is the incidental music that Edward Elgar wrote in 1901 to *Grania and Diarmid* [sic],[182] a play collaboratively written by Yeats and George Moore.

Elgar was enticed to take up the play by conductor Sir Henry Wood (1869-1944), who introduced Elgar to Moore. Elgar was initially ambivalent. During the period of 1901 when Elgar wrote *Grania and Diarmid,* he made the following remarks to his friend August Jaeger expressing his dissatisfaction with circumstances that prevented him from working on serious music: "Oh! My string Sextet – & I have to write rot & *can* do better things."[183] Biographer Michael Kennedy believes that the "rot" Elgar is referring to may

[182] There are inconsistencies regarding the work's title. The play itself is referred to as *Diarmuid and Grania.* Elgar changed the title of the music suite, and I will use this to refer to both versions for the sake of simplicity. See: Phillip Brookes introduction to the score: Edward Elgar, *Grania and Diarmid op.42: Incidental Music and Funeral March, There are Seven that Pull the Thread, The Crown of India Suite, op.66* (München: mph, 2006), 1.

[183] Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar: New Edition [third edition]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 215.

have been the *Grania and Diarmid* incidental music. After all, Elgar did not take up the subject because of his passion for Irish politics, but rather because of what Eileen Kennedy refers to as "the economic hazards suffered by Victorian and Edwardian composers."[184] Despite the composers's frustration, Michael Kennedy posits that Elgar was "doing himself an injustice" by describing the music as "rot." The music of *Grania and Diarmid*, despite its brevity, is of the highest caliber.

Regardless of what Moore may have promised Elgar, the Irish Literary Theatre could not pay him. Elgar's request for a one-hundred pound commission from his publisher may have been an attempt to make up for the fact that he earned nothing from his initial composition.[185] That *Grania and Diarmid* had become, at least initially, a fruitless potboiler may account for Elgar's failure to collaborate further with Moore. Still, the awkward financial circumstances surrounding the composition of *Grania and Diarmid* did not dissuade Moore from repeatedly attempting to persuade Elgar to compose a Celtic opera. The proposed opera may have at first been a ruse – a strategy used by Moore to motivate Elgar to compose even the few pages that he managed.[186] Whatever the initial impetus behind the idea, Moore remained fixated upon it well after

---

[184] Eileen Kennedy, "George Moore to Edward Elgar: Eighteen Letters of *Diarmuid and Grania* and Operatic Dreams," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920,* vol. 21, no. 3 (1978): 169.

[185]Elgar would also conduct the music in several cities, suggesting he may have come around to the work's quality.

[186] The funeral march is fairly extended, lasting some seven minutes, thirty seconds, and in an ABA form. Also, remember that Fauré had enjoyed a success with his music to a legendary drama, *Pelléas et Mélisande,* given in London in 1898, just thre years before *Grania and Diarmid's* premiere.

Grania and Diarmid's brief run of the stage concluded, and he mentioned it in nearly all his correspondence with Elgar over the next decade. At first, Moore's dream involved his own elaboration of *Grania and Diarmid*, but as the years passed with little headway, he suggested other librettists and subjects (perhaps in desperation), including T.E. Scott-Ellis and his play "The Lake."[187] Elgar did not share Moore's dreams, and his side of their correspondence, now regrettably lost, no doubt offers an excellent lesson on the art of being tactfully evasive.[188]

Besides Moore's inability to compensate Elgar for his work, there may have been other reasons why Elgar failed to continue in the promising Celtic vein started with *Grania and Diarmid*. One has to do with a broader notion of musical 'Englishness,' something I will discuss in chapter five. Elgar's keen desire to be perceived as an 'English country squire' may have made him reluctant to take up further with a group of artists known for their anti-English politics. However, what may have influenced Elgar the most was that, despite the almost hysterically jubilant reaction to the play on its opening night, *Grania and Diarmid* was an outright flop. As Eileen Kennedy observes,

> the critical accounts were disappointing: Frank Benson, though an athletic-looking Diarmuid, gave a thin performance; and Mrs. Benson's Grania was inadequate [the Benson's were famous Shakespearean actors recruited from London]. Edward Martyn and the critic for the *Leader* claimed that the company had acted in the wrong key. In Moore's words, the old actress who played Laban was "diabolically bad."[189]

---

[187] T.E. Scott-Ellis, the 8th Lord Howard de Walden (1840-1946), wrote plays under the pseudonym 'T.E. Ellis.' His works are not highly celebrated. The thought of such a collaboration must have left Elgar with feelings of dread.

[188] Eileen Kennedy, "George Moore to Edward Elgar," 168.

[189] Ibid., 178.

Moore appears to have been disheartened by *Grania and Diarmid's* inability to succeed and gave various excuses for this unexpected outcome. The play included a song that Yeats authored specifically for the drama. Titled "There are Seven That Pull the Thread," Elgar's setting for the song is beautiful and lovingly crafted. However, Moore did not spare Yeats's verses, arguing in a letter to Elgar that they laid bare his collaborator's poor dramatic instincts:

> Yeats insisted on writing the verse of the song. His mind is not a very dramatic one, and instead of writing the situation, 'She is pouring it out; now he drinks – King Cormac sleeps, etc.' he sent you a set of verses, pretty, no doubt, but as undramatic as a painted wreath of flowers. The result was a charming song, an Ave Maria. It should have been something as strange as the shepherd's song in *Tristan*…"

But even Moore had to entertain the view that the play simply was not good:

> A more serious objection to *Diarmuid and Grania* is that the play does not seem to be liked. Did you see the article in the *Fortnightly*? I don't think much of the man who wrote it but I sent the play to two German friends and they did not seem to like it. I confess I thought it a wonderful play; but my belief is a little shaken. I believe very easily that my work is bad.[190]

A letter from Moore several years later shows just how much an initially promising collaboration had deteriorated:

> My Dear Elgar,
>
> Again you have disappeared and I do not know why! You seemed glad to see me when I met you in London; and I gave you "The Lake" and Lord Howard de Walden's play which you liked when I told you its story. Did the reading discourage you from all thought of using it as a libretto? Did you write to Lord Howard? Did you read "The Lake?" Did you like "The Lake?" Of these many and

---

[190] Ibid., 183.

various things I know nothing, and naturally I should like to hear about these things and yourself. Do write me a line at your earliest convenience.

I am going to Bayreuth on the tenth of August with Lord Howard. I wish you were going. It is a very pleasant journey, and there one lives in the open air. The country is beautiful, and one can go on to Munich afterwards, or to one of the old towns. Do write to me and believe me to be,

Very Sincerely Yours
George Moore
4 Upper Ely Place
Dublin
July 14th 1908

Elgar did not go to Bayreuth in the summer of 1908, and Eileen Kennedy suggests this may have been because "he could not bear reiterations of Moore's importunings."[191] One cannot blame Moore for trying, as Elgar's music is beautiful and appropriate for its subject. An opera by Elgar on a suitably Celtic theme is indeed the great missed opportunity of the musical Celtic Twilight. However, Elgar, in turning down Lord Howard's plays as possible librettos, certainly dodged a bullet. Lord Howard would eventually find himself a composer, and the results, a failure of Wagnerian proportions, will be detailed in the next section.

One of the most curious parts of the story of the tragic demise of *Grania and Diarmid* regards a promotional notice published by the Irish Literary Theatre announcing Elgar's agreement to write the play's score. It reads,

> Mr. Edward Elgar… has arranged to write some incidental music for the third act, consisting mainly of horn-calls, and music of the immortals, to be introduced at the death of Diarmuid, and some symphonic music for the burial. Certainly the Wagnerian 'horn-calls' and 'music of the immortals' – because Dr. Elgar is a close follower of the Bayreuth Master – will sound strangely amid the primitive scenes of bygone centuries, and at once will conjure up the well-known

[191] Ibid., 183.

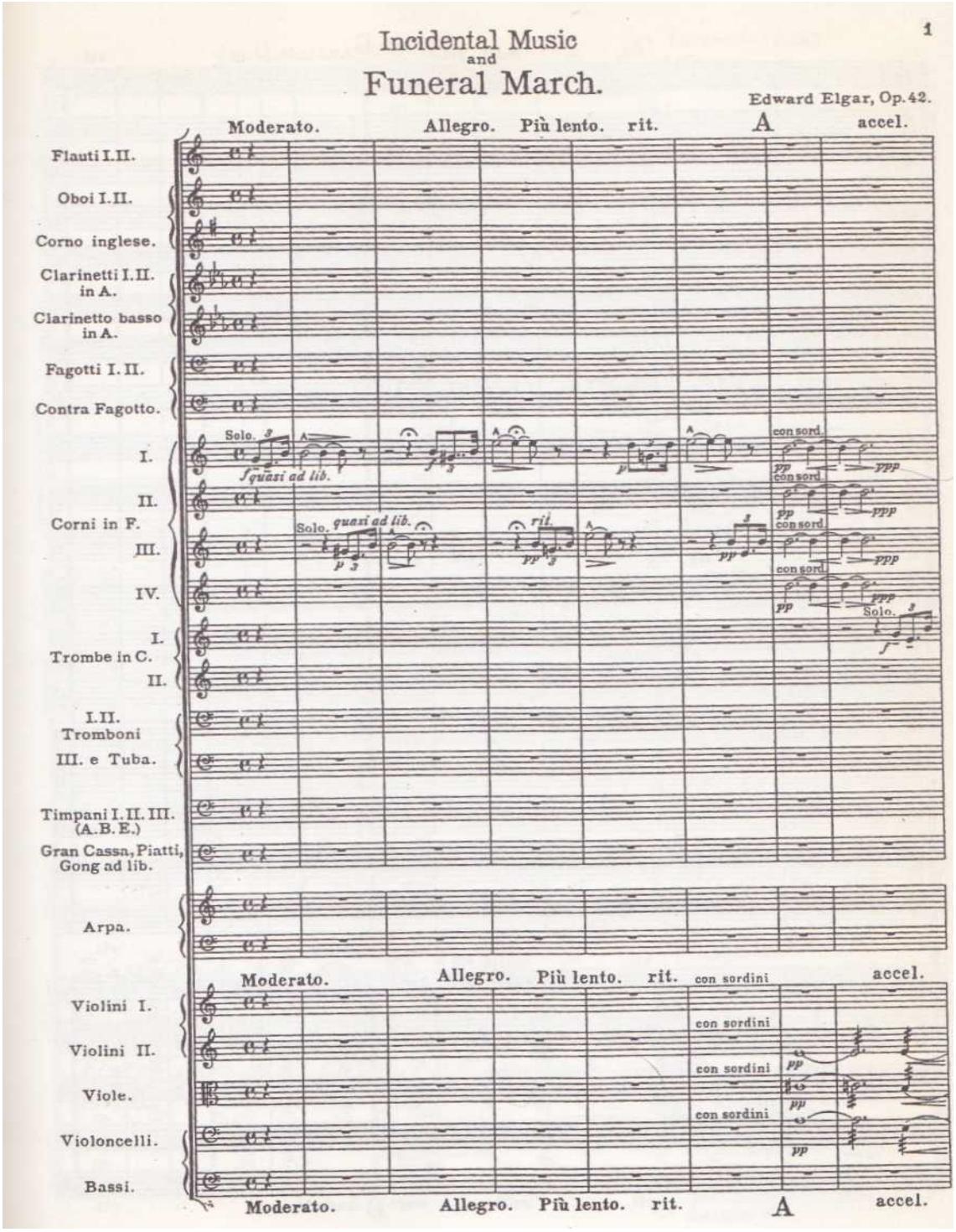
> painting, wherin King David is represented as playing before Saul on an iron grand piano.[192]

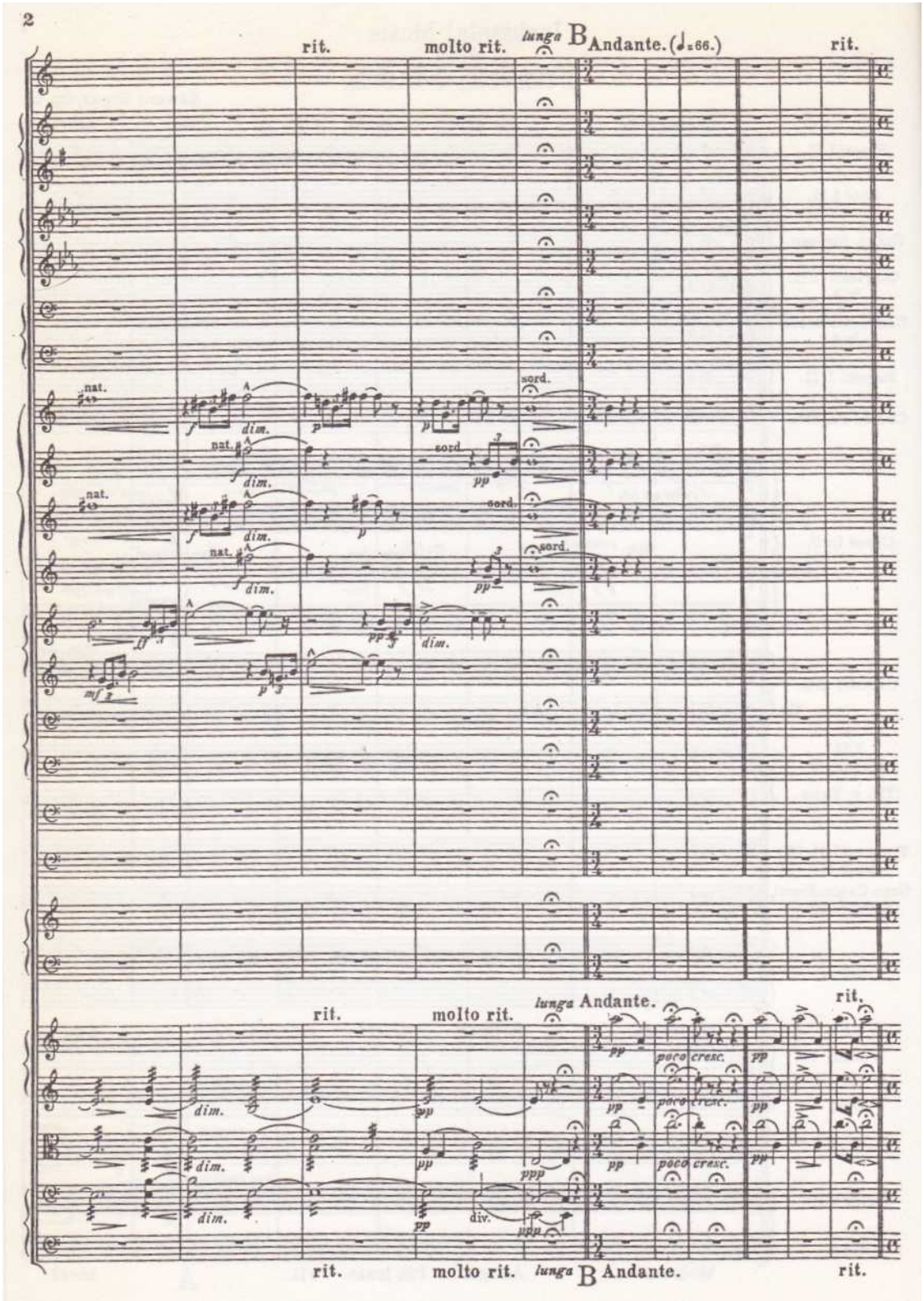
If this notice is intended to promote the play, then the promoters are taking an unusual approach. Indeed, the presence of horn calls and a funeral march cannot help but raise comparison with Wagner, who so artfully depicts hunting calls in the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*, and whose funeral march in *Siegfried* is masterful and an influence on Elgar's own funeral march. However, to implicate Elgar so directly as a follower of the 'Bayreuth Master' and to at once suggest that such a composer will only fail by committing atrocious anachronisms seems a baffling approach to publicity. What this bizarre blurb did succeed in doing, however, was to predict the musical treatment of Celtic Twilight that British composers would adhere to over the next twenty years, one that was Wagnerian without apology. However, Elgar's music stands apart precisely because it avoids the heaviness that was at once the Wagnerian element most easy to assimilate and most difficult to bring off successfully. This treatment may have been entirely a coincidence, as the musical resources available at the Irish Literary Theatre were meager, and Moore had to plead several times with Elgar to keep his ambitions regarding orchestral players limited. Nevertheless, Elgar thought enough of *Grania and Diarmid* to score it as a concert piece for full orchestra.

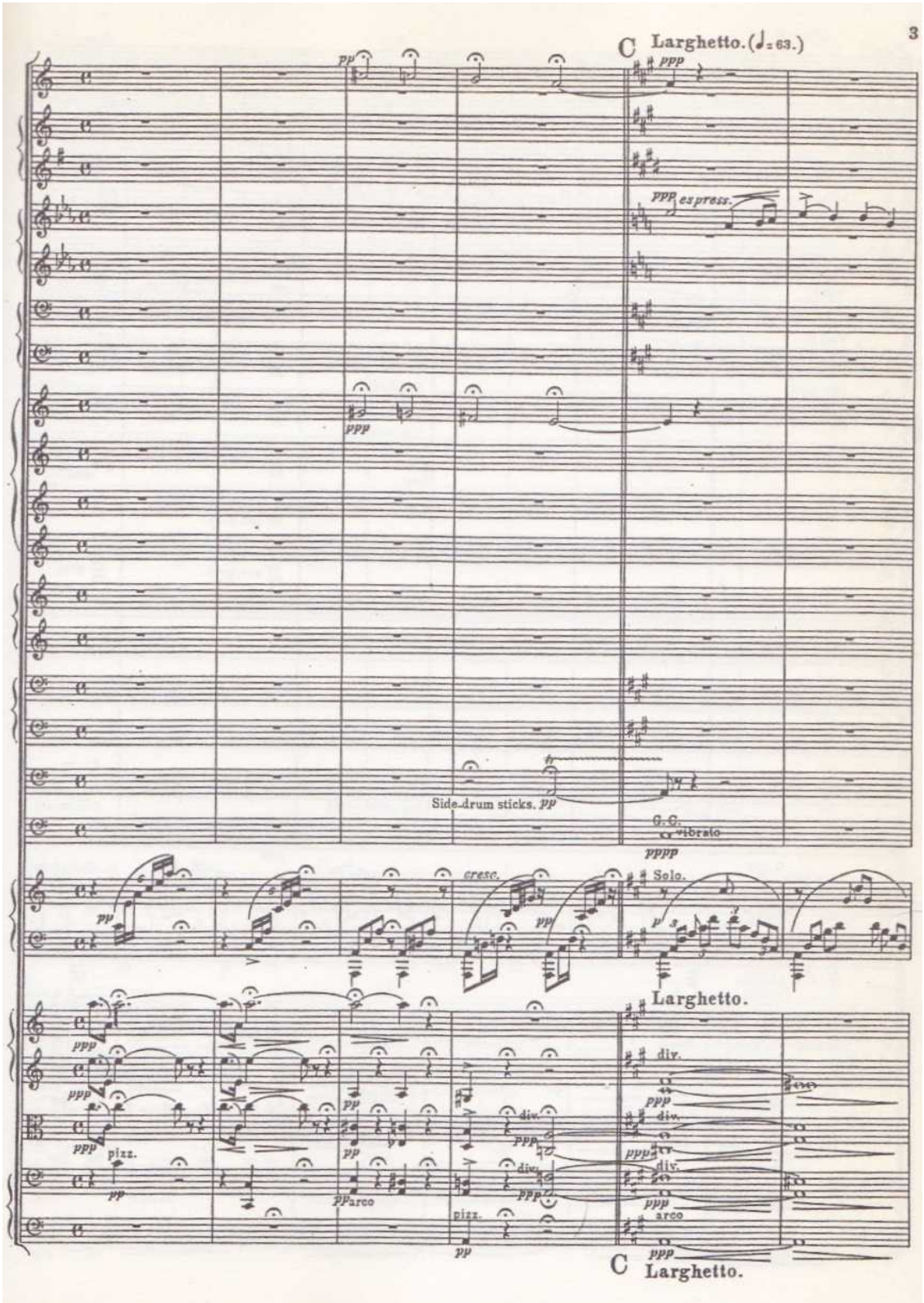
---

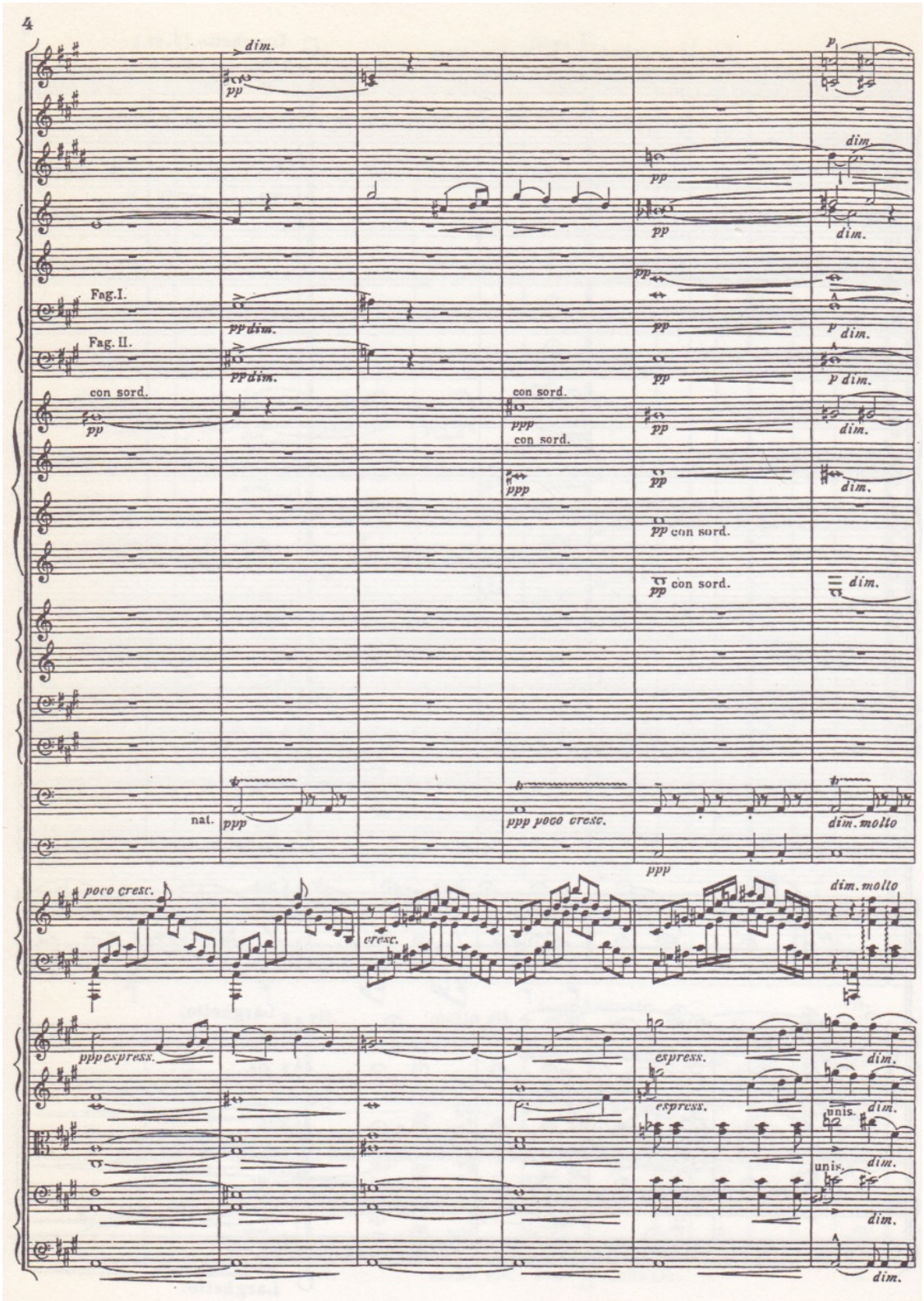
[192] Percy M. Young, Elgar and the Irish Dramatists" in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Raymond Monk, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 125.

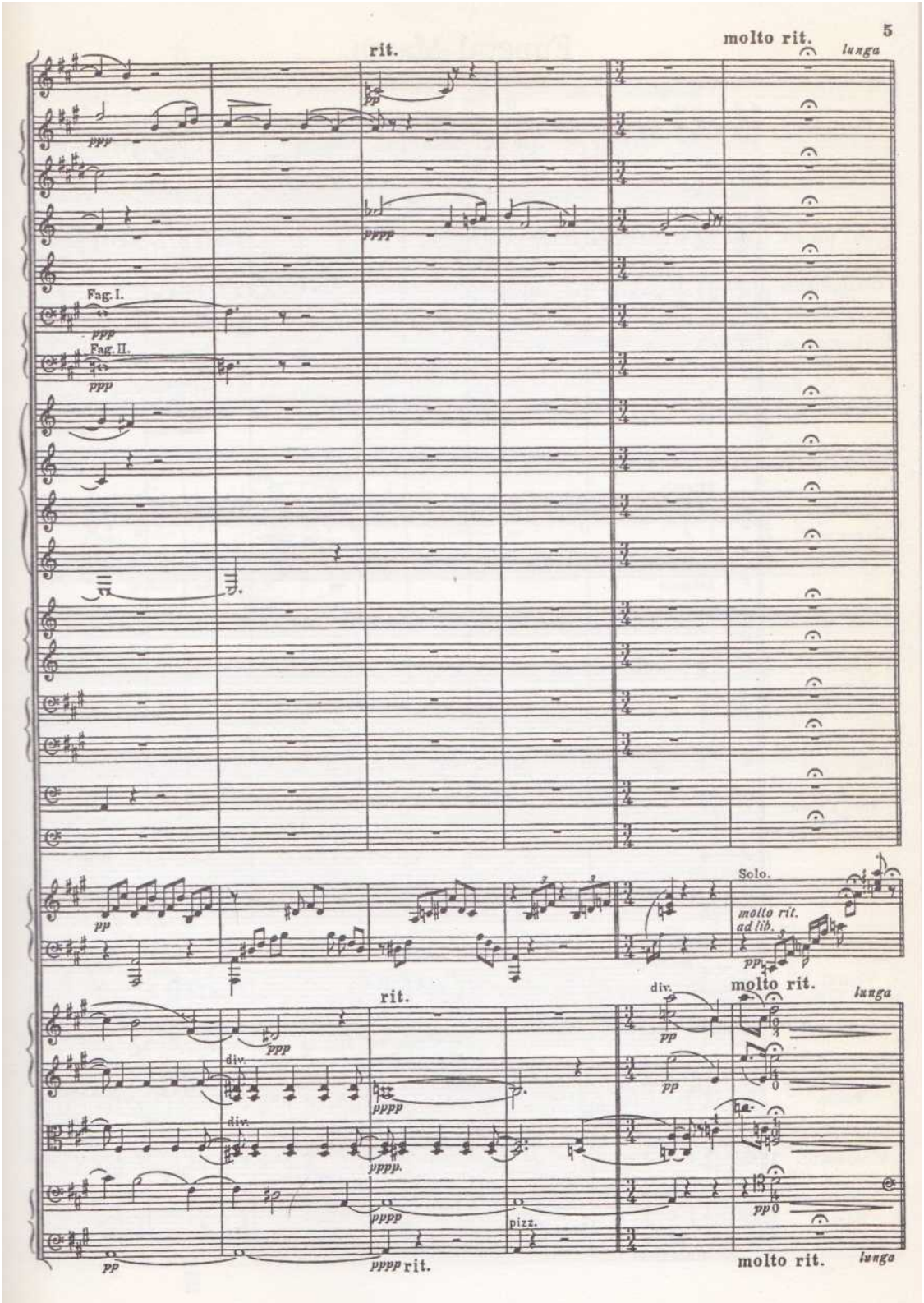
Figure 7: Elgar's *Grania and Diarmid*, op. 42, 1-6.

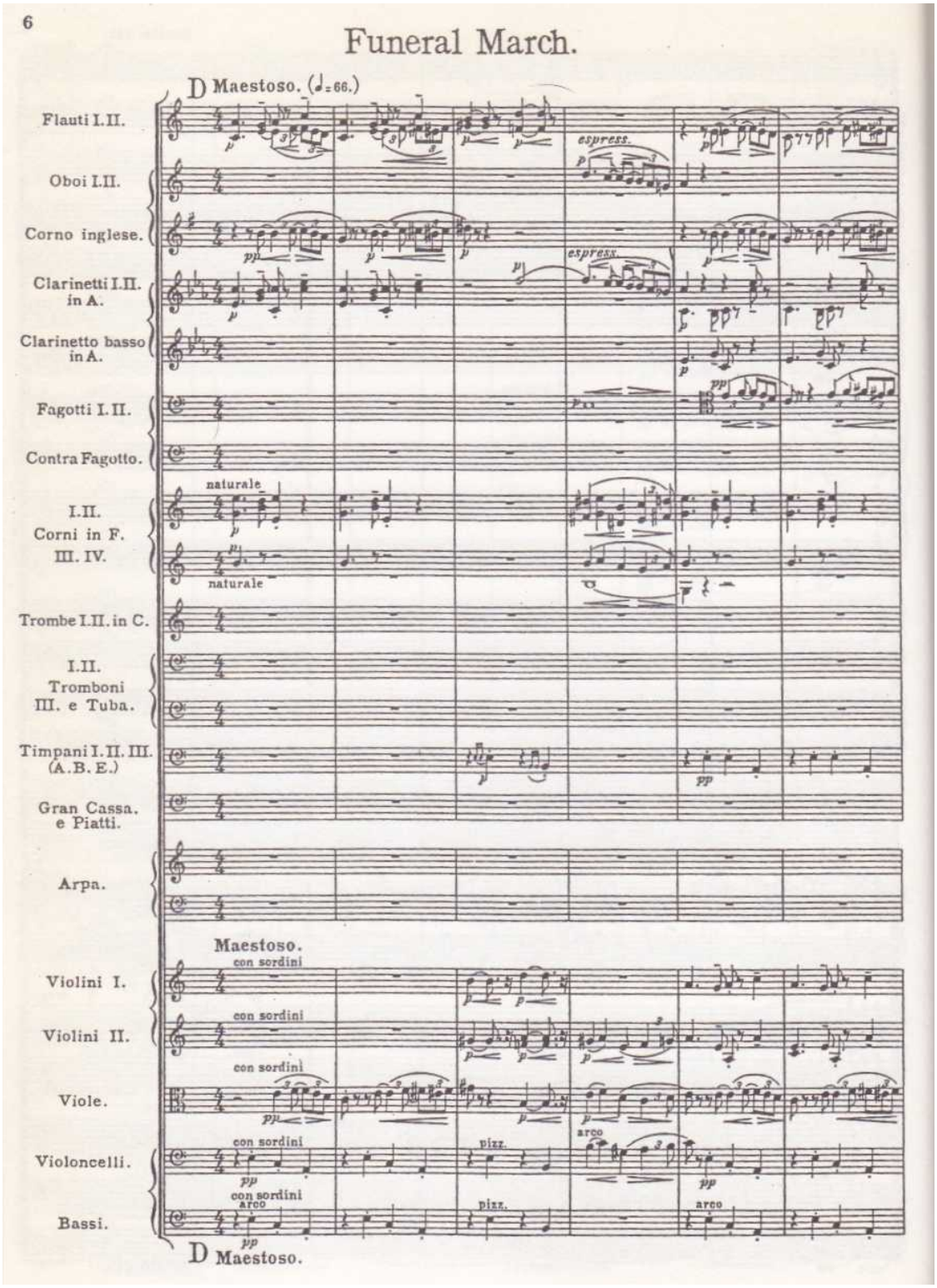



2
rit.
molto rit.
lunga
B Andante. (♩=66.)
rit.
sord.
nat.
dim.
pp
lunga Andante.
poco cresc.
div.
ppp
rit.
molto rit.
lunga
B Andante.
rit.


C Larghetto. (♩= 63.)
ppp
ppp espress.
ppp
Side drum sticks. pp
G. C.
vibrato
pppp
cresc.
pp
Solo.
p
Larghetto.
ppp
pizz.
pp
arco
div.
C Larghetto.

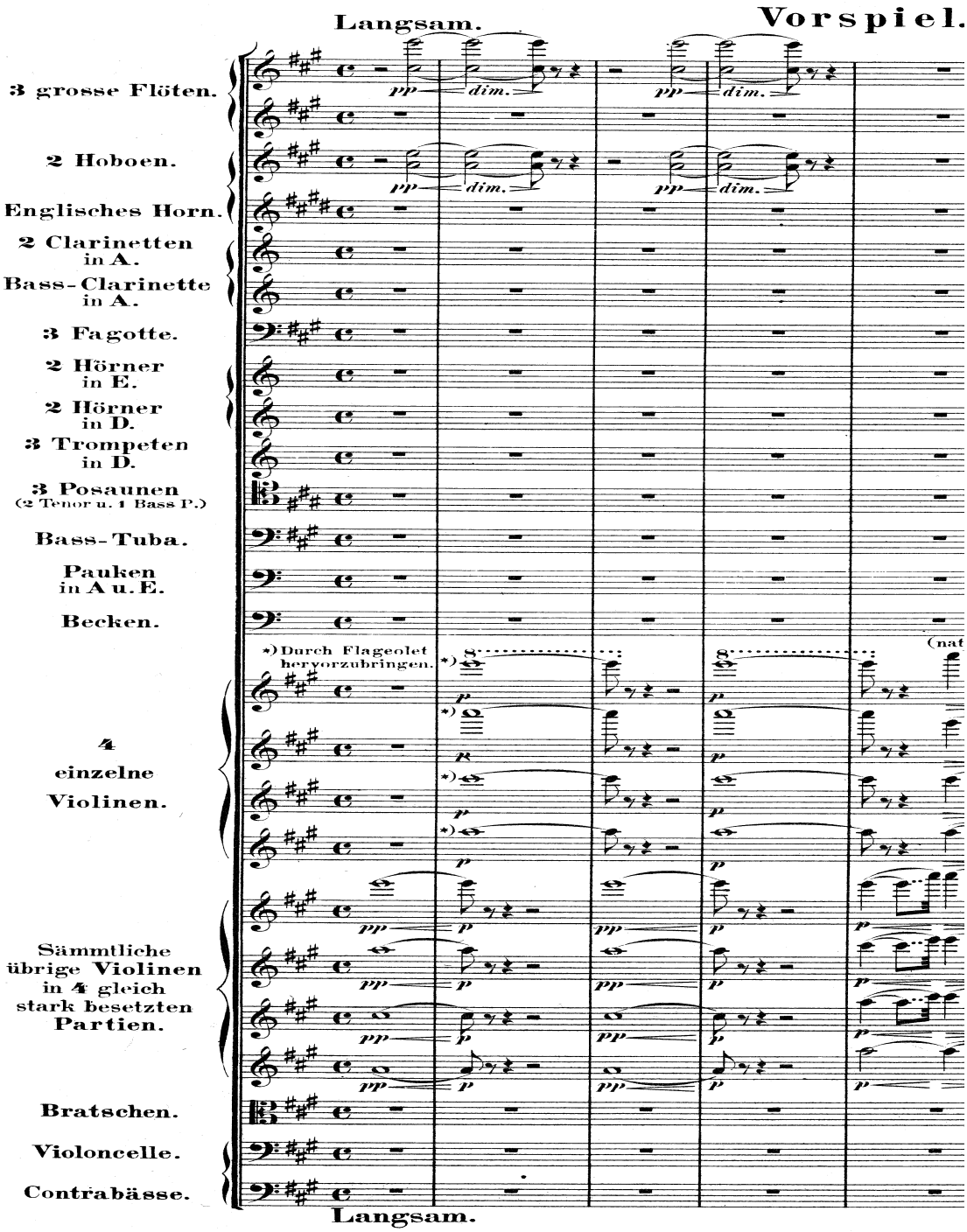

4
dim.
pp
Fag.I.
Fag. II.
pp dim.
con sord.
ppp
nat.
ppp poco cresc.
dim. molto
poco cresc.
cresc.
pppespress.
espress.
unis.


5
rit.
molto rit.
lunga
Fag. I.
Fag. II.
Solo.
molto rit.
ad lib.
rit.
molto rit.
lunga
div.
pizz.
rit.
molto rit.
lunga


Funeral March.
D Maestoso. (♩=66.)
Flauti I. II.
Oboi I. II.
Corno inglese.
Clarinetti I. II. in A.
Clarinetto basso in A.
Fagotti I. II.
Contra Fagotto.
I. II. Corni in F. III. IV.
naturale
naturale
Trombe I. II. in C.
I. II. Tromboni III. e Tuba.
Timpani I. II. III. (A. B. E.)
Gran Cassa. e Piatti.
Arpa.
Maestoso.
Violini I.
Violini II.
Viole.
Violoncelli.
Bassi.
con sordini
con sordini
con sordini
con sordini
con sordini
arco
arco
pizz.
pizz.
espress.
espress.
D Maestoso.

The above pages demonstrate Elgar's restrained avoidance of overblown orchestration and excessive gestures in *Diarmid and Grania* as well as his reliance on compositional technique rather than mere bluster. Elgar sets the opening horn calls to a variety of tempi, which, when combined with muted horns and delicate tremolo strings, contribute to a dreamlike, mystical, and yet tentative atmosphere. Similarly, the B section, marked "andante" features an a minor chord that alternates by octaves. By holding the harmonic development in check, the passage evokes the haunting eerie stillness and mystery of the Celtic forest. One can imagine Wagner himself writing a similar passage in one of his works, and, indeed, Elgar's music is quite like the famous A major chord marking the opening bars of *Lohengrin*:

Figure 8: Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin: Vorspiel,* 1. [193]

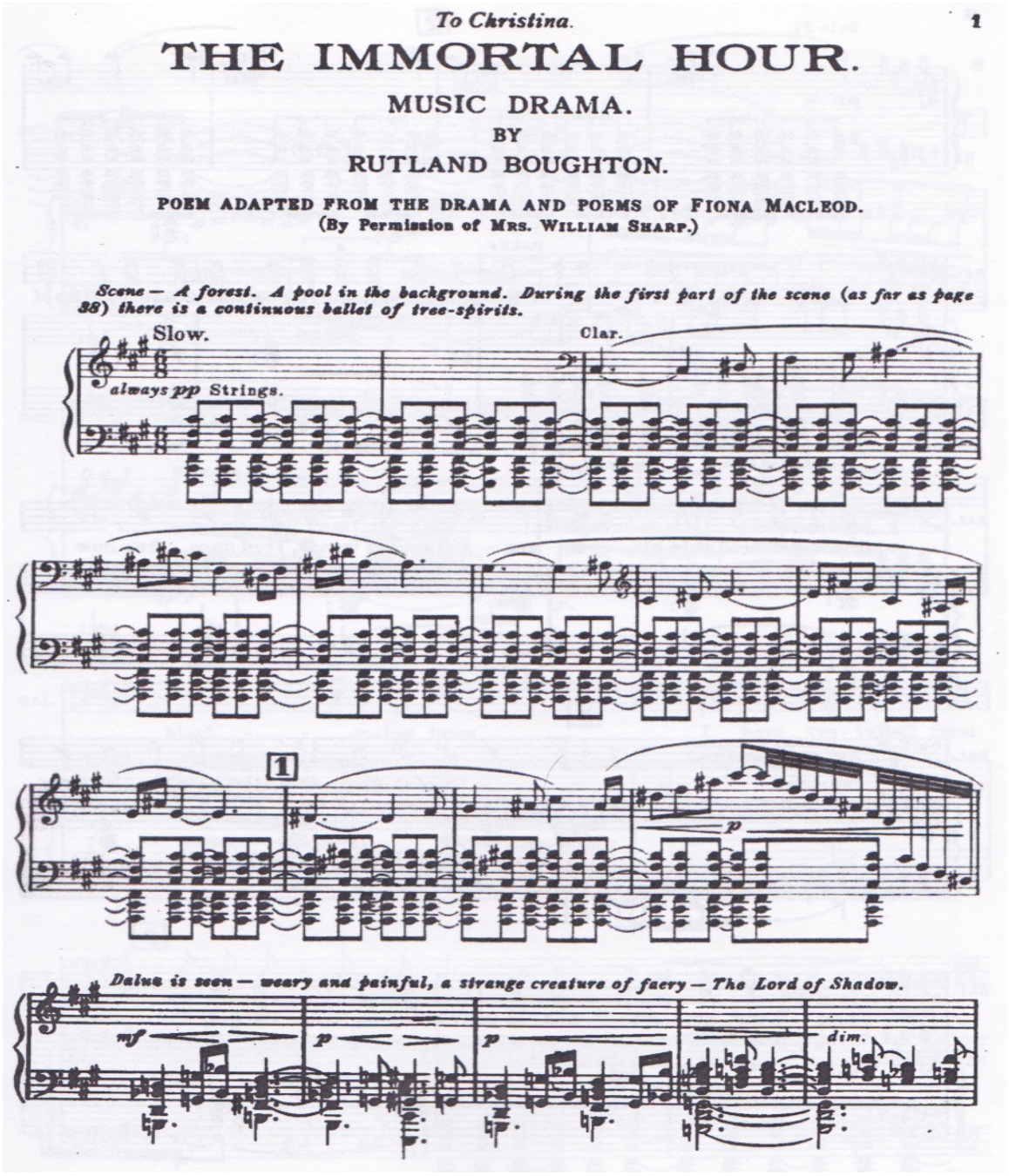


[193] Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin: Vorspiel* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, circa 1881), 1.

Returning to Elgar's incidental music, the entrance of the harp four measures before C is suitably Celtic, and, by drawing on a topos dating back to the earliest days of Ossianic mania, dashes whatever overtones of German forests and streams the previous passage may have brought to mind. However, no bardic verses accompany these delicate chords. Instead, Elgar deploys a single clarinet, pianissimo, to begin section C (Larghetto). The humble copyist that Moore employed to prepare the score for performance celebrated this melody's comely character, remarking that "it is a most beautiful phrase, and I am sure upon the instrument will effect [sic] the hearer deliciously."[194] Rutland Boughton also employs the clarinet in his introduction to *The Immortal Hour*:

[194] Percy M. Young, "Elgar and the Irish Dramatists" in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Ray Monk, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 128.

Figure 9: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour,* 1.[195]



[195]Rutland Boughton*, The Immortal Hour: Music Drama, Piano Score,* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1920).

While Boughton's melody features a mixolydian modal quality, it is set to a harmonically static accompaniment reminiscent of the stasis characterizing the first four measures of *Diarmid and Grania's* B section, as noted above. These static sections both create a certain sense of stillness, one acutely evocative of the lost and ancient forests that their composers seek to evoke.

Elgar's incidental music for *Grania and Diarmid* reaches a vibrant and haunting climax seven measures before its conclusion. Here the oboe briefly takes up the thematic phrase to provide a contrast with the clarinet, which then returns to prominence and gives the melody its final utterance. The chromatic modulations are gentle and indicative of the late romantic aesthetics of the period without being shamelessly Wagnerian. Likewise, the funeral march (of which the first page is included in the above figure 7) avoids the striking brass attacks that so define *Siegfried's Funeral March*. Instead, Elgar makes use of an ingenious triplet figure that lends the march a character distinct to his own compositional aesthetic and makes it an interestingly muted counterpoint to his vivacious *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. The rhythmic ingenuity of this triplet figure shows Elgar at the height of his powers. He builds the passage by degrees, finally reaching a brassy martial cadence before entering into a B section marked by legato strings.

Taking a second look at the page from Boughton's score, one can see a similar march-like approach at the entrance of the shadowy figure of Dalua (at the start of the fourth system), a mysterious demi-god closely associated with death. Dalua's character may have inspired Boughton to a funereal march-like approach that is not unlike Elgar's. Whether or not Boughton studied or heard Elgar's incidental music is unkown. However,

one may conclude that similar dramatic situations called for similar solutions from both composers. Here the similarities end. Elgar seems to have not needed to invoke the Celtic folk-song inspired pentatonicism, that – as shall be discussed further – was crucial for both Granville Bantock's and Boughton's attempts to conjure up the atmosphere of Celtic Twilight. Elgar's melodic sense for this subject matter was intuitive and personal. Moore's impressions from the work's first rehearsal testify to this:

> When it was over, the conductor turned to me saying:
>
> There's your march. What do you think of it?
>
> It will have to be played better than that before I can tell, a remark the orchestra did not like, and for which I felt sorry but it is difficult to have the courage of one's convictions on the spot, and, while walking home, I thought of the many fine things that I might have said; that Elgar had drawn all the wail of the *caoine*[196] into the languorous rhythm of his march, and that he had been able to do this because he had not thought for a single instant of the external forms of native music, but had allowed the sentiment of the scene to inspire him. Out of the harmony a little melody floats, pathetic as an autumn leaf, and it seemed to me that Elgar must have seen the primeval forest as he wrote, and the tribe moving among the falling leaves – oak-leaves, hazel-leaves, for the world began with oak and hazel.[197]

For Moore, Elgar's music evoked the spirit of native Ireland just as efficaciously as any folksong transcription could. Furthermore, in a similar testament to British nativism, one must commend Elgar's setting of *Grania and Diarmid* for avoiding overt Wagnerian imitation, considering that the work's various dimensions would have offered any

---

[196] Known in English as 'keen:' Irish lamentation for the dead.

[197] Percy M. Young, "Elgar and the Irish Dramatists" in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Ray Monk, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 128.

Elgar's choral work, *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf,* Op. 30 (1896) opens with an invocation of the primeval forest of Diarmuid's Britain.

composer ample opportunity for such indulgence. Instead, Elgar limited himself to a slight and yet tasteful nod to *Lohengrin* and *Götterdämmerung*. Still, Elgar's experience with *Grania and Diarmid* may have been enough to show him that it was impossible to write more music on such subjects without delving into overtly Wagnerian territory.[198]

Wagnerian imitation was the incurable, wound of Amfortas for other Celtic Twilight composers. These composers foolishly dared to travel beyond the precipice at which Elgar paused and turned back. Those who failed to practice restraint in their Wagnerian flirtations with Celtic subjects, as both Elgar and Boughton managed to do, were, like men stepping off of a steep cliff, doomed. The tenuous and brief encounter with the musical Celtic Twilight that *Grania and Diarmid* represents is therefore quite suited to the aesthetic: it is a 'brief encounter' with the mystical side of music, not unlike that strange meeting between Yeats and the violinist with the blacking box fiddle, one that, like most mystic revelations, proved unsustainable.

Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958) is an example of a composer whose well-intentioned Wagnerian approach to Celtic subject matter backfired badly. In 1902 Holbrooke was a rising star backed by the powerful music critic Ernest Newman (1868-1959).[199] From 1910 to 1920 he collaborated with his patron Lord Howard de Walden (mentioned above), on "a cycle of librettos… based on tales from Welsh mythology." The first flowerings of this collaboration, Holbrooke's *Children of Don,* premiered at the

---

[198] And yet, *The Dream of Gerontius*, op. 38, is very Wagnerian.

[199] Holbrooke also received a commission to write an Opera-Ballet for the New Century Opera in New York City. Webb, F. Gilbert. "Holbrooke's new Opera-Ballet: 'The Enchanted Garden,'" *The Musical Times* vol. 56, no. 869 (July 1, 1915): 402-403.

London Opera House on Friday 7 June 1917. *The Musical Times* notes just how unusual of an event this was. It credits "T.E. Ellis" (Lord Howard), Holbrooke's wealthy benefactor and librettist, for securing the performance. Indeed, if Elliot's influence "had been less weighty," it, "would scarcely have induced Mr. Hammerstein (who has no particular love of English opera) to embark upon this interesting venture."[200] Far from being a runaway success, the opera "elicited diverse opinions."[201] The reviewer for *The Courier and Argus* (Dundee, Scotland) wrote the following:

> I am afraid the very praiseworthy efforts of Mr. Oscar Hammerstein, Lord Howard de Walden, and Mr. Joseph Holbrooke to produce a British grand opera will not succeed. Certainly *The Children of Don*, which was produced at Mr. Hammerstein's beautiful opera house last night, was not received with enthusiasm. On all sides one heard the same criticisms, yz. (Sic.): -'That book and music were after Wagner, and much after the German master.'[202]

The reviewer describes a fate shared by many artists who continued to work in a late Romantic idiom during this time and risked imitating Wagner too freely:

> I suppose the truth of the matter is that Wagner created one kind of grand opera. Anyone who writes an opera dealing with the warring son of Cymric mythology cannot expect that it should be set to any music but what may be described as an imitation. For that matter, it may be said at once that Wagner brooks no rival, and anyone who attempts to rival him must be content to be called a mere imitator.[203]

---

[200] The opera was produced at Oscar Hammerstein I's London Opera House. Hermann Klein, "Mr. Joseph Holbrooke's New Opera, 'The Children of Don,'" *The Musical Times* vol. 53, no. 831 (May 1, 1912): 309.

[201] Anon. "Joseph Holbrooke," *The Musical Times* vol. 54, No. 842 (April 1, 1913): 225-227.

[202] Anon, "Editorial: Lord Howard de Walden's 'Children of Don,'" *The Courier and Argus* (Dundee Scotland), Monday, June 17 1912, 5. Issue 18414. http://find.galegroup.com/dvnw/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=DVNW&userGroupName=ucriverside&tabID=T003&docPage=article&docId=ID3227570189&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0

[203] Ibid., 5.

By the 1910s, even in British cities as far from cosmopolitan London as Dundee Scotland, listeners had lost patience with such heavy-handed Wagnerian imitation. Besides sounding overtly Wagnerian, *The Children of Don* also employed slavishly one of Wagner's chief innovations, the use of leitmotifs to connect a work's themes, ideas, and characters. At the time, this system was the only way to treat a monumental subject like the one that Holbrooke was attempting to wrangle into obedience.[204] Unfortunately, with Holbrooke in command, tying the leitmotif approach to a Celtic myth was like tying a bowling ball to the branch of a weeping willow. As Brown suggests, the primitive, symbolist, and psychological elements of Celtic literature may have begged for a Wagnerian approach, but the execution of such a project was not practicable, and could only succeed with a touch that Holbrooke was not able to master. By the time Holbrooke's cumbersome cycle arrived on the stage, the romantic culture in which such a work could be celebrated was, though still existent, beginning to decline and unable to bear such weighty material.[205] Beyond *The Children of Don's* indulgence in Celtic myth and Wagnerian aesthetics, there is little to tie it to the aesthetics of Celtic Twilight.

---

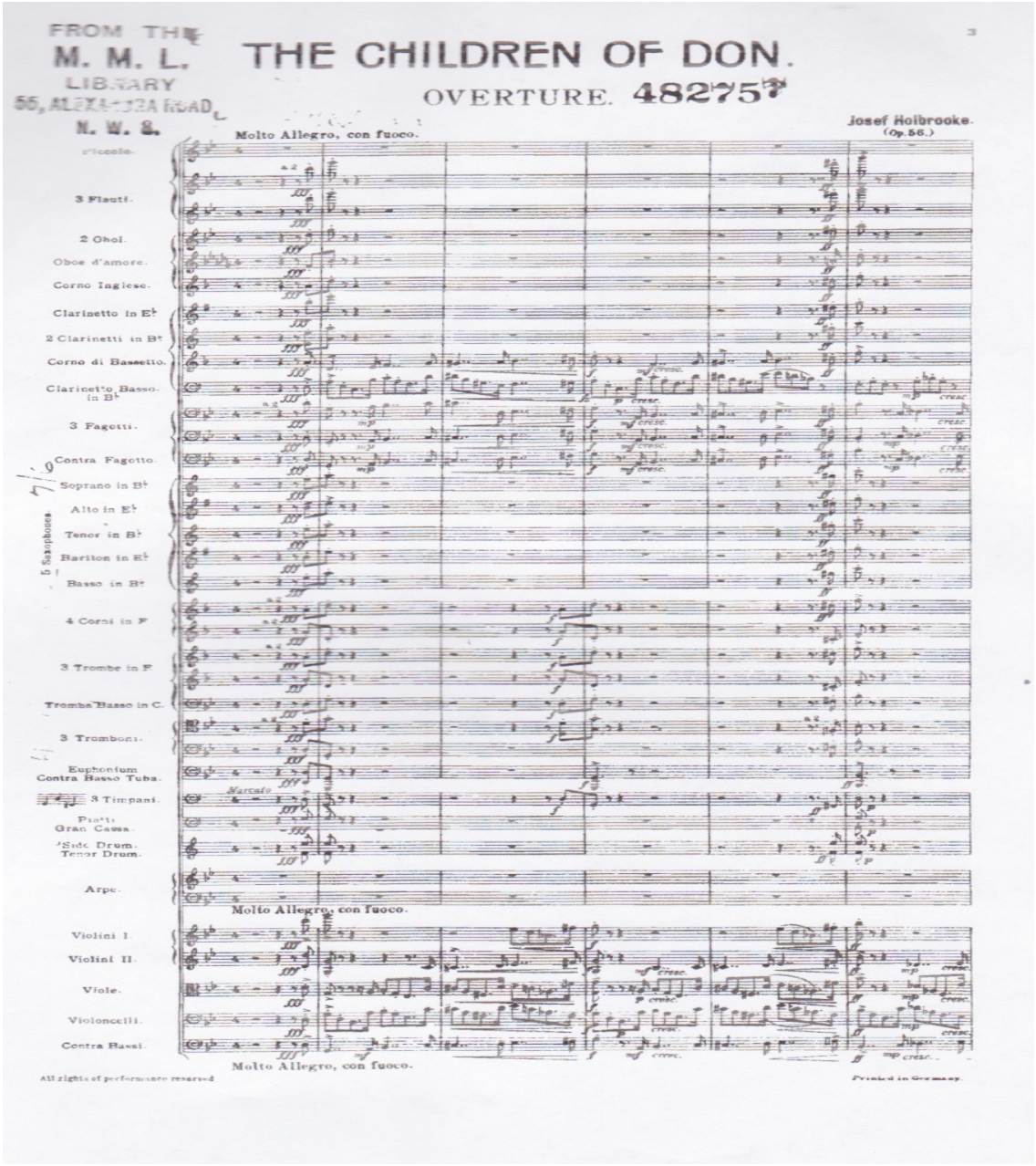
[204] As Ann-Marie Forbes observes, "connections between the operas are underlined in the music by an extensive system of leitmotifs." "Joseph Holbrooke" in *Grove Music Online.* http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013198?rskey=RYjxzA&result=1

Debussy was confounded to admit that he could find no other way to set *Pelléas et Mélisande* than with the system, causing him to abandon any further operatic efforts.

[205] Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music,* 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 201.

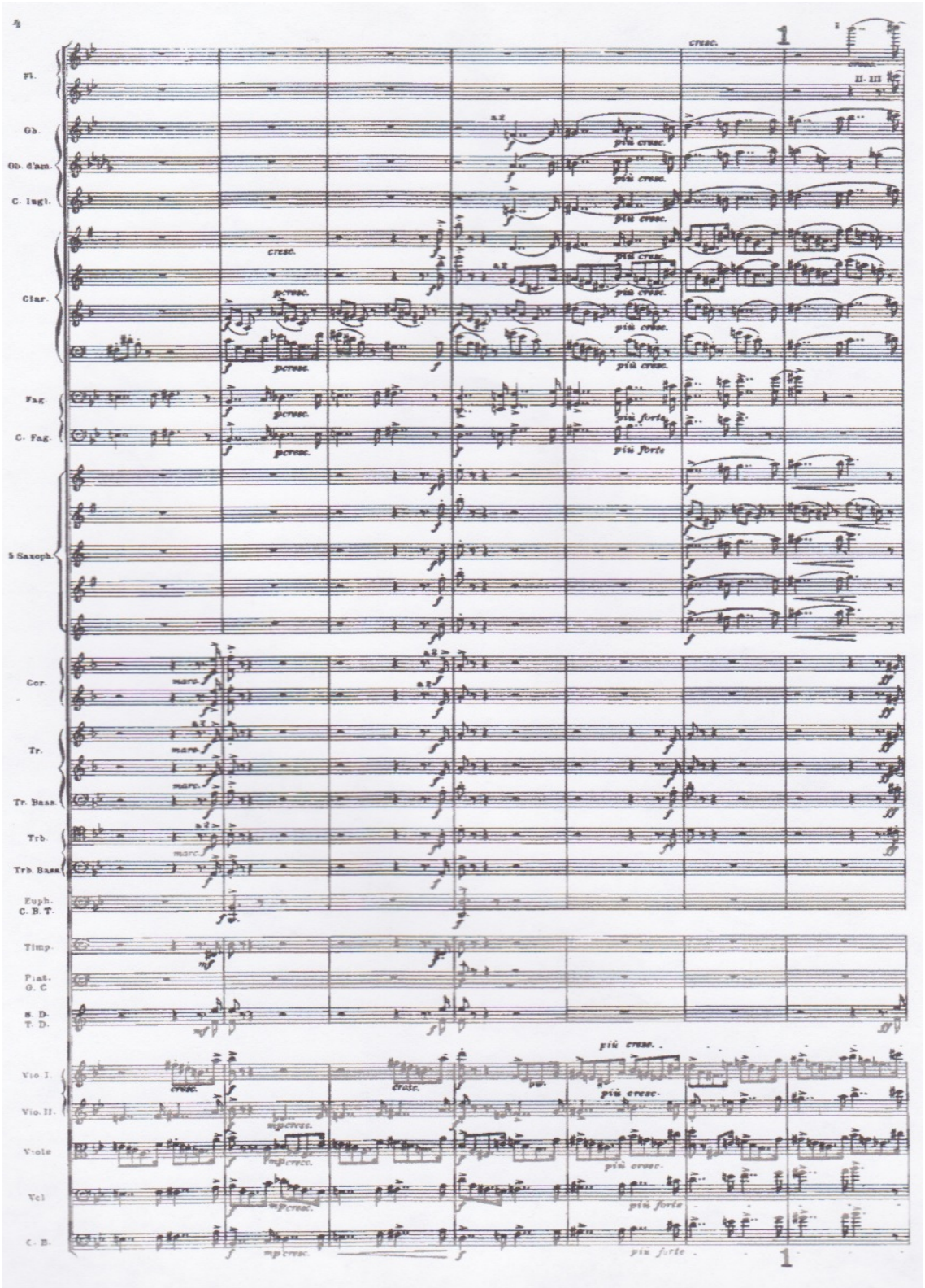
Though the *Children of Don* was not a success, Holbrooke continued to treat Celtic subjects via Wagnerian aesthetics. Other works including, the *Birds of Rhiannon,* op. 87, *Eilean*

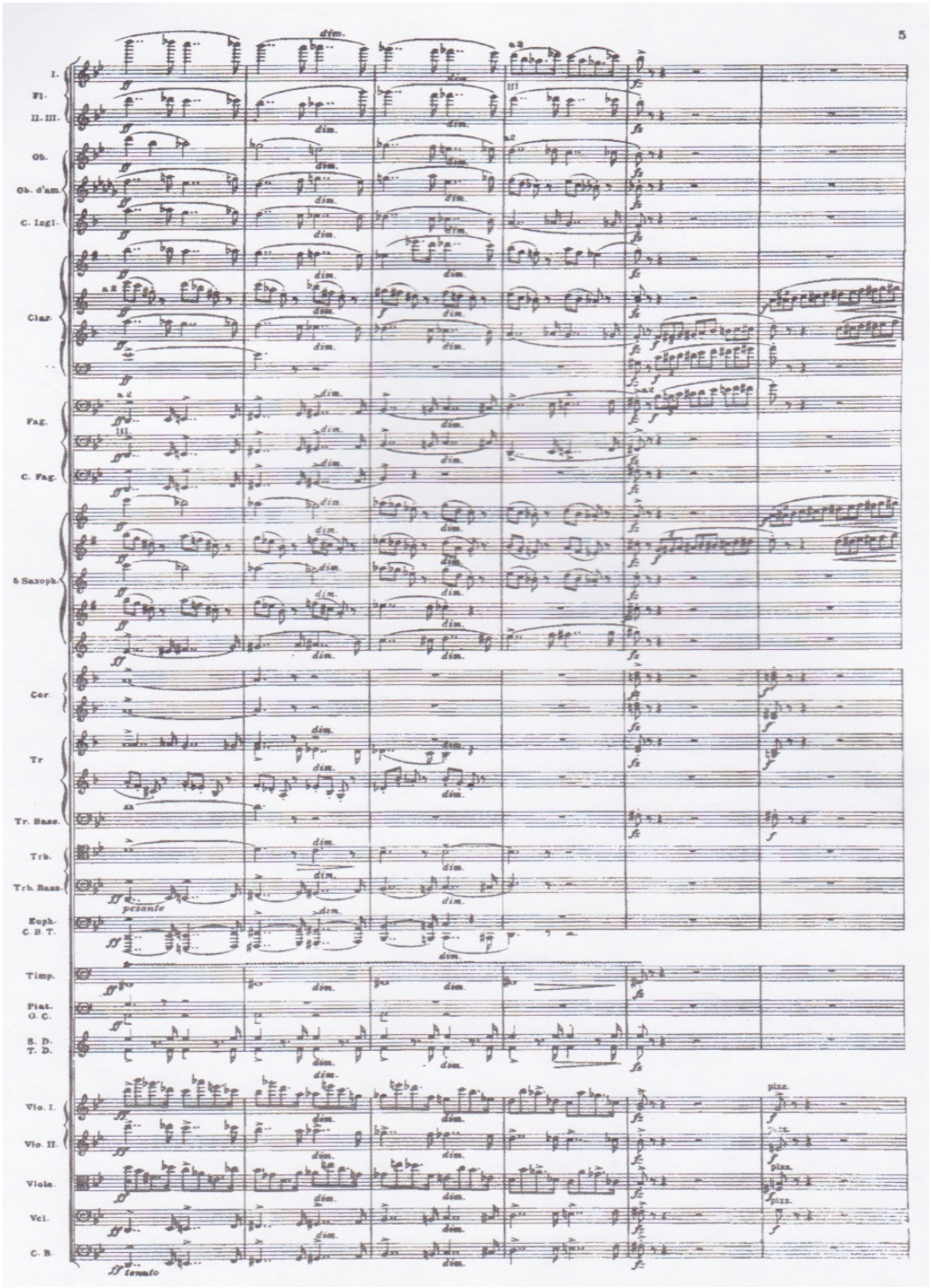
Figure 10: The Introduction to Holbrooke's *The Children of Don*, op. 56 [206]



Shona, *Talliensen's song*, and *Nocturne: Fairyland*, are just some of the pieces he composed based on Celtic themes for a variety of ensembles.

[206] Joseph Holbrooke. *The Children of Don,* op. 56 (London: Goodwin and Tadd Ltd.), 3-5.


Fl.
Ob.
Ob. d'am.
C. Ingl.
Clar.
Fag.
C. Fag.
5 Saxoph.
Cor.
Tr.
Tr. Bass.
Trb.
Trb. Bass.
Euph.
C. B. T.
Timp.
Piat.
G. C
S. D.
T. D.
Vio. I.
Vio. II.
Viole
Vcl
C. B.
cresc.
più cresc.
più forte
marc.
mp cresc.
più cresc.
più forte


5
I.
Fl.
II. III.
Ob.
Ob. d'am.
C. Ingl.
Clar.
Fag.
C. Fag.
6 Saxoph.
Cor.
Tr
Tr. Basse.
Trb.
Trb. Bass.
Euph.
C. B. T.
Timp.
Piat.
G. C.
S. D.
T. D.
Vlo. I.
Vlo. II.
Viole.
Vcl.
C. B.
dim.
pesante
pizz.
ff tonato

Looking at the first three pages of Holbrooke's overture, one instantly detects the undigested influence of Wagner. The chromatic ascending dotted line in the woodwinds is redolent of *Tristan* and is very similar to an inversion of the same 'sick Tristan' motive that, as shall be discussed below, Arnold Bax features in his tone poem *Tintagel.* However, the bombastic triple fortes that introduce the piece betray Holbrooke's mishandling of the subject. Here Holbrooke's failure to follow Wagner's example works against him. Wagner's greatest overtures, including those for *Parsifal, Lohengrin, Tristan und Isolde, Tannhäuser,* and, most famously, *Das Rheingold*, all seduce the listener into entering the world of myth with gentle introductions rather than bludgeoning the ears.

Holbrooke did manage to eke out some success from *Dylan* (also based on the play by Howard de Walden), the second installment of *Children of Don*. In its review of *Dylan*, the *Sunday Times* notes: "Mr. Holbrooke's music, though modeled on Wagnerian lines, is less reminiscent of 'The Ring' than was the case with 'The Children of Don.'" Still, while he succeeded in some sections, Hoblbrooke is criticized for his heaviness. As the reviewer points out, "the scoring is abnormally thick and turgid… he carries his vigorous strenuosity (sic) to extremes… there is hardly a trace of grace or melody."[207] *Dylan*, much like *The Children of Don*, was short-lived.

Another English composer of the early twentieth century to embrace Celtic subjects via a Wagnerian approach, and to do so with different results, was Arnold Bax

---

[207] Anon., "English Opera at Drury Lane: Mr. Holbrooke's Dylan," *The Sunday Times* (London, England), Sunday, July 5, 1914; 10. issue 5761. http://find.galegroup.com/dvnw/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=DVNW&userGroupName=ucriverside&tabID=T003&docPage=article&docId=FP1801293199&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0

(1883-1953). In 1902, Bax, at the behest of his literary brother Clifford, read Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisin* and became enamored with Ireland. He enjoyed extended visits to the country, thanks to his private income, and even moved to Dublin in 1914. Here he associated with important members of the Revival including Yeats and A.E., and began publishing Yeats-like poetry and stories under the pseudonym 'Dermot O'Byrne.' Bax's Irish infatuation makes him stand out from his fellow English composers. As Stephen Banfield suggests, Bax had all the necessary qualities of a 'gentleman composer.' He was "born into a wealthy middle-class family, never did a day's work in his life, never taught or conducted, and wrote largely what he pleased." Though he "knew everybody" and was a "charming and witty conversationalist," he did not overinvest in ingratiating himself to the London social circuit. He often preferred to remain elsewhere. Indeed, perhaps driven by his inner Celt, he "never settled into a home of his own, and for long periods would isolate himself, with or without, with or without his mistress, in Ireland, Scotland, or Sussex in what to many would have seemed drab rather than romantic surroundings."[208]

Bax was more musically successful than Holbrooke (for one thing, he never attempted to write an opera). For Bax, Celtic subjects offered an ideal vehicle through which to intertwine his musical and poetic endeavors. For example, He composed his *Tintagel* during the same period that he wrote a four Stanza verse poem titled *Tintagel Castle* (Tintagel is an important location in Arthurian legend and the legend of

---

[208]Stephen Banfield, "*Review: Frank Bridge: A Thematic Catalogue 1900*-1941 by Paul Hindmarsh*; Bax a Composer and His Times by Lewis Foreman*," *Music and Letters* vol. 66, no. 2 (April, 1985):183-185.

Tristan).[209] In his tone poem, *Tintagel*, Bax pays homage to Wagner by recalling passages from *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung,* and *Tristan und Isolde,*[210] and by embracing Wagner's chromaticism, lush orchestration, and multilayered textures. *Tintagel's* melodies also tend to have modal inflections that "point towards a Gaelic/Celtic folk influence."[211] Though Bax does not include lines from his poem "Tintagel Castle" in the musical score of *Tintagel,* the poem, a love letter to his mistress Harriet Cohen (1895-1967),[212] touches on twilight notions and imagery:

> They stared out even as we do
> Across the silken tide
> And sought in sundown splendours
> The dream their world denied" [213]

Bax's poetic images were no doubt inspired by his readings of Yeats, and one finds similar lines in Yeats's "A Poet to His Beloved:"

> I bring with reverent hands
> The books of my numberless dreams
> White woman that passion has worn
> As the tide wears the dove-gray sands [214]

---

[209] William B Hannam, *Arnold Bax and the Poetry of 'Tintagel'* PhD Dissertation (Kent State University, 2008), 1.

[210] *Ibid*., 71.

[211] *Ibid.,* 74.

[212] Harriet Cohen was a celebrated pianist, and Bax wrote most of his piano music for her to perform. For more on the complicated nature of Bax's relationships see: Lewis Foreman, *Bax a Composer and His Times* (London: Scolar Press, 1983).

[213] *Ibid.,* 94. For a further detailed musical analysis of Wagnerian quotation and stylistic elements in *Tintagel* and other Celtic-themed works by Bax, see: Christopher Little, *Beyond England's 'Green and Pleasant Land:' English Romantics Outside of the musical Renaissance*, PhD dissertation (Kentucky: University of Kentucky), 2016.

Even though Bax declined to give a detailed programmatic narrative to his musical version of *Tintagel*, he wrote in the preface to the score that it was intended to "evoke a tone-picture of the castle-crowned cliff of Tintagel… and with the increasing tumult of the sea arise memories of the historical and legendary association of the place."[215] Here Bax invokes a space that can be compared with the humbler yet equally evocative cave by the seashore from Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight*. It is in locations such as these that the mind can wander and entertain the fantasy essential to Celtic Twilight.[216] Indeed, Bax's call for the listener to meditate and muse over memories of bygone legends invokes the element of nostalgia that, as shall be illustrated in later sections, is yet another essential feature of the aesthetic.

For Bax, Tintagel castle is ultimately not as much a site for the exploration of the liminal boundary between worlds as it is an ode to forbidden love. Recent studies by William Hannam on the poetry written by Bax at the time of Tintagel's composition allow for a new narrative interpretation of the tone poem, one in which two stories of forbidden love collide, those of *Tristan and Isolde*, and of Bax and his mistress, the pianist Harriet Cohen. This duality is symbolized by Bax's acknowledgment of his inclusion of a quotation of "one of the subjects from the first act of *Tristan und Isolde*,"

---

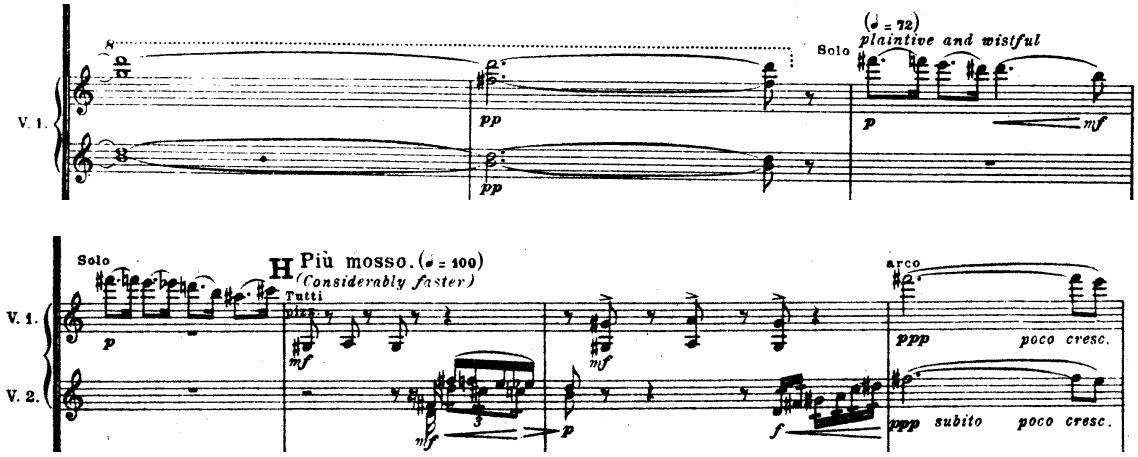
[214] Yeats, W.B. "A Poet to His Beloved," from *The Wind Among the Reeds,* accessed at Project Gutenberg, May 17 2015. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32233/32233-h/32233-h.htm

[215] Bax, Arnold, *Tintagel* (Chappell Music LTD, 1923)*,* 2.

[216] In accordance with this, one may offer the slight criticism that Bax's music is oddly diffuse.

in the work's climax.[217] Several scholars have also identified the "sick Tristan" motive in the score of *Tintagel*. In the example below, one can see it introduced beginning in the third measure:

Figure 11: Arnold Bax, *Tintagel,* 2 Measures before Rehearsal Letter H [218]

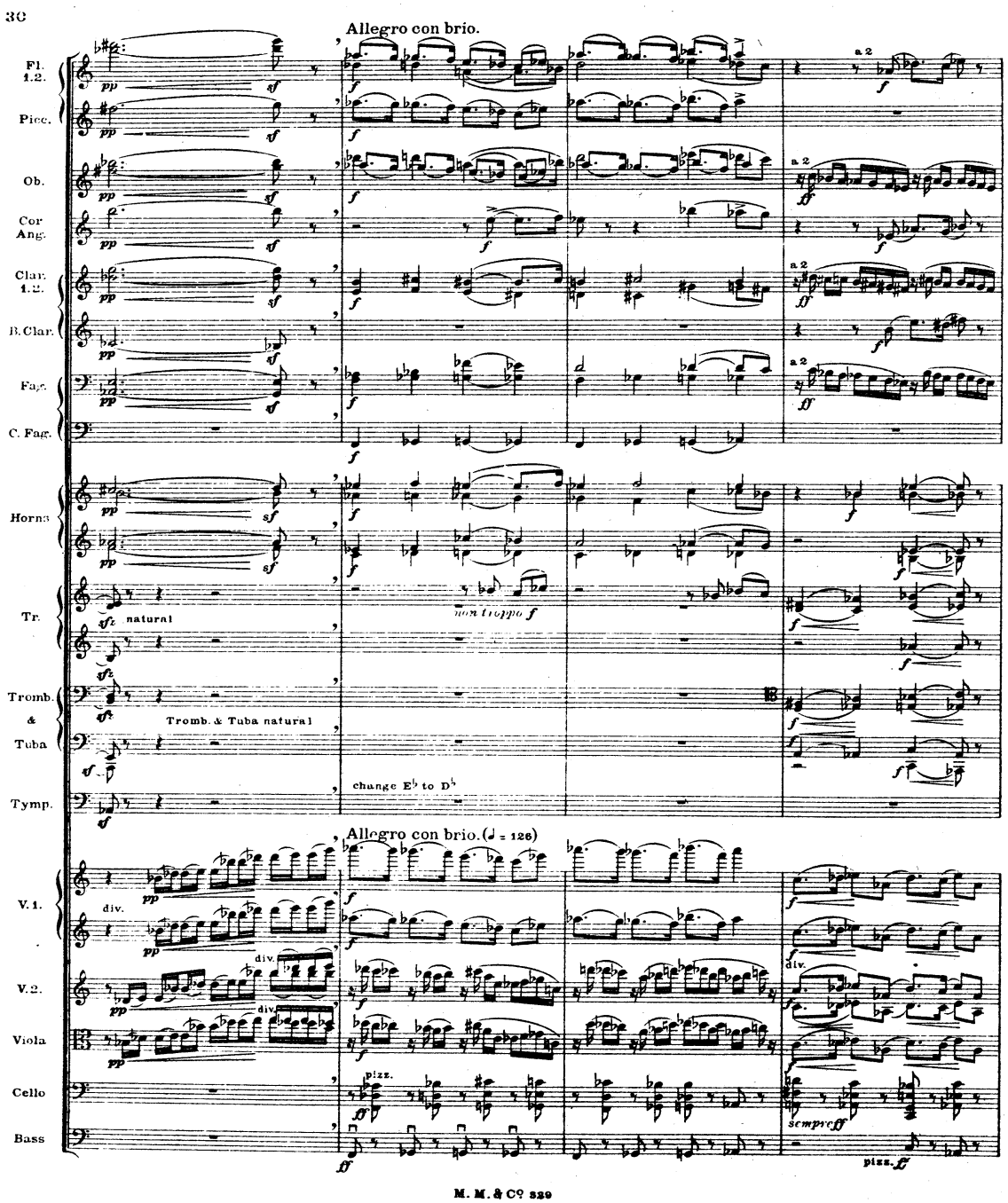


[217] *Ibid.,* 2.

For a detailed analysis of the "Sick Tristan" motive in *Tintagel,* and indeed, for score analysis of Wagnerian elements in works by all composers mentioned in this section, see, again, Christopher Little, *Beyond England's 'Green and Pleasant Land.'* See also: William B Hannam, *Arnold Bax and the Poetry of 'Tintagel'*

[218] Arnold Bax, *Tintagel,* (Murdoch, Murdoch and Co. 1923), 18-19.

Figure 12: “Sick Tristan” appearing again 8 measures after rehearsal letter M [219]



[219] Ibid., 30.

Though *Tintagel* invites comparison with *Tristan und Isolde*, critical reviews of the work avoided doing so. The score was well-received. A critic for *The Musical Times* made the following observations regarding *Tintagel's* 1921 premiere:

> On October 20 interest was chiefly centered in Glazounov's Fifth Symphony and in the actual first performance of a new composition by Arnold Bax entitled '*Tintagel.'* This was very successfully produced, Mr. Bax being the recipient of a genuine outburst of applause. Lovely passages abound in his score, and the poetic quality of the music is everywhere exemplified. One felt however that a better structural balance could have been obtained, and that a keener sense of climax would have improved this deeply-felt piece of writing.[220]

The above review contained some mild criticisms but Bax escaped being typecast as a Wagnerian imitator, and for a good reason. As Peter J. Pirie has argued, "the Wagner spell tended to affect composers in one or other of two ways: they followed either the eroticism of *Tristan* or the clever primitivism and latent gigantism of *The Ring*." Pirie argues that Bantock, Holbrooke, and Havergal Brian were composers who followed the model set forth by *The Ring*. The *Tristan* model, "having been implicated in the Wilde scandal," was a path much less traveled.[221] By 1921, with the Wilde scandal a distant memory, Bax's Tristanesque *Tintagel* presented itself, thanks to the composers own injections of originality and charm to the score, as an experimentation in a Wagnerian vein that had been largely bypassed by other British composers.

Ring imitations, as evinced by Holbrooke's failure with *The Children of Don*, could fall into a habit of creating music that was as turgid as it was gargantuan. *Tintagel*

---

[220] Anon., "Music in the Provinces," *The Musical Times,* vol. 62, no. 946 (December 1921): 865.

[221] Peter J. Pirie, "Bantock and His Generation," *The Musical Times,* vol. 109, no. 1506 (August 1968), 715-717.

For more on the Wilde scandal see chapter 5.

avoids such a pitfall. Indeed, critics noticed a pleasing and grateful lightness in Bax's other earlier Celtic themed works. For example, in a review of the premiere of Bax's *In The Fairy Hills* at a Hallé Orchestra concert, the critic for the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* observed:

> The Fantasy, "In the Faery Hills," by Arnold Bax is the second of his works to be accorded a hearing at these concerts, and, like the first, bore witness of a genuine vein of poetic fancy in the composer. No one will quarrel with him for his resort to the 'little folk' for inspiration. These Irish faieries – are they not as real as Free Trade, Fair Trade, Voluntaryism, or other of our fondly cherished abstractions? Mr. Bax's music plays round the central idea of the hosting and revels of the faery folk with rhythmic devices of singular delicacy. His melody is thin-spun –naturally perhaps, but not, we think, necessarily. The work was well received, and further acquaintance with Mr. Bax's art is to be welcomed."[222]

By imbuing his Celtic works with a buoyant elegance, what the reviewer deigns "singular delicacy" of rhythm and a melodious character "thin-spun," Bax both tailored his music to his subject matter and avoided the heavy-handed Wagnerism that hindered Holbrooke's *Children of Don*.

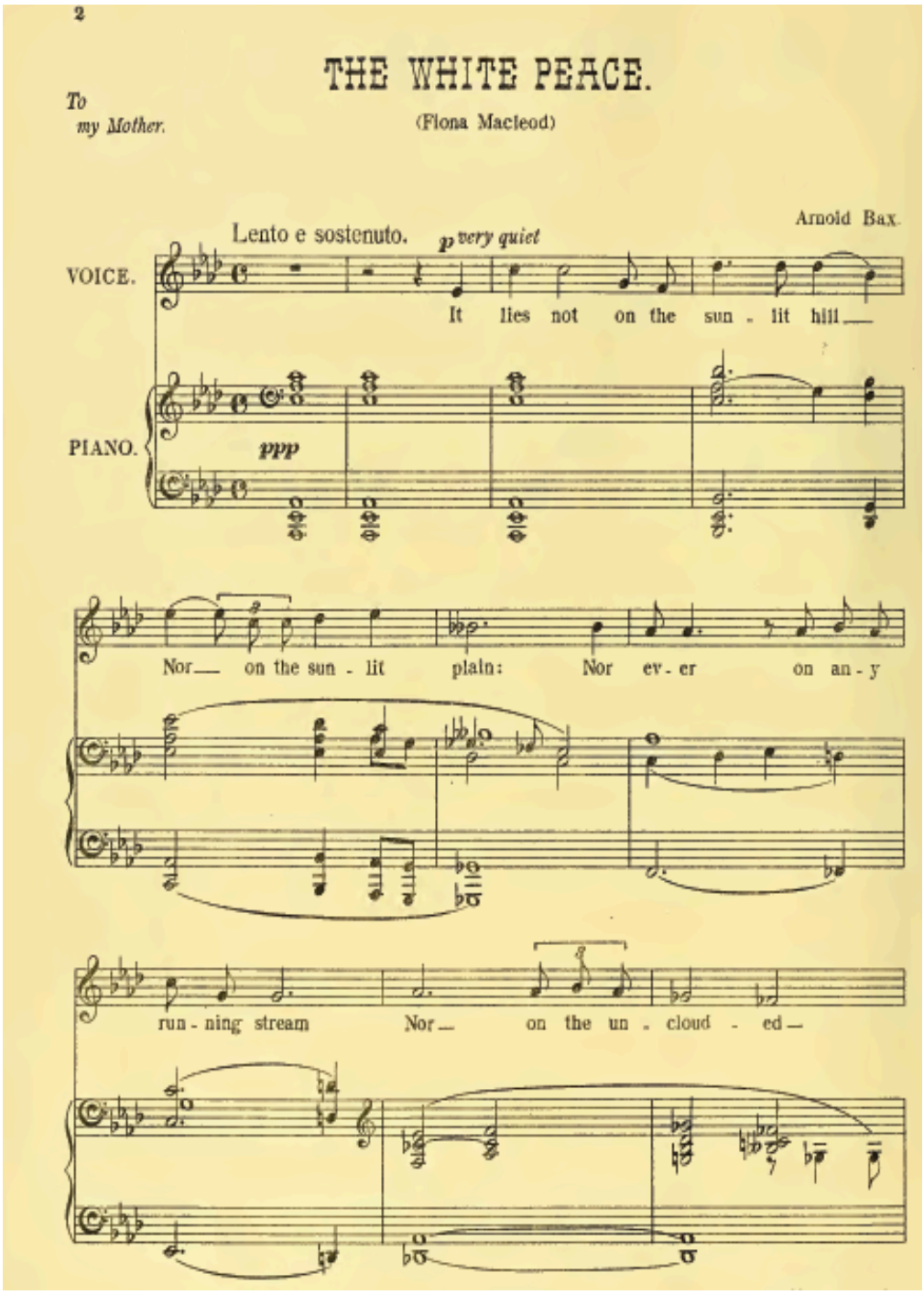
Bax was inspired, like other British composers, by the poetry of Fiona Macleod, and made several settings of Macleod's poetry for voice and piano.[223] His *Album of Seven Songs,* features three settings of Macleod's verse, including, "The White Peace," one of her most famous poems:

---

[222] Anon., "Halle Concert: Thomas Beecham's Success," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser,* Friday, January 28, 2016, 4. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000206/19160128/043/0004?browse=False

[223] For more discussion of Fiona Macleod, see chapter four.

Figure 13: Arnold Bax, "The White Peace," words by Fiona Macleod, 1.[224]



[224] Arnold Bax, "The White Peace" in *Album of Seven Songs* (London: J. W. and Chester, 1919), 2.

The accompaniment features whole and half note rhythms and the chords are embellished with tasteful chromaticism. The juxtaposition of the voice – a sustaining instrument – and the fading tones of percussive yet plangent piano chords is a Twilight topos, and the hovering melody gives the work a haunting, twilight that feeling brings the words to life:

> It lies not on the sunlit hill
> Nor on the sunlit plain:
> Nor ever on any running stream
> Nor on the unclouded main —
> But sometimes, through the Soul of Man,
> Slow moving o'er his pain,
> The moonlight of a perfect peace
> Floods heart and brain.

Though these lyrics don't directly address Celticism, they indulge in the spiritualism essential to Celtic Twilight. Thank to such alluring qualities, Macleod's poetry, especially selections from her collection *From the Hills of Dream* (1907)*,* would also be set by composers such as Frederick Delius (1862-1923), Granville Bantock (1868-1946), and the American Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920). Rutland Boughton (1878-1960) would use selections from it to tie together his opera *The Immortal Hour,* whose main text is also written by Fiona Macleod.

In terms of creating a truly Celtic Twilight mood, only the rare work will outshine "I heard the Piper Piping," from Bax's *Five Irish Songs,* which features lyrics by Joseph Campbell (1879-1944).[225] Unlike "The White Peace," "Piper" doesn't deal with the spiritualist or occult elements of the Celtic Twilight. However, its lonely, melancholy

[225] Campbell was a Belfast born Irish poet and a supporter of the 1916 Easter rising.

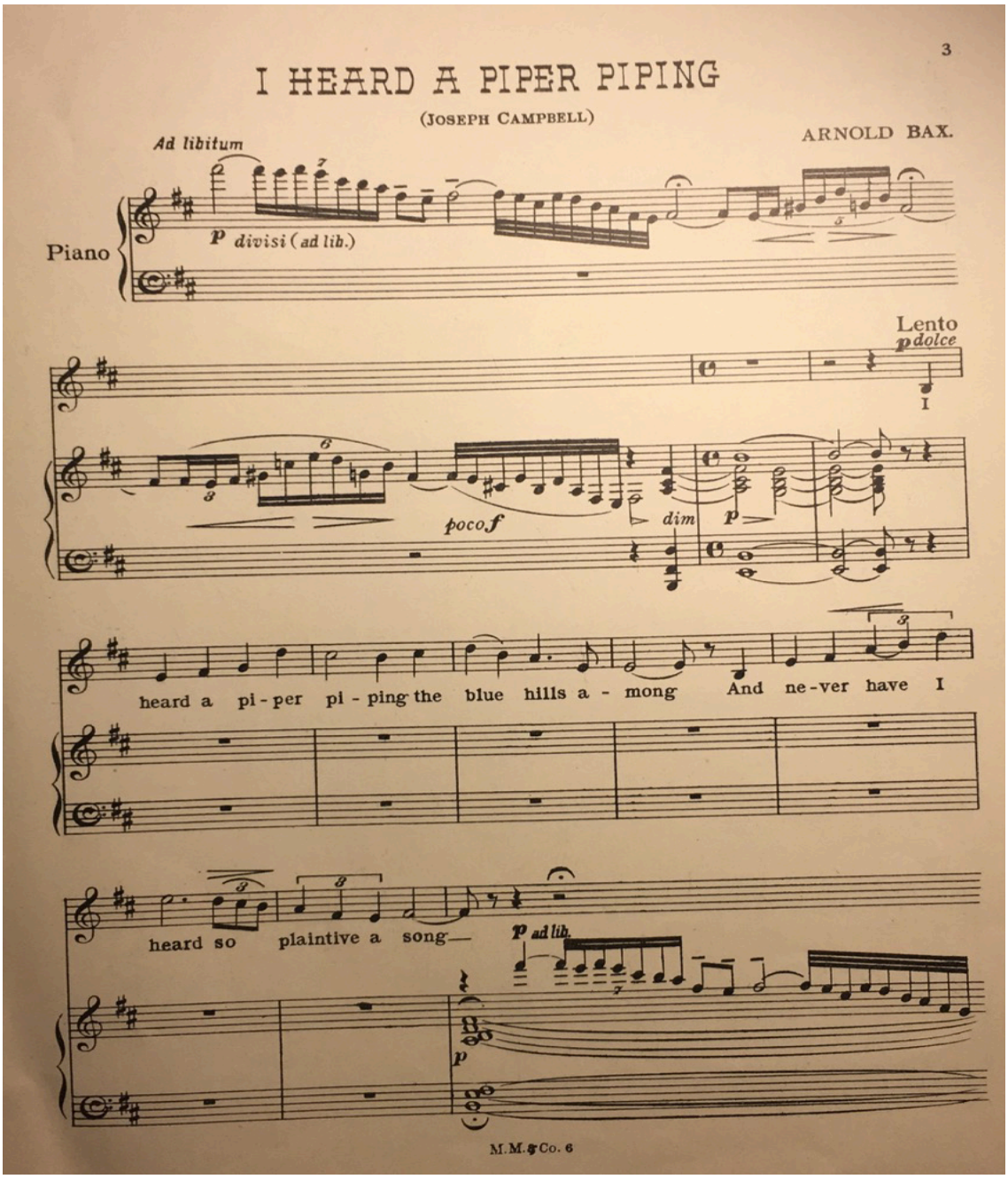
quality conveys a feeling of being at the edge of the world – both physically and spiritually. Is the distant sound of the piper the expression of a sad shepherd boy, as in *Tristan,* or is it a ghost of the *Sídhe* calling to a star-crossed mortal?

Bax's introduction to "I Heard the Piper Piping" features a descending figure that gives way to several chromatic figurations, featuring an alternation between G-sharp and G-natural, and comes to rest on a e minor chord. The verse then enters, set to a tune in the Dorian mode:[226]

> I heard a piper piping
> The blue hills among
> And never have I heard
> So plaintive a song.
>
> It seemed but a part
> Of the hill's melancholy:
> No piper piping there
> Would ever be jolly.
>
> And still the piper piped
> The blue hills among,
> And all the birds were quiet
> To listen to his song.

[226] Though "I Heard the Piper Piping" is an art song, its use of modality is considered a signifier of folksong. The significance of modality to actual folksongs is yet another point of debate for collectors and scholars. Some scholars argue that folksong collectors disproportionally represented modal tunes in their collections, and that there were many tonal tunes that went uncollected. Songs that used the pentatonic scale were also often considered modal by collectors and scholars of the time. Regardless, the use of the Dorian mode here contributes to the song's haunting character. For more regarding modality in folksong see: Julian Onderdonk, "Vaughan Williams and the Modes," *English Folk Dance + Song Society* vol. 7, no. 5 (1999): 609-626.

Figure 14: Arnold Bax, "I Heard a Piper Piping," from *Five Irish Songs,* 3.[227]



[227] Arnold Bax, "I Heard a Piper Piping," From *Five Irish Songs* (London: Murdoch, Murdoch and co., 1921), 3.

The success of settings like Bax's "The White Peace" and "I Heard a Piper Piping" suggests that the intimacy of the art song genre lent itself to the Celtic Twilight aesthetic. The genre offered composers a degree of stylistic leeway and called for a natural brevity which prevented overindulgence in Wagnerian excesses.

Despite Bax's success with small and large forms as well as his luck garnering good reviews during his early career, his music has suffered from neglect. As Stephen Banfield notes, his music, 'failed to generate performances after (his) death." Add to this the rather unfortunate circumstance that "much of Bax's music… went out of print overnight with the fire at Chappell's in 1964."[228] Whatever cards fate may have dealt Bax's oeuvre, many of his major compositions, including *Tintagel*, *In the Faery Hills*, and *Into the Twilight,* and *Cathleen NiHoulihan* deftly interweave late Romantic aesthetics with Celtic myth and lore, and do so on a grand scale. His music has been recently revived, and though it still remains on the fringes of the repertory, his works are essential to British music's Celtic Twilight.

Unlike Bax, Granville Bantock was rarely acclaimed for writing music that was "thin spun" or of "singular delicacy," though he does have his share of smaller scale works. In his larger compositions, Bantock fully embraced the Wagnerian giganticism mentioned by Pirie above. Michael Hurd describes him as a "prolific composer of works

---

[228] Stephen Banfield, "Review: Frank Bridge: A Thematic Catalogue 1900-1941 by Paul Hindemarsh; Bax: A Composer and His Times by Lewis Foreman," *Music and Letters* vol. 66, no. 2 (April, 1985): 183-185.

on the largest scale."[229] His works are "huge in conception, Babylonian in orchestration and catastrophic in economic effect."[230] As a characteristic example of Bantock's lack of economy, his *Celtic Symphony* calls for no less than six harps. Despite Bantock's orchestrational grandeur, critics have found his expressive palette limited. Pirie argues that Bantock was unable to assimilate the harmonic innovations of *Tristan und Isolde* that Bax appears to have so handily incorporated into his music. As Pirie observes,

> Bantock never adopted the advanced harmonic idiom of *Tristan,* let alone *Salome* or *Elektra.* His style, both in orchestration and harmony, suggests rather such works as *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Guntram.* It is based on common chords and diatonic discords; the complex chromatic suspensions of *Tristan* are outside its scope, as is the dissonant counterpoint of Strauss's more advanced works.[231]

Accusations against Bantock's harmonic daring must be taken with a grain of salt: his *Sappho* (1906) has a Tristan chord in nearly every bar. Nevertheless, Bantock made up for whatever his perceived shortcomings were with a penchant for the unusual. He was "a man of wide culture… an omnivorous reader… master of French and German, Persian and Arabic, as likely to correspond in Latin as in English."[232] He was fascinated by eastern thought and oriental philosophy, and he associated with likeminded

---

[229] Michael Hurd, "Introduction," *Sir Granville Bantock: Hebridean and Celtic Symphonies* (1991). https://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA66450

[230] Peter J. Pirie, "Bantock and His Generation," 715-717.

[231] Peter J. Pirie and David Brock, "Granville Bantock," *Grove Music Online,* 20 January, 2001. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000001965?rskey=dKm0po&result=1

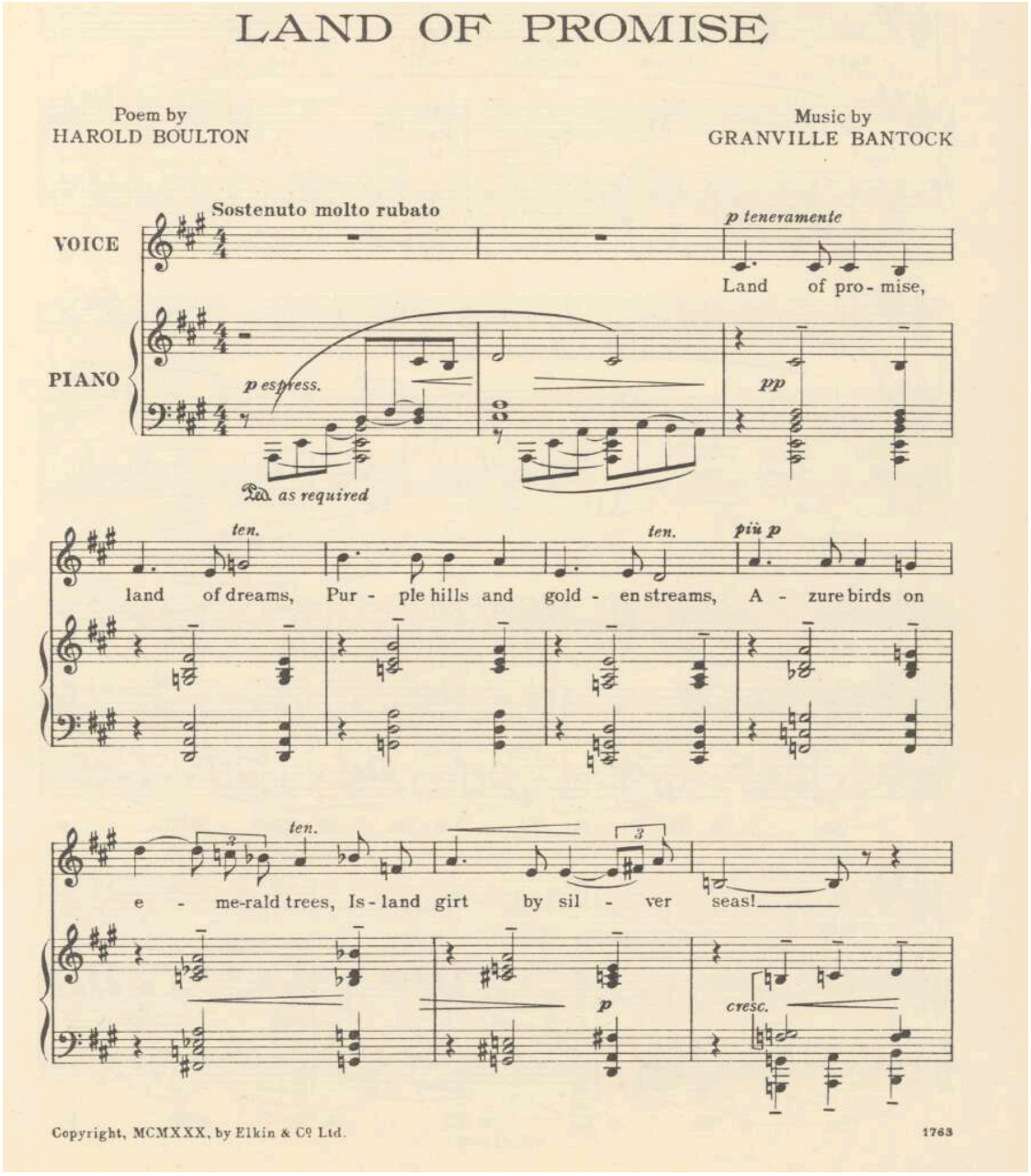
[232] Michael Hurd, "Introduction." https://www.hyperionrecords.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA66450

individuals who shared his occult religious interests, including fellow composer Cyril Scott (1879-1970) and photographer George Davison (1854-1930).[233]

Celtic subjects especially interested Bantock. He became enamored with Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's *Folksongs of the Hebrides*, an interest that led to the composition of his *Hebridean* and *Celtic* symphonies. Kennedy-Fraser's collections also prompted Bantock to work in smaller forms and try his hand at arranging folksong. Bantock's approach to folksong is notable for its sophisticated use of chromaticism. Consider the opening pages of "Land of Promise," arranged for voice and piano:

[233] Anon., "The Speculative or Secret Art," *Aperture,* no. 104 (Fall, 1986): 51.

Figure 15: Granville Bantock: *Land of Promise*, 1.[234]



The pungent modulations found in measure seven are far more modern and effective than Kennedy-Fraser's modest harmonizations. On the other hand, the

[234] Granville Bantock, "Land of Promise" in *Hebridean Songs, words by Harold Boulton* (London: Regent Street, 1930).

unobtrusive accompaniment and the gentle rhythmic flow of the melody are redolent of her arrangements. The work's lyrics by Harold Boulton (1859-1935), an enthusiast of Scottish folksong, invoke a perennial topic of Celtic Twilight reverie, the 'land of youth':

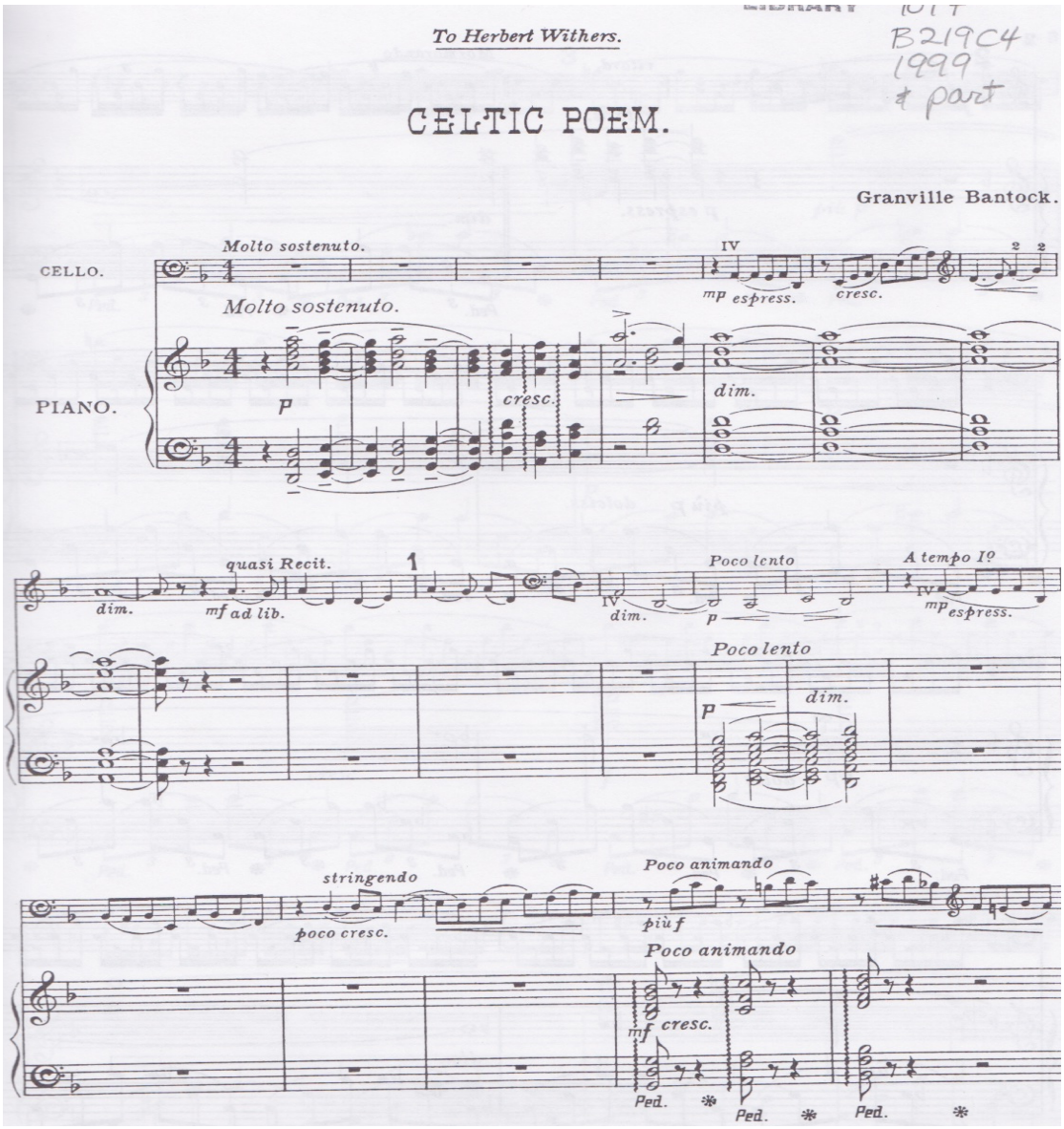
> Land of promise, land of dreams
> Purple hills, golden streams
> Azure bird on emerald trees
> Island girt by silver seas

These lines, while perhaps suitable for a song, are not of the highest caliber. They highlight one of the weaknesses of Celtic Twilight. As mentioned earlier, the folksy side of the Twilight could imbue works with a kitschy quality. Poets like Yeats and Macleod could transform the genre into something ominous and powerful. However, in the hand of lesser poets the 'boundary between this world and the next' could come across more like an advertisement for a timeshare in Maui.

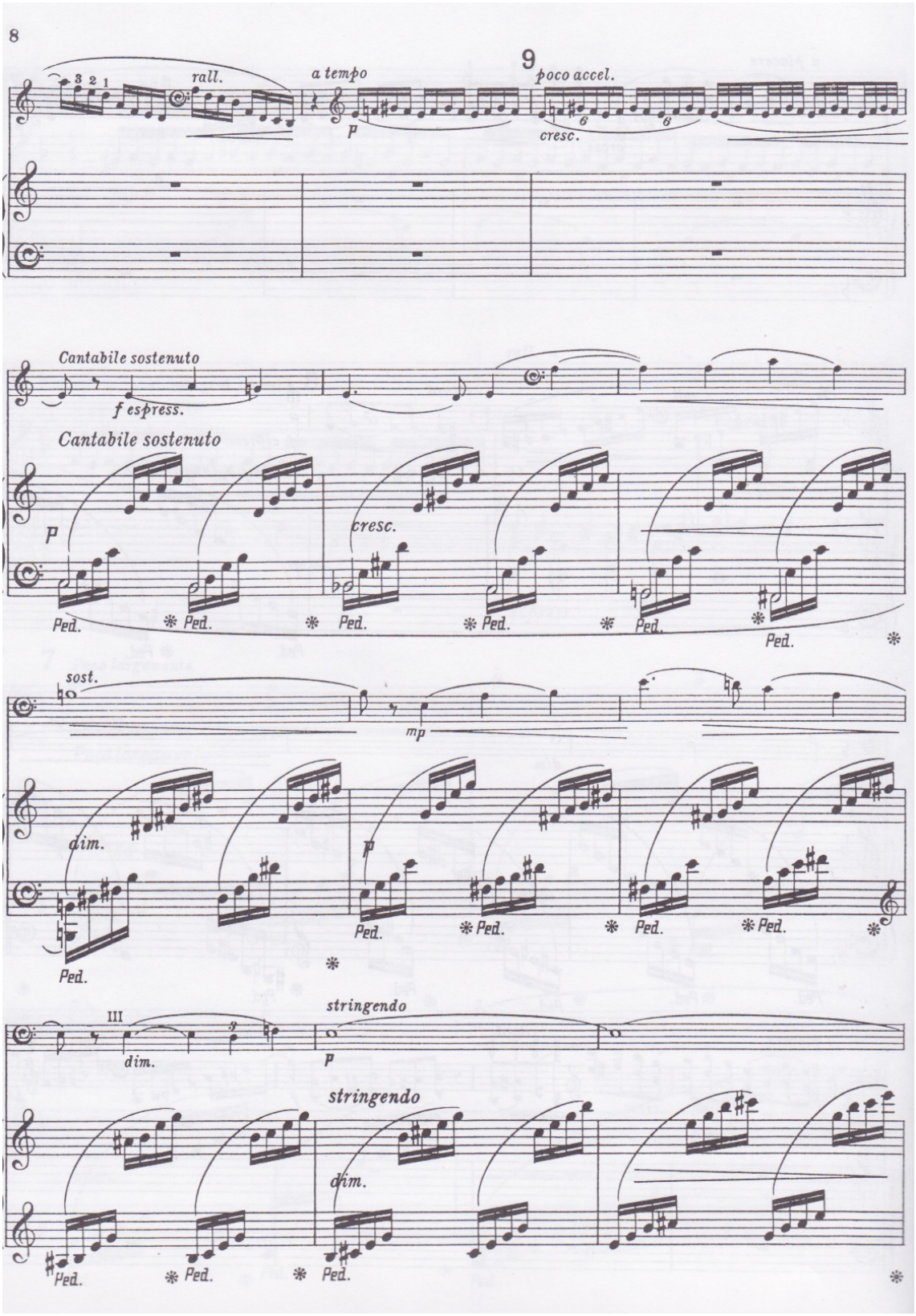
Thankfully, Bantock's engagement with Kennedy-Fraser's settings also took the form of instrumental works, and thus avoided the problems of setting weak poetry. His *Celtic Poem: "The Land of the Ever Young"* for cello and piano treats much of same themes of "Land of Promise," but does so through a programmatic approach. Lest there be any ambiguity about Kennedy-Fraser's influence upon this particular work, Bantock selected his narrative in her *Songs of the Hebrides* (the following passage was written by her collaborator and 'Gaelic translator,' Kenneth Macleod):

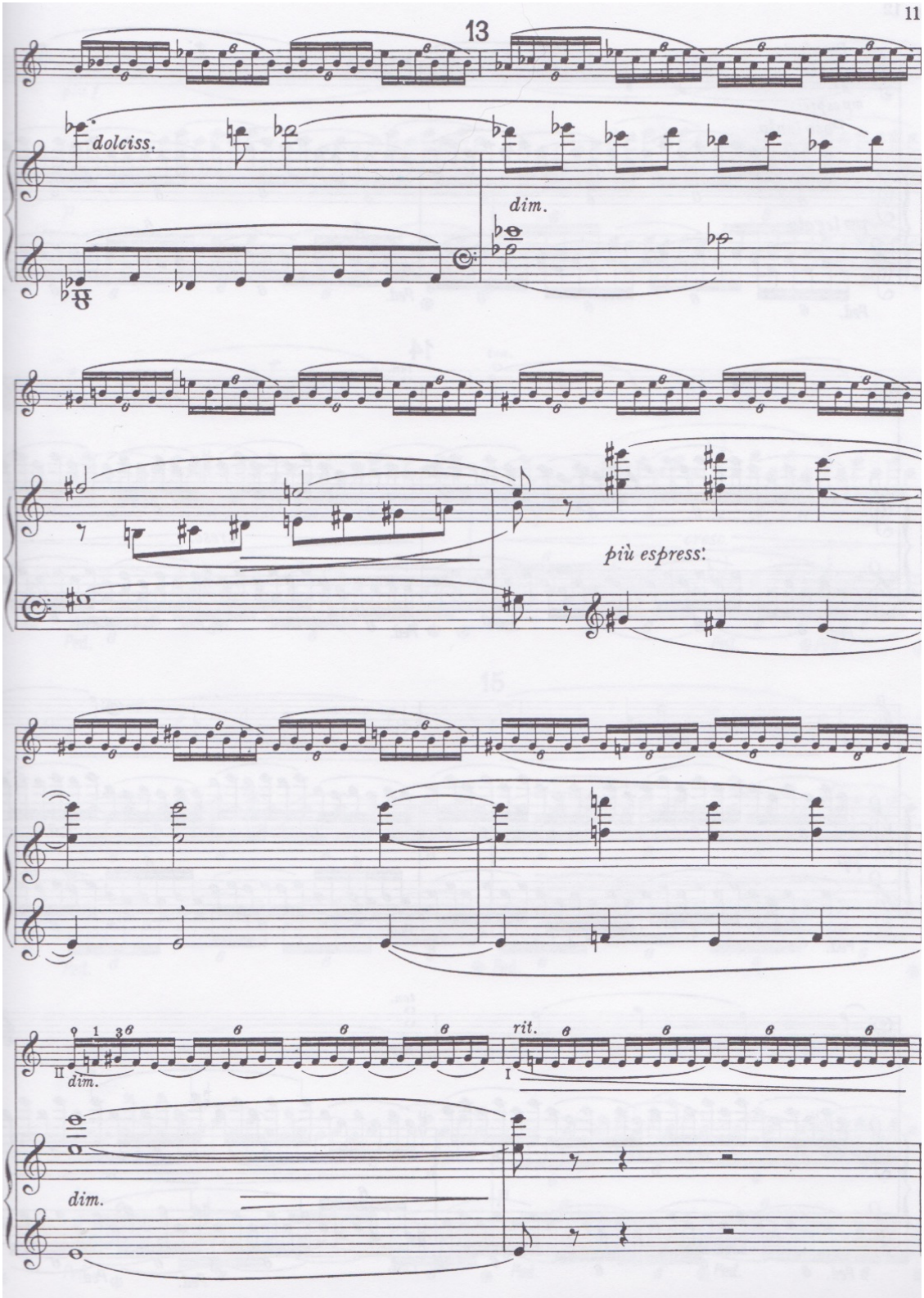
> The Celtic Heaven, *Tir-nan-Óg,* the Land-of-the-ever-Young, lies somewhere to the west of the Hebrides, where the sun sets. And the Celtic soul ever waits on the shore of the great Sea for the coming of the White Barge which, year in year out, ferries the elect across the waves to the Isle where they would be. And that same Barge needs wind nor sail no rudder to make her speed like a bird over the sea; the wish of the Fate that guides her, is her all and her in all.

Figure 16: Granville Bantock, *Celtic Poem: "The Land of the Ever Young,"* 1,8, 11.[235]



[235] Granville Bantock, *Celtic Poem: "The Land of the Ever Young,"* (Masters Music Pubications inc., originally published 1916).


8
9
rall.
a tempo
poco accel.
cresc.
Cantabile sostenuto
f espress.
Cantabile sostenuto
cresc.
Ped.
sost.
mp
dim.
Ped.
stringendo
dim.
stringendo
dim.
Ped.


13
dolciss.
dim.
più espress.
rit.
dim.
dim.

The first four measures are quite possible influenced by the open chord spacing often found in Kennedy-Fraser's settings. Similarly, in measures five through seven, the cello melody unfolds against a D-A dyad. This is in turn reminiscent of the unaccompanied vocal passage at the start of Bax's "I heard a Piper Piping," and is set over a d minor scale. Soon Bantock abandons this tonal approach for his own brand of chromatic, melodic embellishment. The cantabile melody on page eight features chromatic inflections and is accompanied by arpeggiated chords suggestive of the fabled instrument of Celtic lore, the harp. However, this 'harp' can modulate freely. Meanwhile, on page eleven (rehearsal number 13), the cello and piano exchange melody and accompaniment, and the cello adopts a figuration that invokes the rolling sea over which the white barge must travel. After a dramatic finale with sixteenth-note figurations on the cello and an effective crescendo, the music dies away toward a final elegiac phrase accompanied by plangent open chords similar to those that introduce the work. From this ending, one can only conclude that the 'Celtic soul' has reached *Tir-Nan-Óg* and is finally at rest.

Bantock tried his hand at a Celtic Twilight opera, *The Seal Woman* (1924). With a libretto written by Kennedy-Fraser*, The Seal Woman* is the story of a seal who becomes a woman, and then turns back into a seal to avoid a bothersome husband. Conducted by Adrian Boult and starring Kennedy-Fraser in the role of 'Old Crone,' The *Seal Woman* ran for a fortnight at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre during September 1924. Despite the assistance of Boult and Kennedy-Fraser, *The Seal Woman* proved dramatically inert. It offered to its audiences "dreams within dreams" that somehow managed to "show very

little interest in the warmer emotions, with which opera most naturally associates itself."[236] Despite his tasteful choice of an orchestra consisting of "ten strings, one flute, cor anglais, clarinet and horn, a harp and drums," Bantock, like other Celtic Twilight composers before him, made the fatal mistake of self-indulgent composing, and performances lasted up to three hours.

Bantock may have contributed works of uneven quality to the musical Celtic Twilight, but he played a significant role as an enthusiast of Celtic culture and a champion of Kennedy-Fraser's work. In particular, by sharing the *Song of the Hebrides* with his pupils Joseph Holbrooke and Rutland Boughton, he inspired them to take up Celtic subjects in their works. While Holbrooke's attempt to treat Celtic myth failed, Boughton's *The Immortal Hour,* which specifically bears the influence of Kennedy-Fraser's pentatonic melodies as well as Bantock's rich harmonies, enjoyed great success.

As the above works suggest, the primary ingredients for a work of musical Celtic Twilight often include a Wagnerian compositional aesthetic and a degree of influence from the worlds of Celtic folklore and myth. Every composer of the period was familiar with Wagner, but the folkloric influence came from various sources. Kennedy-Fraser's songs offered a model for composers like Bantock who delved into the aesthetics of Celtic folk-song. In the case of Elgar, the supposed folk-like qualities of *Grania and Diarmid* came not from any actual folk influence, but rather, as Moore suggested, from

---

[236] "Anon. "A Celtic Folk Opera" *The Times* (London, England), Monday, September 29, 1924; 10. Issue 43769. http://find.galegroup.com/dvnw/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=DVNW&userGroupName=ucriverside&tabID=T003&docPage=article&docId=CS168367933&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0

musical intuition. There were also ways of weaving Celtic Twilight into musical works not linked to compositional technique. For example, Bax immersed himself in Celtic life, living in a remote Irish village among peasants, and thereby arguably added a touch of Celtic Twilight to the majority of his works. In a more practical vein, a suitable extra-musical program, such as the one included at the start of Bantock's *Celtic Poem*, could also imbue a work with a degree of Celtic Twilight. Celtic Twilights' spiritual and occult associations are also worthy of consideration. These could come through in settings of successful Twilight poetry, but the unfortunate verses of Bantock's *The Land of Promise* could never elicit a profound reaction from a cultivated listener. On the other hand, Bantock's wordless *Celtic Poem* has the potential to conjure up a spiritualist reverie, but, if divorced from its program, listeners could go blissfully unaware of this aspect of the work.

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's Symphony No. 3 in F Minor, which the composer himself subtitled 'Irish,' presents itself as an example of a work whose Celtic Twilight status is debatable. Stanford wrote music with broadly Celtic associations throughout his career. He helped edit and arrange two collections of Irish folksong, including the *Petrie Collection* (approximately 1500 songs are in this collection) and *The National Songbook*. Some of his most celebrated works are his five Irish Rhapsodies and his 'Irish' Symphony. The 'Irish' Symphony debuted in 1887 – six years before the publication of Yeats's volume. While the first movement is, according to Paul Rodmell, "not evidently Irish in character," the second movement, a scherzo, "captures excellently the *perpetuum mobile* nature of Irish dance music." Other critics hailed the slow third movement as

creating a "dreamy melancholy which conveys an intense poetic impression." Stanford claimed that the main theme of this movement was "an old Irish lament" from the *Petrie Collection*, but others found it to be an overt allusion to Brahms' Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, debuted only two years earlier. Rodmell argues that, regardless of this controversy, the movement, apart from the D major oboe theme "which represents Irish bagpipes," is "somewhat lacking in Irish character."[237] Finally, the fourth movement quotes two Irish folk songs, "Remember the Glories of Brian the Brave" and "Let Erin Remember." "Let Erin Remember," originally written by Thomas Moore (1779-1852), invokes an heroic Celtic past, and similarly engages in nostalgic remembrance:

> Thus sighing, look through the waves of time
> For the long-faded glories, they cover

The 'Irish' symphony was hugely successful in its own day – Mahler conducted it – and it is still played today. Though the 'Irish' symphony invokes Irishness with varying amounts of success throughout its movements, its 'Irishness' cannot be easily tied to the Celtic Twilight. Essential elements to Celtic Twilight, such as the liminality, supernaturalism, and spiritualism, are missing from the work. The 'dreamy melancholy' of the slow movement, which begins with and is built around the harp, may be suited to Celtic Twilight, but to label the 'Irish' Symphony as a work of Celtic Twilight means overlooking many of the distinguishing elements of the aesthetic.

---

[237] Rodmell concedes that "although one can see a portrait of an Irish lough on a rainy day, this would not be so readily apparent if one did not know that the symphony carried the 'Irish' moniker." *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 124-129.

One can also inquire about Stanford's possible status in the Celtic Twilight from a biographical perspective. Despite being a staunch Unionist, he joined the Irish Literary Society, and he was "seen very much as the Irish 'representative' of the United Kingdom." However, in 1900, Yeats, a member of the committee, "accused the British of 'robbing the South African republics of their liberty as it has robbed Ireland of hers.'" This statement "was too much for Stanford's Unionist sensibilities," and he resigned "after Yeats refused to retract his comments."[238] Should Stanford be considered a Celtic Twilight composer when he advocated for Unionism and fought with Yeats over the political issues that motivated him to write *The Celtic Twilight* in the first place?

This question mixes politics and art, and I have argued above that one of the keys to Celtic Twilight's diffusion into the broader artistic culture is that it became separated from overt nationalism. However, the retrenchment to conservativism that Stanford's resignation and Unionist sympathies both symbolize are out of step, not only with the politics of the Revival, but with the radicalism at the heart of Celtic Twilight. The reveries of Celtic Twilight are inspired not by practical-minded thinking but by that most irrational need to experience something supernatural. It is suited best to dreamers and wanderers like Bax, who wholeheartedly adopted Ireland as his homeland, and was content to keep away from popular centers, staying instead in distant locales. It is best suited to composers like Rutland Boughton, who dared to rage when he felt audiences had missed the symbolic dimensions of his Celtic Twilight opera, *The Immortal Hour*. Out of the musical works discussed in this dissertation, *The Immortal Hour*, by engaging

[238] Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford: Man and Musician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 368.

with nearly all the signifiers found within Yeats's original volume, espouses the most deeply the aesthetics of Celtic Twilight.