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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

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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.
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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


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

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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 *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.


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

8 Ibid., 12.

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.”\(^\text{10}\) 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,

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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.\(^\text{11}\)
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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.\(^\text{12}\) 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

\(^{10}\) 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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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,” \textit{Irish University Review} vol. 33, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2003): 79.

Irish literature. 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,” 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.

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.*

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. 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-

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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), Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), and John Millington Synge (1871-1909), though their aesthetics and endeavors varied, were all dedicated 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. 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

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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.\(^{22}\)

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“Pre-Christian Irish paganism,” The Túatha Dé Danann/Sídhe and Celtic mythology as a living tradition
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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.” 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.”

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 resurfaced 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

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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 Sidhe. The Sidhe 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.

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 Sidhe.” 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 Sidhe 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 Sidhe and Túatha Dé Danann. According to Lady Gregory’s mythology, the Sidhe/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 Mil 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 Sidhe, 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 Muirtheme (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.” 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 Sídhé also blurs the cultural value of these two groups. Some revivalists wished to associate the Túatha 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 Sídhé, 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 Sídhé 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….”

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.’ 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.
³² Ibid., 295.
³³ Ibid., 300.
Even as 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 Tíatha Dé Danann/Sídhe as Ireland’s pre-Christian pagan gods could be offered to the masses.

\(^{34}\) 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.”

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. 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”).

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,

Scotland, Wales, Brittany, and parts of the Iberian Peninsula. 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. 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), penal laws which persecuted Catholics (as well as dissenting Protestants such as Puritans

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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


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/e-eight/ireland/ire-land.htm See: Michael Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question* (London: Methuen, 1984).
England, Hungary, etc.). This vogue led James Macpherson to publish *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books*. 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. The work’s

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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. McKeen 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.” McKeen 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). 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 European classicism.” Authors in Nordic countries, even Ireland, were “similarly involved in using the example of Ossian in counteracting the barbaric image of


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 François-Hippolyte Barthélemon’s opera Oithôna (1768), Gaetano Donizetti’s Malvina, Scène 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 Symphony49 but also by “Schubert’s Ossians Gesänge (A collection of settings of Ossianic texts for voice and piano published in 1830), 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


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.” 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. This scoring is not unlike that from Brahms’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.”

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.
include “open spacing, parallelism in voice leading, pentatonic or modal melodies, striking orchestral colors, and fanfare-like motives emblematic of the hunt.” 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.” 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. 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 “Fraulein vom See.”

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.\(^5^7\) 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.\(^5^8\) Such images and fancies became the stock and trade of Celtic romance.\(^5^9\) Scott’s ultimate act of invented tradition manifested itself

\(^5^7\) 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-Ukranian) Frameworks,” 82. Deane, *Strange Country*, 33.

\(^5^8\) 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.

\(^5^9\) 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.\(^\text{60}\) 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.\(^\text{61}\)

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.”\(^\text{62}\) Yet this romanticized Celticism brought

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\(^{60}\) 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. 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 Cumhul 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

state of immortality. 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.

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

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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.

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.  

*The Wanderings of Oisin* is a dire pronouncement regarding the influence of Christianity upon Irish culture. 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. 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. 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.

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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.

This elevation is part of a strategy of oblique self-aggrandizement that Yeats would continue to use throughout his career.\textsuperscript{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* 

\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,”\textsuperscript{74} he also observes that some of Yeats’s few references to Macpherson come “at the time of the publication of Yeats’s own \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{75} If Yeats did indeed paraphrase Comyn, Macpherson’s predecessor, then one could attribute the similarities between the language of \textit{Wanderings} and Macpherson’s epics to possibly shared sources. However, one cannot know to what degree O’Looney’s \textit{translation into English} was itself influenced by Macpherson’s style.

\textsuperscript{72} Gomes, “Reviving Oisin,” 387.

\textsuperscript{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,” \textit{Past & Present} no. 124 (Aug., 1989): 70.


\textsuperscript{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;

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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

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. 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!

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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 again 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 from 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.\(^{81}\)

\(^{80}\) English translation obtained from *The Lieder Net Archive.*
http://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=26526

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*

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\(^82\) 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.

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. 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). 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.

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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 their 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 Kightley (*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). 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). 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

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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.\(^8\)

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,

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\(^8\) “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

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.\textsuperscript{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:

\begin{quote}
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!\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{90} Hyde, ed., “The King of Ireland’s Son” in *Beside the Fire*, 19-21. (*Gassa:* in Irish, *geasa*—mystic obligations)


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:

\begin{quote}
But when he came to his Abbey, he found a wondrous change;
\end{quote}
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 vermilion 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 Danann’ [sic], who when no longer worshipped and fed offerings, dwindled away in the popular imagination and are now only a few spans high.52

That the Sídhe, as a host of fairy folk, and the Tíatha 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.

Interlude: Folktales collections and literacy

If the transcription of folktales was motivated 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.’”

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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).  

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.  

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.”  

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).”  

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


98 Ibid., 17.

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.


\(^{103}\) 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

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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


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,” and a sympathetic Munro found her accompaniments to be “of great originality, beauty, and fitness.” 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.”

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.


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.
“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

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:

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THE BALLAD OF MACNEIL OF BARRA.

Words from John Macneill, Eriskay, M'g Maclean, Barra; and Island of Eigg version.

Moderato, $d = \frac{172}{\text{quarter notes}}$.

Like the sea.

To be sung with an appreciation of the melodic and rhythmical beauty of the old air. Not to be too freely recited.

Ru-a-ri Chief of Bar-ra ó-hu Plun-der'd ships of

O-bhraid-aig dhuibh o-hi o-hu Bhrist na glas-an

"good'Queen Bess, O- i-o- u-o fal-u-o Ha-

2nd Verse.

i-o ó-hu Him, the Scots King o-hi ó-hu

*Italian vowel sounds as oh is ee or oo as aw.

The story of the ballad refers to the capture by treachery of Raas, the stormy Chief of the Macneill, in the time of King James VI.

**All the verses of the Gaelic song may be sung to the accompaniment of the 1st verse or preferably to that of 1st & 2nd verses alternately.
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.

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A MHAIRI BHOIDHEACH.

A Mhairi bhoidh each 'S a Mhairi ghaol ach A Mhairi bhoidh each gur mòr mo
ghaol ort, A Mhairi bhoidh each gur tu a chlaidh mi 'S a dh'fhòg mi bròn ach gun dòbgh air t'fhao tainn.
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Figure 5: An untitled chant, *Folksongs of the Hebrides*, xx
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.’

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. 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.

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.

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.

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 Pigeorum 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.
reedsthe “song of the birds,” and the “moan of the waves.” 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.

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.

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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.’”\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{122} Yeats, \textit{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 \textit{style} of things - is identical with their meaning.” Yeats pre-occupation with treating folktale\textit{styled}ly rather than authentically seems synchronous with this notion. “Introduction,” 5.

\textsuperscript{123} W. B. Yeats, \textit{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 Sidhe.\(^\text{124}\)

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, \textit{The Celtic Twilight}, 30.
of the Irish verses than one finds in most translations.” 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?” Finally, he saves for himself the story’s last words:

it may be that in a few years Fable, who changes mortalities to immortalties 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.

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.

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 groundbreaking 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

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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?\textsuperscript{135}

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

\begin{quote}
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 our feet.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{135} This passage was found worthy of quotation by an early reviewer of \textit{The Celtic Twilight} in \textit{The Flag of Ireland}, Saturday, 23 December, 1893, 5.

\textsuperscript{136} W. B. Yeats, \textit{The Celtic Twilight}, 5.

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 Fêtes 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.” 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.

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.

In another chapter, ‘The Untiring Ones,’ Yeats remarks,

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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.\textsuperscript{143}

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

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

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 \textit{The Celtic Twilight}. In his chapter “The Sorcerers,” he describes encounters with men who have access to the “dark powers.”\textsuperscript{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:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 108.


\textsuperscript{145} Yeats, \textit{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’).

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\(^{147}\) Yeats joined the society in 1887 and later resigned to participate in the more extreme ‘Golden Dawn.’

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.”

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.\textsuperscript{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.

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

Yeats’s \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{153} Sundermark notes that in Charles Perrault’s \textit{Contes}, “fée (fairy) comes to be synonymous with magic.” Yet Yeats’s fairyworld is more than a ‘magical’ space, rather, “he associates ‘fairy’ with \textit{the occult} and with inspiration.” “Yeats and the Fairy Tale,” 103.

\textsuperscript{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 of the Abbey Theatre. 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

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 Neauouvea 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:

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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-Raphaelite. For Yeats, Romanticism was no erstwhile companion; John Yeats had indoctrinated his son with the ruthless tenacity of a military drill sergeant.

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? 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. 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. 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

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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), 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 *Sidhe* 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 off 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. Synge’s

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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” 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.  

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 venerated 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.


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


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. 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.”

*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.”

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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.

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

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


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

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Twilight, and its accompanying occult associations, were also “fashionable in many London circles.” 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. 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 Baudelaière’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 “synesthetic 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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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

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\textsuperscript{179} Clarke, \textit{The Celtic Twilight}, 35.
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\textsuperscript{180} Brown, \textit{The Life of W.B. Yeats}, 83.
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\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 83.
\end{flushright}
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

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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.

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.”\(^\text{184}\) 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.\(^\text{185}\) 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.\(^\text{186}\) Whatever the initial impetus behind the idea, Moore remained fixated upon it well after

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\(^\text{185}\) Elgar would also conduct the music in several cities, suggesting he may have come around to the work’s quality.

\(^\text{186}\) 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 three 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.” 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

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191 Ibid., 183.
painting, wherin King David is represented as playing before Saul on an iron grand piano.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Tristan und Isolde}, and whose funeral march in \textit{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 \textit{Grania and Diarmid} to score it as a concert piece for full orchestra.

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

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.” Rutland Boughton also employs the clarinet in his introduction to The Immortal Hour:

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Figure 9: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, 1.\(^{195}\)

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 unknown. 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.

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.\footnote{And yet, The Dream of Gerontius, op. 38, is very Wagnerian.}

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).\footnote{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.} 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
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

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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.


\(^{205}\) 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*
Shona, Talliensen’s song, and Nocturne: Fairyland, are just some of the pieces he composed based on Celtic themes for a variety of ensembles.

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, Holbrooke 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.”

*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

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(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.”

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

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Tristan). In his tone poem, Tintagel, Bax pays homage to Wagner by recalling passages from Siegfried and Götterdämmerung, and Tristan und Isolde, 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.” 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), 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

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

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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.” 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. 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*.”

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216 In accordance with this, one may offer the slight criticism that Bax’s music is oddly diffuse.
in the work’s climax. 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

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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’*

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.  

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.  

By 1921, with the Wilde scandal a distant memory, Bax’s Tristanesque *Tintagel* presented itself, thanks to the composer’s 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*  

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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 faeries – 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.”

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. His *Album of Seven Songs*, features three settings of Macleod’s verse, including, “The White Peace,” one of her most famous poems:

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223 For more discussion of Fiona Macleod, see chapter four.
Figure 13: Arnold Bax, “The White Peace,” words by Fiona Macleod, 1.  


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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). Unlike “The White Peace,” “Piper” doesn’t deal with the spiritualist or occult elements of the Celtic Twilight. However, its lonely, melancholy

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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 *Sidhe* 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:

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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.
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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.  

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 overindulgences 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.” 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

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on the largest scale.”\textsuperscript{229} His works are “huge in conception, Babylonian in orchestration and catastrophic in economic effect.”\textsuperscript{230} As a characteristic example of Bantock’s lack of economy, his \textit{Celtic Symphony} calls for no less than six harps. Despite Bantock’s orchestral grandeur, critics have found his expressive palette limited. Pirie argues that Bantock was unable to assimilate the harmonic innovations of \textit{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 \textit{Tristan}, let alone \textit{Salome} or \textit{Elektra}. His style, both in orchestration and harmony, suggests rather such works as \textit{Der fliegende Holländer} and \textit{Guntram}. It is based on common chords and diatonic discords; the complex chromatic suspensions of \textit{Tristan} are outside its scope, as is the dissonant counterpoint of Strauss’s more advanced works.\textsuperscript{231}

Accusations against Bantock’s harmonic daring must be taken with a grain of salt: his \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{232} He was fascinated by eastern thought and oriental philosophy, and he associated with likeminded

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{230} Peter J. Pirie, “Bantock and His Generation,” 715-717.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Michael Hurd, “Introduction.” https://www.hyperionrecords.co.uk/dc.asp?dc=D_CDA66450
\end{itemize}
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individuals who shared his occult religious interests, including fellow composer Cyril Scott (1879-1970) and photographer George Davison (1854-1930).\textsuperscript{233}

Celtic subjects especially interested Bantock. He became enamored with Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s \textit{Folksongs of the Hebrides}, an interest that led to the composition of his \textit{Hebridean} and \textit{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:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}
The pungent modulations found in measure seven are far more modern and effective than Kennedy-Fraser’s modest harmonizations. On the other hand, the

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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 nor 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.  

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The first four measures are quite possibly 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.”

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

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.” 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.” 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 conservatism 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

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with nearly all the signifiers found within Yeats’s original volume, espouses the most deeply the aesthetics of Celtic Twilight.
Chapter 4: Rutland Boughton and The Immortal Hour

The inaugural 1922-1923 run of Rutland Boughton’s The Immortal Hour at the Regent at King’s Cross Theatre in London, fueled by a devoted, almost hysterical audience, reached a previously unheard-of run for a British opera of 216 performances.\textsuperscript{239} The following year saw a revival of 160 performances, with subsequent revivals bringing the total to over 600. While The Immortal Hour failed to find success overseas, its London triumph was nothing short of phenomenal, and it “still holds the world-record for a continuous run of any serious opera by an Englishman.”\textsuperscript{240} This meteoric yet fleeting popularity makes The Immortal Hour a ripe subject for this study.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{239} A notice regarding the end of the work’s first historic run reads:

‘Immortal Hour’ Ended: There was a scene of extraordinary enthusiasm at the Regent Theatre on Saturday night, when ‘The Immortal Hour’ was played for the 216\textsuperscript{th} and last time. An Album containing the autographs of 226 persons of some distinction was publicly presented to [producer] Mr. Barry V. Jackson. Princess Helena Victoria, with whom was Princess Marie Louise, made the presentation with the company standing all around. Sir Denison Ross organized the collection of the names.


\textsuperscript{240} http://rutland-boughton-music-trust.blogspot.com/p/rutland-boughton.html (Accessed February, 1 2015 – the trust is under new management and the website is now closed).

\textsuperscript{241} Even during its time, the reasons for the success of The Immortal Hour were not comprehended fully. Consider the following review from its first revival at the Regent in 1923:

Only a very optimistic person would have prophesied that Mr. Rutland Boughton’s music drama would have run over a hundred nights and then be revived again after the lapse of a month or two. Yet this is the case, and on Wednesday last ‘The
One of the most interesting features of *The Immortal Hour* is that it was the victim of an unusual malady: a strange case of repeated attendance. In his monograph, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals*, Michael Hurd states that audience members who visited the Regent did so with a devotion that prompted them to return “to see it time and time again.”\(^{242}\) Among those who repeatedly attended *The Immortal Hour* were the Princesses Marie Louise (1872-1956) and Helena Victoria (1870-1948). According to Hurd, the gossip columns “had a merry time” recording their visits, “devoting to them some of the fervor normally accorded to batting averages (in cricket).”\(^{243}\) Yet even though Marie Louise attended *The Immortal Hour* fifty-two times, the papers reported that she was still outdone by the “claims of a certain Miss Parker to a record of 133 performances.”\(^{244}\) Who was this “Miss Parker” that managed to attend over half the performances of a record-breaking run of an English opera, and what compelled

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Immortal Hour’ was received so enthusiastically that the short season at the Regent Theatre promises to be more successful than the previous one. The truth is that ‘The Immortal Hour’ has become a cult. It would appear that most of the audience had heard the play many times, and evidently the oftener it is seen and heard the more excited one gets about it. To a comparative novice, who has only seen the play once or twice, the enormous enthusiasm for this rather shadowy tale of a mortal’s dream for a beauty not of the earth is not altogether understandable. But it exists, and the reception on Wednesday was reminiscent of some of the first nights at the Old vic.


\(^{243}\) Ibid., 149.

\(^{244}\) Ibid., 149.
her to this feat? If Miss Parker’s reasons for attending the work are for the present moment lost to history, the question of just what motivated her to see *The Immortal Hour* so often still remains significant, if only for one reason: while most British composers might have been overjoyed at *The Immortal Hour*’s success, Boughton, rather than feeling elated, was downright “horrified.”

Boughton was particularly upset that “a work into which he had poured his very soul had been taken up by the rich and idle as a fashionable plaything.” The newspapers, to Boughton’s chagrin, confirmed that “all fashionable London” was “running to see” *The Immortal Hour*. The work’s high profile guests included the Marchioness of Londonderry, Lord and Lady Ridley, Lady Winifride Elwes, Lord Clifton, Lord Beaverbrook, Lady Maud Warrender, Lady Cunard, Lady Falmouth, Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fox Pitt, the Duchess of Sutherland, Lady Betty Butler, etc. No doubt this list could have continued for quite some time, and while it is refreshing that name dropping must not have been Boughton’s cup of tea, it is possible that his reasons for bristling at the presence of the elite were more political than practical. He was a staunch socialist, and his beliefs took no cues form a desire to be “fashionable,” or to rub elbows with the upper class. His unapologetic views clashed with the politics of royalty,

245 Ibid., 149.

246 Ibid., 149.


248 Hurd, *Rutland Boughton*, 149.

Lady Winifride Elwes, daughter of the Eighth Earl of Denbigh, was the widow of the great tenor Gervase Elwes, who had died in a tragic accident in 1921.
business, and the affluent, to the degree that he “refused to conduct (The Immortal Hour) for a suggested visit of the King and Queen, and is said to have turned down the offer of a knighthood.” Clearly he was allergic to the elites, but did Boughton blow the presence of these notables out of proportion? Possibly. Yet, even if one assured Boughton that his masterpiece was patronized by nothing but card-carrying communists (a political party which he joined not just once but twice), he still would have found cause to protest.

Another thing that upset Boughton was that, in his opinion, the audience at the Regent did not react properly to The Immortal Hour, and did not give it the solemn reception it deserved. According to Hurd, Boughton claimed that, “the hysterical response to the last curtain, when only silence will prove that the effect made has been a true one, sickened me.” However, as if to directly contradict Boughton’s interpretation of how the audience received and regarded the work, a review in the Children’s Newspaper offered the following eulogy to The Immortal Hour:

How we should like again and again to listen to the Druid’s song, all too short for a thing so beautiful. It is one of the most striking tributes to this matchless hour of music that, while every hand is aching to clap to bring this old Druid back, the stillness of that moment is unbroken lest the clap of a hand or the beating of a heart should disturb a poignant scene.

The Sunday Times reported the audience’s reaction in a similar, if not quite so poetic, manner, stating that, “the silence with which it was listened to and the applause at the end

249 Hurd, Rutland Boughton, 149.
250 Ibid., 149.
of each act were manifestly sincere.” If the audience couldn’t resist the urge to applaud the final curtain, at least they received the work’s most powerful moments with the very “silence” for which Boughton yearned.

Regardless of who clapped when, Boughton had his reasons for wanting a reverent audience. He interpreted the work as a metaphor for the soul leaving the body. His belief that someone who truly understood The Immortal Hour would refrain from making celebratory noises reflects the seriousness he attached to this spiritual content.

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253 Boughton’s interpretation was very much a Theosophical one. One can conclude that Boughton was indeed a spiritualist, though there is no evidence yet that he was a practicing occultist as were Yeats and Macleod. Further research may prove this at some point. However, the Etain myth was ripe for Theosophical interpretations. For a complete Theosophical take on the story, see: Dr. James H. Cousins, The Story of Etain: A Celtic Myth and An Interpretation. Reprinted in from “Theosophy in Ireland” publisher unknown, short booklet, circa 1929. In this volume, Cousins states:

The burden of this ancient Myster-drama [sic] is that of the passage of the Soul (Etain) from the state of union with the Spirit (Mider), which state is called by the Vedantists the plane of sattvic consciousness, through the rajasic - the region of Gods and Daemons- to the plane of manifestation, the tamasic or gross consciousness, and her return to their original state”(19)

That both Boughton’s socialist and spiritual views alienated him from his adoring crowds may not be a coincidence. As Janet Oppenheim observes, “in the ferment of ideas and movements that animated the decades of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth it was possible to perceive Theosophy as part of a vast liberation movement designed to topple the materialistic, patriarchal, capitalistic, and utterly philistine culture of the Victorian age.” While there is no direct evidence linking Boughton to Theosophy, there are numerous indicators that his spiritualist beliefs were related to the esoteric practice. Not only was The Immortal Hour’s original author a member of The Golden Dawn, an organization too radical even for theosophists, there are, as noted above and shall be demonstrated further below, numerous Theosophical interpretations of Boughton’s The Immortal Hour as well as the original Etain myth. The Other World, 183.

Was the “silence” that the reporter for the *Children’s Newspaper* described at the end of the druid’s song simply a testament to the lyricism and poetry of that enchanting scene, or did it perhaps signal an understanding of the very same themes to which Boughton thought audience members were oblivious? When Sir Dension Ross, in a presentation to producer Barry Jackson made at the end of the work’s first run, “summed up the attitude of all the work’s admirers” by claiming that they had come “to look upon a visit to *The Immortal Hour* as almost a religious service,” he certainly implied that the spiritual messages in the work had not gone unnoticed. *The Children’s Newspaper*, also, by signaling a desire to spread “a touch of the spirit of *The Immortal Hour*,” hinted that there was something at play in the work that went beyond its musical appeal. Even those who balked at the notion of an artwork anchored by mysticism and spiritualism could not deny that *The Immortal Hour* seemed to possess an uncanny power. Ernest Newman, whose critiques of the work seemed perennially negative, wrote that despite his assessment that

As for Boughton’s actual religious beliefs, a description of him as “an agnostic of deep religious feeling” appears the most likely to be accurate, as Boughton is co-author of the article from which it is sourced. Herbert Antcliffe and Rutland Boughton, “A British School of Music Drama: The Work of Rutland Boughton,” *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 4 no. 1 (January 1918): 117-119.


For more on how Boughton transformed the second Act of *The Immortal Hour* into, almost unbelievably, the first religious ritual of the so-called Celtic ‘pagan’ gods, see: Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 438. Indeed, the processional in the second Act may have been in important element of the Theosophical interpretations of the work to be discussed below.

255 Denison Ross was Director of the School of Oriental Studies at the University of London and was familiar with the occult as well as various mystical and theosophical traditions. See: Ariel Benison, with an introduction by Denison Ross, *The Zohar in Muslim and Christian Spain*, (London: Routledge, 1932), xiii.
the work was unintelligible, it transported listeners into a “land of secular fancy”\textsuperscript{256} that was able to “grip us all.” He went on to write that, “I myself can testify to the power of its effect on people who, one would say a priori, had not a spark of mysticism in them.”\textsuperscript{257} In a similar vein Dame Ethyl Smythe wrote to Boughton the following:

I came away yesterday with a great, great ‘impression on my chest’ from the Regent. When I tell you I’m not fond of mysticism you can imagine what I think about your music... the performance enchants me in every way.\textsuperscript{258}

It seems that, contrary to Boughton’s views, in the eyes of both skeptics and devotees, the work’s spiritualism was recognized, though it may not have been read exactly as he intended. What if audiences appreciated \textit{The Immortal Hour} in a fashion more adapted to the historical moment than Boughton may have realized or could have anticipated when he wrote it? Indeed, many historical events unfolded between 1912 when Boughton initially scored \textit{The Immortal Hour}, and 1922 when it made its London debut. This investigation seeks to discover with what aspects of its devotees’ lives \textit{The Immortal Hour} resonated and to do so while also illuminating connections between the work and the Celtic Twilight aesthetic. Ironically, it is thanks to the noble patrons who upset Boughton so badly that such connections can be made now. By searching the cultural history articulated by some of the socially prominent noblewomen mentioned above, including Princess Marie Louise, Lady Maud Warrender, Millicent Sutherland, and


\textsuperscript{258} Hurd, \textit{Rutland Boughton}, 147.
others, in the form of published memoirs, reminiscences, and historical documents, it may be possible to parse out the meaning behind the work’s allure, and to question whether Boughton was justified in the “horror” he felt at its London success.

Princess Marie Louise, *The Immortal Hour*, spiritualism/supernaturalism

What about *The Immortal Hour* could have inspired someone like Princess Marie Louise to attend fifty-two performances, and how could this supposedly rich and idle princess possibly have understood Boughton’s music? To begin, she had a more musical background than Boughton may have imagined. In her memoir, *My Memories of Six Reigns* she regales readers with astonishing tales of close encounters with prominent German musicians including Clara Schumann, Hans von Bulow, and Joseph Joachim, and even recounts how Cosima Wagner shepherded her through a crash course in Wagner appreciation, which included attending rehearsals at Wanfried.²⁵⁹ Despite encountering so many luminaries, she reserves her greatest praise for the violinist Johannes Wolff, a student of Henryk Wieniawski of whom she wrote in the following terms:

> Perhaps he did not have a very outstanding international reputation as a violinist, but there was something about his playing which, to my mind, made a greater appeal to his audience than perhaps more celebrated artists.²⁶⁰

Marie Louise’s preference for this underappreciated violinist suggests that she may have preferred a folk-melody – if played with appropriate taste and sensibility – over the


²⁶⁰ Ibid., 165.
chromatic extravagance of a work like Strauss’ *Elektra*. As shall be demonstrated below, the compositional aesthetic of Boughton’s score was perfectly suited to someone with tastes like Marie Louise.

Like other composers of the Celtic Twilight, Boughton had a strong attraction to the music and the ideas of Richard Wagner, and with Wagner *The Immortal Hour* makes its first connection to Celtic Twilight. As noted previously, the Wagnerian element of Celtic Twilight could be a major stumbling block for a composer. Thankfully, Boughton did not let Wagner’s influence run roughshod over his score. Though *The Immortal Hour* certainly engages in some Wagnerian chromaticism and modest use of leitmotifs, it is still essentially a number opera. It also avoids the giganticism of Bantock or any attempt at an excessive orchestration. Boughton further tempers the work’s Wagnerian elements by incorporating the influence of Celtic folk song. This folk influence came directly from his recent study of Kennedy-Fraser’s *Folksongs of the Hebrides*. These folk materials helped him imbue *The Immortal Hour* with “a personal vein of simple lyricism.”261 The work’s Wagnerian sections often serve as connecting tissue or to heighten the drama, while the work’s most important songs, such as “The Faery Song,” drawn from Fiona Macloed’s *From the Hills of Dream*, follow Kennedy-Fraser’s folk idiom.

Figure 17: Conclusion of the “Faery Song” from the Piano Score of *The Immortal Hour*, followed by Princess Etain’s response:\textsuperscript{262}

\textsuperscript{262} For a synopsis of the plot, see below. Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, 184-185.
One of the major features of Kennedy-Fraser’s folk-melodies is their reliance on the pentatonic scale, and Boughton used this scale at key points in his opera to great effect, particularly with the melody of the “Faery Song” which begins in the fourth measure of the selection. Of course, the pentatonic scale avoids the ‘leading tones’ – the
fourth and seventh scale degrees of a major scale. Often the pentatonic scale is interpreted from the perspective the minor scale, in which it is the second and sixth degrees that are omitted. The “Faery Song,” simple as it appears on the page, deftly combines the pentatonic scale with a Lydian harmonization. The tonic of the melody, regardless of what the key signature may suggest, is A flat, and the song is harmonized in A-flat Lydian. Thoroughly pentatonic, the melody avoids notes D and G at all times. Meanwhile, the harmony alternates between an A flat major chord, and a B flat major chord, which sneaks in the raised 4\textsuperscript{th} (D) necessary to complete the Lydian effect. Finally, a G appears in the cadential E-flat-major chord at the third measure of the third system during the phrase “hollow hills.” This is followed by a final A flat major chord, completing a plagal (IV-I) cadence. Thus, the “Faery Song” combines modality and pentatonicism, two features associated with both English and Celtic folk music.

Though the gentle melody is, like the harmony, very much in the vein of folksong, Boughton did not adopt Hebridean “irregular rhythms” (as found in Kennedy-Fraser’s studies).\textsuperscript{263} The “Faery Song’s” rhythm is simple, arriving neatly on the downbeat, and the phrasing is square, and this adds to the music’s folksy character, whether it is an exact representation of Hebridean folksong or not. The “Faery Song” is an enactment of ‘folk-music’ not beholden to any concept of ‘authenticity.’ This freewheeling adoption of folk elements is analogous to Yeats’s approach to Celtic mythology and folktales in \textit{The Celtic Twilight}.

\textsuperscript{263} Munro, “Review: Songs of Hebrides,” 185.
Taking a closer look, Wagner’s influence shows itself in the sixth measure of the fourth system of the first page. A descending chromatic line unfolds over a series of dissonant chords that indicate Etain’s bewilderment. This leads to a half diminished seventh chord in second inversion (D, F, A flat, C – the Tristan chord, a French augmented 6th), at the beginning of the second measure of the second page. In the second system, when Etain realizes that the song is familiar to her, Boughton returns to the pentatonic idiom, but this time with a contrapuntal elaboration (beginning at rehearsal #92), in which the violin takes the main melody, and the voice enters in imitation beginning in the third system. The inclusion of a Wagnerian transitionary section between two folk-like sections is a typical example of Boughton balances the various aesthetic positions at play within the score of *The Immortal Hour.*
Figure 18: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, 88-89.
(He sees Blain.)

good folk! I give you greeting.

He bows to Blain, steps nearer, and from this moment keeps his eyes on her.

Sir! I pray you, draw near the fire.
This second example further reveals Boughton’s balanced compositional approach. These two pages mark the arrival of the Eochaidh, the King of Ireland, to a peasant’s hut where he meets Etain. The chromatic passages in the first three systems, played by the violin section in the orchestral version, symbolize the raging storm outside. As Eochaidh meets Etain, the music passes through Tristan-like modulations, and unseen in this piano score is the continuation of the chromatic figurations of the previous page. The dense chromaticism of this section is well suited here because it conveys not only the instability of the evening’s weather but also the strangeness of the meeting of these two ill-fated lovers, as well as Etain’s otherworldliness. Some supernaturalism is even attached to Eochaidh during this encounter when Manus, the peasant, exclaims in an upcoming passage that Eochaidh is bone dry despite the gale-driven downpour. These pages represent one of the opera’s most dramatic and Wagnerian moments, yet the rhythm of the recitative is uncomplicated. It is through Boughton’s subdued approach to rhythm that he manages to sustain a folk-like atmosphere even in work’s most Wagnerian sections.
Figure 19: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, “I have Seen All Things Pass,” 175.
The song of the ‘Old Bard,’ ‘Minstrel,’ or ‘Druid’ (in the case of the *Children’s Newspaper*) lies at the opposite extreme. It is fully pentatonic (g minor pentatonic scale – note the absence of A and E-flat form the melody) and contains absolutely no chromaticism: an operatic rarity. The Old Bard, accompanied by his harp, invokes the old Ossianic trope, but here he does so with straightforward language – a direct nod from Macleod to the language of Yeats’s *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry*, and the poetry of William Allingham.264

Whether one interprets Boughton’s compositional approach as somewhat ingenious or simply saccharine is the determining factor in whether – or not – one finds this opera touching or a bore.265 For example, consider *New York Times* critic Olin Downes, who, in a review of a failed attempt to bring *The Immortal Hour* to New York in 1926, expresses his own inability to appreciate Boughton’s score:

Allowing for the shortcomings in the performance that doubtless weakened the opera’s effect, it is very hard to see why it should exert a popular appeal before audiences of experience if only because of the undramatic and unoriginal quality of the music… there is also the frequent flavor of folksong and its attendant pleasures. But the music, in no instance that can be recalled, gives the impression of individuality of matter or workmanship or of a poignantly emotional quality. The drama… is itself a tenuous, symbolic, sentimental and untheatrical affair… it cannot be said that the composer’s treatment materially conceals these defects…. *The Immortal Hour* is actually a cantata rather than an opera – a cantata, one would say, for amateur societies… There are composers who might have made of this a convincing musical exposition. We cannot see that Mr. Boughton is among them. The opera may well be one of the numerous works which appeal to the people and the communities that produce them, but have not

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264 The progression through a series of colors is reminiscent of William Allingham’s “Green Jacket, Red Cap, and White Owl’s feather!”

265 The laudatory review in *The Children’s Newspaper* claims that an evening at the Regent is “two hours of rarest charm and joy to any whose heart responds to glorious harmony.” Not all critics shared this view. Mee ed., “The Immortal Hour: New Conqueror of London,” 2.
the qualities that command interest and long-continued public support in other places.\textsuperscript{266}

For Downes, Boughton’s music is “sentimental,” and lacking in real emotional content or dramatic resonance. Its strong reliance on the contours of folk melodies is mawkish and ineffective, unless a listener is in the mood to relish such “attendant pleasures.” In a less damning mention regarding a 1926 London revival of \textit{Immortal Hour}, the \textit{Sunday Times} music critic Maitland Davidson describes the work as that “celebrated, rather sugary, but always enchanting bit of exquisite musical sentimentality.”\textsuperscript{267} In a much later review of an attempt to mount \textit{The Immortal Hour} at the Julliard Theatre in 1994, James Oestreich, writing for the \textit{New York Times} penned the following:

Maybe it’s the season, but Rutland Boughton’s \textit{Immortal Hour} seems to resemble nothing so much as a spectacular balloon for the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade that sprang an irreparable leak after its wildly acclaimed early appearances. Lord knows, plenty of hot air is available… Mr. Frank Corsaro (producing this 1994 revival at the Julliard Opera Center) tries heroically… but none of it can patch over the ultimate weakness of Boughton’s scores which alternates between maunndering and jaunty folkishness.\textsuperscript{268}

Unless one is prepared to appreciate ‘jaunty folkishness,’ \textit{The Immortal Hour} appears to be best avoided. Still, these reviews offer some insight regarding \textit{The Immortal Hour}’s reception. Both Maitland Davidson and Ernest Newman manage to mete out


\textsuperscript{267} Maitland Davidson, “Plays and Players,” \textit{The Sunday Times} (London, England), Sunday, January 24, 1926, 6, issue 5363.

some small measure of praise. However, in the case of the New York reviewers who are separated by cultural, literal, and temporal distance, *The Immortal Hour* fails to connect with the audience. Downes’ observation that “the opera may well be one of the numerous works which appeal to the people and the communities that produce them” seems right on the mark: *The Immortal Hour* only appealed to British audiences. This suggests that one must look to some factor beyond the score itself to explain the work’s appeal. On that note, *The Immortal Hour*’s folksy, late-romantic compositional aesthetic may have been a perfect match the to musical tastes of Marie Louise, but her repeated visits suggest that she was enchanted by more than just the works hints of Wagnérisme, or its chord progressions, its tasteful orchestration, and its use of folk-like melodies.

There is another plausible theory that may explain Marie Louise’s presence at so many presentations of *The Immortal Hour*: she attended because she was enamored with actress Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies (1891-1992), who played the character of Etain. Louise sent letters to Davies and was devoted to her. Did the work’s other repeat visitors attend because they felt similarly about Ffrangçon-Davies? It is possible. This theory also brings to light other things that Marie Louise and Ffrangcon-Davies had in common besides their mutual admiration. They both shared roles as early British feminists who daringly chose to live unconventional lifestyles.

As Helen Grime notes, Ffrangcon-Davies was “a highly feminized lesbian actress who achieved significant commercial success as a (heterosexual) romantic lead while
risking the occasional unconventional role in the Theatre Club scene.”

Meanwhile, Marie Louise had divorced her husband in 1900 and remained unmarried afterward. Her prominent position as a member of the Royal family made this a bold step. Marie Louise also started “The Princess Club,” a place for “working-class girls employed in the factories along the riverfront at Rotherhithe.” When the First World broke out in 1914, the club was converted into a military convalescent hospital. All these actions suggest that Marie Louise was keenly interested in the welfare of women. In fact, several of the prominent women whose memoirs will be investigated here similarly worked in wartime hospitals like the one founded by Marie Louise. They stood against patriarchy by pursuing the unconventional, advocating for women’s suffrage, and agitating for a more significant role for women in the British armed forces. However, that Davies may have been a lesbian icon for some audience members can’t alone account for the opera’s astonishing runs. Nor can the presence in the cast of a budding star be used to explain away The Immortal Hour’s extraordinary success. There are direct newspaper reports that celebrate Davies as the star of the show, and yet attribute the work’s allure to some other, still indefinable factor.

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Ffrangcon-Davies was in a hugely successful 1924 production of *Rome and Juliet* opposite John Gielgud. Meanwhile, Marie Louise was also enamored of Beatrice Harrison, also a lesbian, who was a famous cellist.


271 Nevertheless, Ffrangcon-Davies’ performances were highly celebrated. As Grime recounts, “she was described in positive terms by the *Times* critic as ‘shadowy, ethereal but always
beautiful.’” Grimes also notes that during *The Immortal Hour’s* early performances at the Glastonbury festivals “it was reported that audiences at Glastonbury, on the bench seats in the assembly rooms were ‘oblivious of their crowded and cramped condition, [and] sat breathless till the end.’” One cannot attribute the breathlessness of the audience to Davies’ presences alone. There were criticisms of Ffrangcon-Davies, notably that her voice lacked sufficient strength to carry operatic roles. Such objections to her singing help one understand why Ffrangcon-Davies, though the daughter of the famous baritone David Ffrangcon-Davies, eventually pursued acting over singing. *Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Twentieth Century Actress*, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 70-74.


Note: It may be of interest, for upcoming sections, that the previous page of this issue of *The Sphere* features many pictures of the Cenotaph on Armistice day.
A number of other plausible explanations for the acclaim afforded *The Immortal Hour*, and the repeated attendance of its many guests, also fall apart upon further investigation. The immense popularity “The Faery Song” might initially explain the situation. The “Faery Song was a ‘hit’ sung at concerts, society weddings, and voice competitions. An article from the *Burnley Express* in 1923 regarding an afternoon vocal recital by Frank Mullings reports that he sang the “Faery Song” twice – once in his program and again as an encore. This double performance suggests that the “Faery Song” had become an audience favorite. However, the music critic tempers the implications of this repeat performance by noting that the singer was limited in his choice of encore because only a harp was available to accompany him. Still, the “Faery Song” seems to have remained popular, like *The Immortal Hour*, until the mid-1930s. As late as 1935, the *Derby Daily Telegraph* reports its inclusion in vocal recitals. The “Faery Song” appears to have been a meaningful element of *The Immortal Hour’s* success, but this single song alone cannot account for the opera’s popularity.

Another theory is that the work’s appeal stemmed from a general trend at the time in favor of all things Celtic. While there was, in the words of Christopher Fleming, “a great deal of pentatonic as well as modal nostalgia in the air,” works with the distinct signatures of Celtic music were not, as mentioned above, even close to uniformly

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successful during this period. Other works engaging in Celticism from the same era, including Holbrooke’s *The Children of Don* and Bantock’s *The Seal Woman*, failed miserably. Indeed, to dismiss *The Immortal Hour*’s triumph as solely a consequence of its Celtic themes is not only a poorly informed opinion but also one that strips the work of its agency. In a similar vein, one cannot attribute *The Immortal Hour*’s success to the popularity of “Yeats” at this time. Indeed Yeats did much to promote all things Celtic. Could fans of Yeats’s work have been inspired to see *The Immortal Hour*? Undoubtedly. But would such fans have come to see the work over and over?

The abundance of theories regarding *The Immortal Hour*’s popularity suggests at least one thing: the work had substance; even the poorly received revival at the Juilliard implies a continuing fascination. In this spirit, one further potential explanation for the work’s success should be explored. This posits that *The Immortal Hour* had become a magnet for Theosophists. Boughton had attempted to imbue his work with symbolic dimensions, ones that he felt, as suggested above, were overlooked. There is evidence that Theosophists of the time gravitated towards the work as a result of these ‘hidden meanings.’ Lurking on the internet is a review of Rutland Boughton’s *The Immortal Hour* whose origins have been difficult to trace. Originally published under the pseudonym of ‘Mac Tyler,’ the real author is claimed to be a Marie Fornario, a member of an occult group, “The New Golden Dawn in Bradford,” who died strangely on the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland in 1929. Though her death remains a mystery, her review

275 Joseph Holbrooke writes that Boughton “has attracted to his music a real and strange community – which is growing amongst us – the Theosophists.” *Contemporary British Composers* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1925), 110.
helps shed light on the different ways that attendees appreciated *The Immortal Hour*. She writes:

> Visitors to the Regent Theatre may be roughly classified as follows; students of mysticism and folk-lore who are able to understand the great truths concealed behind this gossamer curtain of faery; (a small clan, but they come frequently and every time discover some new aspect of illuminating significance), a large number of people who think the play beautiful but sad; and many for whom the whole drama is so elusive and incomprehensible that they… are frankly bored… and there is a fourth class who, while keenly appreciating the artistic beauty of the performance, also sense the existence of a deeper meaning.\(^276\)

Fornario’s division of the audience is interesting, and, as far is it can be considered a reliable source, it also clearly states that the Theosophical fringe only comprised a small portion of the audience body. For Fornario, the various characters in *The Immortal Hour* represent the “psychological and spiritual effects of initiation” – initiation into a higher level of consciousness. She also describes this as “the raising of the lower self or personality to the level of the higher self.”\(^277\) This interpretation reflects the general goals of the esoteric and theosophical practices that formed a mystical subculture in Britain. In general terms, these practices promoted the belief that through the pursuit of “hidden knowledge” one could come to understand “the bonds that unite the universe, humanity, and the divine” and thereby “reach enlightenment and salvation.”\(^278\)

For students of the occult like Fornario, *The Immortal Hour* is essentially a step-by-step guide to Theosophical enlightenment, one in which the discovery of “hidden


\(^{277}\) Fornario, “The Immortal Hour.”

knowledge” rests in an accurate understanding of the work’s various characters and their inter-relationships. Here *The Immortal Hour* makes another vital connection to Celtic Twilight; it is imbued with those very same occult elements with which Yeats leavened his own volume. Yet, as Fornario states, local occultists alone did not sustain *The Immortal Hour*’s hundreds of performances, though they were indeed repeatedly in the audience. However, the same content that lured the Theosophists and the occultists may also have had an unexpected effect on the average attendee, those who “sensed the existence of a deeper meaning.” It is possible that this vague “deeper meaning” that was an integral part of the spiritual content about which Boughton was so serious may have resonated with contemporary audiences in a way that eludes those who seek easy explanations for the *The Immortal Hour*’s acclaim. Is it possible that the work’s unusual *mise en scène*, one characterized by a set of elements so significant to Celtic Twilight – the spiritual, the mythical, and the supernatural – played a most crucial and curious role in fueling the devotion of Marie Louise and so many others who flocked to *The Immortal Hour*?

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280 Theosophical lectures on the work were given at the Gloucestshire Theosophical lodge. Here the speaker, Mr. G.D. Bond, conveyed that “few productions are so full of theosophical ideas and occult symbolism as ‘The Immortal Hour’: the colours of costumes worn even, and names of the characters are full of deep meaning to the student.” Anon., “The Immortal Hour,” *Gloucestshire Echo*, Saturday, November 29, 1924, 5. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000320/19241129/124/0005

To investigate this question, one must study how the tropes of spiritualism, supernaturalism, and myth function in *The Immortal Hour’s* text. Here it is necessary to consider the source for the libretto. Boughton adapted his libretto from a stage play written by Fiona Macleod in 1908, also titled *The Immortal Hour*, which is itself based on the ancient Irish legend, *The Wooing of Etain*. Here another interesting connection to Celtic Twilight arises.

As noted in chapter one, Fiona Macleod was a pseudonym used by the Scottish writer William Sharp. Sharp was both a poet and a critic, and, like Yeats, was a member of the occult society The Golden Dawn during the 1890s. In a letter to Catherine Janvier, one of the few people to whom he revealed the secret identity of Macleod, Sharp claims that,

> I can write out of my heart [as Macleod] in a way I could not do as William Sharp, and indeed that I could not do if I were the woman whom Fiona Macleod is supposed to be, unless veiled in scrupulous anonymity… This rapt sense of oneness with nature, this cosmic ecstasy and elation, this wayfaring along the extreme verges of the common world, all this is wrought up with the romance of life, that I could not bring myself to expression by my outer self, insistent and tyrannical as that need is… My truest self, the self who is below all other selves, and my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams, must find expression, yet I cannot, save in this hidden way.281

That Sharp channeled Macleod in order to access the deepest level of his poetic imagination is yet another nod to a feminist element present simultaneously on the stage, in the audience, and in the text of *The Immortal Hour*. As will be discussed in chapter five, the Celt had long been associated with femininity in a stereotypical and

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uncomplimentary fashion. In Sharp’s case, there are no negative connotations to ‘the feminine.’ Rather, the feminine persona of Macleod gave him the strength and emotional depth to be able to treat that subject so essential to Celtic Twilight – the liminal boundary between worlds.

Sharp’s desire to express “cosmic ecstasy and elation,” and what he calls “this wayfaring along the verges of the common world” echoes Yeats’s wish from the pages of *The Celtic Twilight* that he “receive a message from those beings or bodiless moods, or whatever they be, who inhabit the world of spirits.”\(^{282}\) In both passages, each writer longs to express something just beyond reach. Yeats uses the music of the strange and mysterious fiddler on the train to Sligo as the metaphorical vehicle through which to approach his poetic objective. However, for Sharp, an entirely new identity was needed because as ‘William Sharp’ he simply could not express what he calls “my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams,” dreams which nevertheless “must find expression.” Yeats and Sharp’s approaches are not as different as they may seem. Both have to adopt a role to engage in the twilit, mystical, and dreamlike subject matter that fascinates them. In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats, as mentioned above, takes on many different roles: reporter, ethnographer, social commentator, and translator of spiritual experiences. However, he is always the observer, rather than the actor. He observes the bizarre occult activities of the clerks whose evil ceremony he attends. He encounters the strange fiddler who conjures his visions of a fallen world mirrored by the world of faery. He even uses the figure of A.E., whom he presents as a man maddened by

\(^{282}\) Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, 145.
spiritual longings, to place his own poetic identity behind a veil. Sharp employed a virtually identical strategy. He reported on Fiona’s activities to others, and could only find the twilight expression that came from her pen when he had similarly veiled his true self. For both Yeats and Sharp, the prosaic and numinous worlds are gated by personal boundaries, and both use their own unique artistic and poetic devices to try to cross these thresholds.\textsuperscript{283}

In \textit{The Immortal Hour}, Macleod also continues the Celtic Twilight tradition of only loosely adhering to notions of ‘authenticity’ in folklore or any set understanding of Celtic mythology. This lack of concern was a characteristic of much of Macleod’s (and, indeed Sharp’s) work. As Georgiana Goddard King notes, Sharp had an “easy-going conscience in matters intellectual.” She argues that Sharp’s volume \textit{Green Fire} was “never republished because the Brêton lore and the Béron description were done too much out of his head.”\textsuperscript{284} In her stage version of \textit{The Immortal Hour}, Macleod continues this process. She takes the ancient version of \textit{The Wooing of Etain} and streamlines, simplifies, and modernizes it by reducing something complicated and bizarre to its most

\textsuperscript{283} Boughton did not engage in such a layered and veiled approach in the creation of his version of \textit{The Immortal Hour}. What is interesting, however, is that many of Boughton’s works stem from librettos of his devising. His grandest project, the creation of a cycle of operas based on the legend of King Arthur, likewise, was the result of a collaboration between Boughton and Reginald Buckley, a young poet who unfortunately died before their work together could be finished. \textit{The Immortal Hour} is a rare example of Boughton using another work almost outright. Of course, he does make some significant changes to Macleod’s version, which will be discussed below. Yet, to the degree that he mostly stays faithful to Macleod’s text, he fulfills that unusual position of artistic intermediary so essential to conjuring Celtic Twilight.

\textsuperscript{284} Georgina Goddard King, “Fiona Macleod,” \textit{Modern Language Notes} vol. 33, no. 6 (June, 1918): 353.
symbolic dimensions (Boughton also continued this process with his subtle revisions).²⁸⁵

In Macleod’s text, the most startling example of this revisionary approach is its introduction of ‘Dalua’ (the ‘fairy fool,’ and the first character to appear on the stage), into the world of Celtic deities. As Mark Williams notes, Dalua is a character created out of whole cloth by Macleod.²⁸⁶ In her foreword to the play, Macleod describes Dalua as follows:

The fool is at once an elder and dreadful god, a mysterious and potent spirit, avoided even of the proud immortal folk themselves: and an abstraction: the shadow of pale hopes, forgotten dreams, and the madness of men’s minds.

Dalua is a god outside of the gods, and therefore reminiscent of the ‘Norns’ who oversee the action in Wagner’s Götterdämmerung. With this character, Macleod skillfully indicates the pagan qualities of the other Irish deities who are part of the play by casting Dalua as a figure from ‘before;’ before religion, before time, and one yet destined to exist beyond these confines as well.

The opera begins as Dalua and Etain, a princess of the Sídhe, encounter one another in a misty forest. Dalua casts a spell on Etain, which causes her to forget her past. She then meets, in a peasant’s hovel, the Irish King, Eochaidh, a man disillusioned by

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²⁸⁵ In the introduction to the play, Macleod offers her own interpretation of the work’s symbolism: “I have no doubt that the legend, though only honey for the later Gaelic poets, had originally a deep significance, and that the Wooing to the Otherworld… i.e. the Gaelic Tir na’n Og, the Land of Youth, of the Ever Living, of Love, the Land of Heart’s Desire… [of] the beautiful woman Etain, wife of King Eochaidh, symbolized another wooing and another mystery than that alone of the man for woman. It symbolized, I think, the winning of life back to the world after an enforced thralldom: the renewal of Spring.” In other words, for Macleod, The Immortal Hour was the Celtic version of Orpheus and Eurydice. Fiona Macleod [William Sharp], “The Immortal Hour: A Drama in Two Acts,” (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis), 1908. https://archive.org/details/imortalhourdrama00sharuoft

²⁸⁶ Williams, Ireland’s Immortals, 385-387.
war and suffering. The two declare their love for one another during a passionate duet at the end of Act 1. Act 2 begins at an anniversary celebrating one year of love between the couple. The king receives an unknown visitor, who asks him for a boon: to sing and play the harp for Queen Etain and to kiss her hand (this is one of the opera’s main diversions from the stage play, in which Eoachaidh and the visitor play chess). The visitor’s strange music stirs Etain’s lost memories, and she recognizes the mysterious man as her husband Midir, the Faery King. Midir sweeps her away to strains of the famous “Faery Song,” sung by a chorus of spirits off stage, while Eoachaidh is left devastated. In an act of mercy, Dalua appears and touches Eoachaid with an icy finger, and the King of Ireland falls dead.

Etain and Eoachaidh’s relationship is the focal point of the work. It is a meeting between a human and an apparition, or a guest from the spirit world. The opera’s final and most significant point of action involves the threshold between worlds, that essential feature of Celtic Twilight. Conjuring this boundary on the stage as a tangible place of spiritual transformation and crossover may have been an overlooked point of resonance for audiences at the Regent. Taking a closer look at Marie Louise’s personal history, it seems likely that this kind of symbolism could have resonated with her: her memoirs include several encounters, ranging from the mundane to the profound, with the supernatural.

**Uncanny experiences (of *The Immortal Hour* devotees)**
In her memoirs, Marie Louise tells of a manor house in Gloucestershire, called Chavenage, of which she was a constant visitor. Here Marie Louise is haunted by the man her room is named after, Sir Hugh Cholmondeley, a renegade Royalist who fought alongside Oliver Cromwell. She writes:

I was often interrupted, while sitting in my room, by my door quietly opening, remaining open for a few minutes, and then gently shutting again. I used at first to call out ‘come in…’ …no one answered. Could it have been Sir Hugh, who wished to see what this very distant descendant of the King he had turned against was like, and whether he approved of her inhabiting his room?287

While this seems rather historical for a ghost story, Louise is nevertheless not alone in this encounter. Her host confirms that “other visitors ...(have) had the same experience.”288

In a more personal vignette, Marie Louise recounts a visitation from her brother, who has been fighting in Pretoria during the Second Boer War. She has just divorced her husband Aribert of Anhalt:

On my return to England after the dissolution of my marriage, I took a small house in South Kensington… I was arranging my books and odds and ends in my sitting room when the door opened and in walked my oldest brother, Christian Victor. “Oh Kicky (the pet name we brothers and sisters called him by), how nice to see you again.” He replied: “I just came to see that you were all right and happy.” He sat down in the chair near the fire and I then noticed he had his favorite dachshund on his knee. We talked a little, and then he got up and told me I was not to follow him downstairs, that he was very happy, and all was well with him. After he had gone, and shut the door, I realized that he was in khaki but did not have his medal ribbons on. I then remembered that during the African war an order had been issued that officers were not to wear their ribbons so that the enemy should not be able to distinguish them from their men. Only then did I suddenly realize that this dearly loved brother had died eighteen months previously, and lay in his resting place in South Africa.289

287 Louise, My Memories of Six Reigns, 224-5.
288 Ibid., 225.
289 Ibid., 223-224.
Once again her experience is corroborated:

My sister came to see me that same afternoon, and I told her of what had taken place. She was sitting in the same chair as he had done, and when she got up remarked, “I know he has been here – I feel it.”

These stories show that Marie Louise’s experiences of the supernatural included both the unexceptional and the highly personal, and also suggest that her proclivity for the uncanny, which may have attracted her to The Immortal Hour, was not unusual. In fact, occurrences such as her meeting with her dead brother Prince Christian Victor were actively sought out during and after the Great War. In his volume Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, Jay Winter describes a rise in spiritualism and a desire for spiritual encounters that was at its heart “inevitably and inextricably tied up with the need to communicate with the fallen.” Winter remarks that through séances and spirit photography, ordinary citizens sought to conjure the presence of lost loved ones and to open channels of communication with them. Such esoteric practices were publicly legitimized by the writings and lectures of a cultural vanguard that included Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the celebrated physicist and writer Sir Oliver Lodge. Thus, during the Post-war era, the story of Etain’s fleeting year of love with Eoachaidh, and its concluding vanishing act, may have been a coincidental if powerful representation of something many wished to make real: a meeting with a loved one from the other side. Did Etain’s

Her brother was Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig Holstein (1867-1900), a keen cricketer, who died of enteric fever in Pretoria.

290 Ibid., 223-224.

visitation remind Marie Louise of her meeting with her brother? If so, is it possible that the supernatural elements of The Immortal Hour communicated with others as well, and possibly offered the vicarious experience of a meeting with the spirit of someone lost during the Great War?292

That Marie Louise is not the only member of Boughton’s public who includes encounters with the uncanny in their publications suggests that the vogue for spiritualism

292 Winter’s research emphasizes the notion that the war helped transform spiritualism from something that existed more on the fringes of society into a practice that took on a degree of normalcy. In a cross-the-pond confirmation of this suggestion, Upton Sinclair’s Oil!, a muckraking expose of the California oil industry, features an encounter with spiritualism as part of its plot. The work features the adventures of a father/son duo. As the father becomes an oil baron, the son grows up seeing the damage that wealth and industry wreak both upon ordinary people and the environment. The novel reads not only as a condemnation of the oil industry but also as a damming snapshot of the follies of 1920s culture that doubles as a record, fictional though it may be, of the times. Curiously, “Bunny,” the young and pampered scion, becomes carried away, much like Rutland Boughton, with the Bolshevik revolution, and the growing awareness of the “workers of the world.” The most unpredictable turn in the novel occurs when the father, James Arnold Ross, attempting to evade subpoenas from the US government, spends the year of 1923 in Paris accompanied by his young son (precisely the same time that, across the channel, The Immortal Hour is reaching its greatest fame). Sick and consumed with boredom, Mr. Ross is duped by a spiritualist divorcée who helps him to reunite, at one of her séances, with his deceased mother. Bunny recounts how his father is taken in by what Sinclair obviously believes is a con-artist’s profession: “the most amazing things had happened, there had been horns floating in the air, and voices coming out of them, and lights flickering about… and finally this old lady ghost who asked for ‘Little Jim,’ and started right off to tell these things that had taken Dad’s breath away. How could a medium have known such things?”(456) For Bunny, it is evident that the medium, Mrs. Olivier, wants “to marry Dad,” so that she can one day inherit his massive fortune. Sinclair, as narrator, remarks that Ross was “old and tired and sick, he craved something to lean on. He was shame-faced, afraid his son would ridicule him.”(456) Similarly, Jay Winter notes that spiritualist practices such as séances, etc., often functioned as a means for tricksters to make a profit off of desperate, bereaved people. That such a story found its way into an American novel functioning as an exposé of industry, society, and culture, both in American and across the Atlantic, is telling. It suggests that even if the general population wasn’t necessarily going to events like that attended by Ross, the idea of the séance, and the spiritualism associated with it, had entered the cultural imagination and was popularly accepted. The Immortal Hour may have acted, unlike Sinclair’s condemning narrative, to condone such practices, and to offer an experience, albeit a staged one, of a 1920s spiritualist encounter thankfully devoid of the troubling connotations of the séance. Oil! (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
described by Jay Winter was undoubtedly real. Lady Maud Warrender (1870-1945), a well-known amateur singer, cultural philanthropist, and lesbian also in attendance, describes in her memoir *My First Sixty Years* an encounter with the supernatural while staying at a former “home of the Knights Templar” supposedly haunted by “friendly ghosts.” One night, things take a turn for the mildly sinister when the fire irons are rattled together. In another anecdote, while journeying through India, Maud meets a “Mr. Jacob of Simla.” He presents her with a published account of his magical abilities, which includes treating a dinner party of Boer War veterans to mass hallucinations that allow them to relive together, quite humorously, their heroic and otherwise harrowing war stories. While stories such as these have a sense of whimsy, even patrons of *The

293 Lady Warrender was also a friend and patron of Sir Edward Elgar.


295 Ibid., 195.

296 Ibid., 99-104.

The story of “Jacob of Simla’s” magical abilities is written by “Tautriadelta,” a “pupil of Bulwer Lytton.” That Warrender includes the full text of the account in her memoir suggests that the supernatural was an important element of British culture. Jacob displays a variety of “tricks” to Tautriadelta and a dinner party of notables, including an unnamed general “whose name was a household word in England and India.” Jacob makes a walking stick grow grapes, which the party then eats. Next, he plunges a sword through Tautridelta, who recounts that the “point came out through my back, and penetrated the paneling of cedar wood behind me.” Finally, Tautriadelta describes how Jacob proceeds to induce group hallucinations. Together, they witness the famous general as he is wounded during the “Balaclava ride” (also known as the storied ‘charge of the light brigade,’ a charge led on October 25, 1854 by Lord Cardigan during the Battle of Balaclava, the Crimean war). Jacob continues to amaze his guests by recreating visualizations of the battle stories of the other war heroes at the dinner party. Jacob explains to his fascinated guests that, “every event that had ever taken place in the world’s history was actually existing in the astral light, and could be reproduced at any time or place by those who possessed the knowledge and the power.” The evening concludes with Jacob walking on water, producing a swarm of butterflies, and then transporting Tautriadelta to his bungalow. When Tautriadelta refuses to let Jacob transport him back to the dinner party, Jacob vanishes.
Immortal Hour whose biographies give the impression of a very practically-minded person can still include a reference to the possibility that there are supernatural forces at play in the world.

In a biography of Lady Edith Vane-Tempest-Stewart, Marchioness of Londonderry (1878-1959) (another devotee of the opera who would later attempt to support Boughton – see chapter five), after a matter-of-fact retelling of lineages and fox-hunting parties, one encounters an unusual story from the night of Edward the VII’s death. Edith is in Scotland, and the news has not yet reached her. That night the “most vivid flash of lightning I had ever seen” spooks her dogs, who leap through the window. To make sense of this bizarre occurrence, Lady Edith later interprets it as a supernatural premonition of the King’s death. While this last story emphasizes the appeal of spiritual thinking to a range of personalities, it also helps hint at an underlying theme contained in all the previous stories. From an encounter with a cranky knight templar, to a brush with the shy ghost of a Cromwellian soldier, a bittersweet visitation of a relative killed in action, a hallucinatory recreation of chaotic battle scenes, and a supernatural warning regarding the death of the Sovereign of the Realm, each of these stories contains an element of militarism.

Warrender doesn’t say in her memoir if she experiences Jacob’s magical powers herself, but she mentions that Madame Blavatsky (co-founder of the Theosophical Society) had been “amazed at what he could do with his occult power.” Warrender, My First Sixty Years.


A classic example of the Victorian connection between spiritualism and militarism can be found in Henry James’ short story “Owen Wingrave.” Owen is the descendant of an ancient line of English soldiers. One particular room in the family house is haunted by a “Colonel Wingrave”
Spiritualism and militarism, The “Faery Song’s” militaristic imagery

The connection between spiritualism and militarism can be regarded as a natural consequence of the practice of spiritualism during wartime. Bereaved relatives and friends often sought an encounter, as Jay Winter suggests, with someone lost due to war, and in particular the Great War. *The Immortal Hour* played into this situation in two ways. First, through its evocation of a visitation from the spirit-world, symbolized, as discussed earlier, by Etain’s ‘immortal hour’ with Eochaidh. Second, the opera participates in this connection through the militaristic imagery found in the work’s famous “Faery Song:”

Midir sings:

How beautiful they are the lordly ones,
That dwell in the hills, in the hollow hills.
They have faces like flowers and their breath is wind
That blows over grass filled with dewy clover.
There limbs more white than shafts of moonshine:
They are more fleet than the March wind.

who lived during the time of George II and died mysteriously after giving his son a smashing blow over the head following an argument. When Owen decides to refuse his family’s expectation that he follow the Wingrave tradition and join the military, he is ‘put up’ as a coward by “Miss Julian,” a young lady of the house who would have become his betrothed if not for his sudden change of colors. Owen’s tutor Spencer Coyle notes with irony that, in refusing a military career, Owen is forced to battle it out with his family and Miss Julian. Miss Julian challenges Owen to spend the night in the haunted room of the house to prove his manhood. History repeats itself, and in the morning, Owen is found dead in the Colonel’s room. Coyle observes with sadness that, “Owen Wingrave, dressed as he had last seen him, lay dead on the spot on which his ancestor had been found. He was all the young soldier on the gained field” (Benjamin Britten used this story as the basis of his late opera *Owen Wingrave*, op. 85, 1971). Henry James, “Owen Wingrave” in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*, ed. T. J. Lustig (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992), 78.
They laugh and are glad and are terrible:
When their lances shake and glitter every green reed quivers.

To which Etain replies:

I hear sweet dewfall voices, and the clink,
The delicate silvery spring and clink
Of faery lances underneath the moon.

In its final iteration, which, sung by an unseen chorus of the Sidhe offstage are the opera’s final lines, the words are rearranged to increase the effect:

They play with lances
And are proud and terrible,
Marching in the moonlight
With fierce blue eyes.\textsuperscript{299}

\textsuperscript{299} Libretto taken from the liner notes to \textit{The Immortal Hour}, conducted by Alan G Melville (Hyperion Records Limited, 1984), 14-15.
Figure 21: “How Beautiful They Are”


https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001861/19230203/024/0020?browse=False
As these lines suggest, the Faery world that Boughton invokes in *The Immortal Hour* is far from “a child’s fancy,” and does not “involve tiny creatures with fluttering wings, sitting on toadstools or prancing in magic circles.” Instead, in the words of Michael Hurd, the libretto presents “an awesome mirror-image of the mortal world and a proud, fierce race to whom the comings and goings of humans are no more than the peregrination of ants.” By combining the image of instruments of war – the lances that inspire fear in “every green reed” – with references to the confidence of youth, characterized by glad terrible laughter, athletic ability, and flower-like faces, the “Faery Song” portrays the *Sidhe* as a troop of young soldiers “marching in the moonlight with fierce blue eyes” as they accompany Midir while he sweeps Etain away from Eochaidh at the opera’s breathtaking conclusion.

To suggest that the *Sidhe* were militaristic was not an original step for either Macleod or Boughton to take. They built upon a tradition well-established in Celtic literature. In Yeats’s *Stories of Red Hanrahan*, his next published volume after *The Celtic Twilight*, Hanrahan catches echoes of warring faery soldiers in the following excerpt:

> And sometimes he would hear coming and going in the wood music that when it stopped went from his memory like a dream; and once in the stillness of __

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301 Michael Hurd, Liner notes to *The Immortal Hour*, conducted by Alan G Melville, (Hyperion Records Limited, 1984), 4.

Note: A ‘lancer’ was a cavalry soldier who fought with a lance. There were British lancers in WWI; there are still the Royal Lancers today – although the lances are for ceremony.


It was with this very same conflation of the soldier and the immortal that O’Grady first identified the *Tuatha Dé Danann/Sidhe* as Ireland’s pagan gods: he identified them as “both ‘eternal’ (in other words, supernatural immortals) and as the historically specific ‘first and best’ of the nation’s past (that is long dead heroes).” Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 304.
midday he heard a sound like the clashing of many swords, that went on for a
long time without any break.\footnote{W.B. Yeats, “Stories of Red Hanrahan” in \textit{The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. 5.} (Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-on-Avon, 1908), 251.}

Here, Hanrahan’s awareness of the \textit{Sidhe} is distinctly similar to the experience
presented in \textit{The Immortal Hour’s} conclusion, where the music of the \textit{Sidhe} accompanies
traces of warlike imagery.

Lady Gregory’s \textit{Complete Irish Mythology} (1902 and 1904), features a chapter
titled “Donn, Son of Midhir.” In this tale, a mysterious fawn leads Finn, the legendary
Irish leader, and his band of warriors to a hill where a group of the \textit{Sidhe} is living with
King Midhir (a slightly different spelling than that used in the text of \textit{The Immortal
Hour}). These \textit{Sidhe} explain to Finn that they have been battling hordes of various clans
who try to conquer them year after year, and are in desperate need of his military
expertise.\footnote{Lady Gregory, \textit{Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology}, (Finland: Reed International
Books, 1994), 175-181.} As a student of Irish mythology and a friend and associate of both Yeats and
Gregory, Macleod was well aware of these texts and tropes.

Some of the passages from songs for \textit{The Immortal Hour}, which Boughton found
in Macleod’s volume, \textit{The Hill of Dreams}, are reminiscent of passages from Yeats. In
particular, one of Hanrahan’s poem’s, “The Twisting of the Rope,”\footnote{Yeats, “Stories of Red Hanrahan,” 218.} may have provided
material for the “Faery Song,” “The Land of Youth” (another example of Midir’s wooing
poetry that comes in between iterations of the Faery song), as well as for the lament, “I Have Seen All Things Pass.”

Yeats’s poem, “The Twisting of the Rope” from Stories of Red Hanrahan:

O Death’s old bony finger
Will never find us there
In the high hollow townland,
Where love’s to give and to spare;
Where boughs have fruit and blossom
At all times of the year;
Where rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a gold and silver wood;
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in a crowd.

When their hearts are so high
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs:
But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again

Compare the above to the texts of the “Faery Song” as well as “The Land of Youth:”

In the Land of Youth there are pleasant places,
Green joyful woods and fields, swift grey-blue waters.
There is no age there, nor any sorrow,
As the stars in heaven are the cattle in the valleys.
Great rivers wander through flowery plains,
Streams of milk and mead, streams of strong ale.

There is a noticeable overlap between the lines of these three poems. “The hills, the hollow hills” from the “Faery Song” matches neatly with “the high hollow townland.”

The youthful invocations found in both the “Faery Song” as well as “The Land of Youth”

match as well to Yeats’s invocation of a place where “Death’s bony finger will never find us.” Furthermore, there are the amusing lines regarding copious beverages:

   Where rivers are running over
   With red beer and brown beer.
   (The Twisting of the Rope)

   Great rivers wander through flowery plains,
   Streams of milk and mead, streams of strong ale
   (The Land of Youth)

The point here is not to suggest that Yeats was the originator of such poetry, but rather to argue that all these poems contribute to another Celtic Twilight trope: the ‘Land of Youth’ (Tir Na nÓg). Most importantly, in the cultural imagination, this ‘Land of Youth’ was linked to militaristic imagery and the idea that the Sídhe were a type of faery soldier; one that if killed “awakens to new life again.” It seems highly unlikely that “Faery Song’s” invocation of this well-known trope would not have made an impact on post-war audiences still reeling from the tragedies of the front.

That Boughton scores the “Faery Song” for harp and voice is significant. The association of lost heroes and the harp, Midir’s instrument of choice, is one of the oldest Celtic tropes. John Daverio, in his analysis of Gade’s Ossianic compositions, writes,

   The harp, a primary color in Gade’s orchestral palette, is not only a signifier for bardic song; in Ossianic poetry it often serves to summon the spirits of heroes of yore, who in turn make their presence known through its ethereal sounds. Thus, when Comala [here Daverio is referring to Gade’s Comala, “no. 7, Chorus of Spirits,” circa. 1846] is visited by the ghosts of her ancestors who escort the souls of fallen heroes to the next world, their solemn march is accompanied by the harp as if to highlight the fact that the spirits emanate from an extratemporal realm.307

Daverio’s commentary implies that the “Faery Song’s” harp accompaniment may have remind audiences of the thousands of young men recently killed in the war because of the harp’s special power to conjures up the “souls of fallen heroes” (in other words, it is an aural signifier of dead soldiers). In the “Faery Song,” these fallen heroes are specifically invoked as “marching in the moonlight.” That member’s of Boughton’s audience shared their own encounters with soldiers on the march in their biographies and memoirs suggests the currency and power of this image in the postwar era.

Soldiers on the march in the lives of The Immortal Hour Devotees

Just as the devotees of The Immortal Hour listed above had a predilection for a militaristic spiritualism, they also conjured and experienced the image of the marching soldier in their memoirs and lives. Lady Warrender’s volume describes a defeated British battalion retreating from encroaching Germans during the early days of the war. They are too exhausted to move, when luckily their Major

then happened to see a toy drum and a penny whistle in a shop window. These he bought, found a couple of men to play, and started off down the road, his ‘band’ in front. The others followed and he got them along a few miles that night and on again next day, when they rejoined the Division.308

In this touching story, music is a transcendent force that re-energizes British troops as they march to an at least temporary safety. Stories such as these are uplifting and inspiring, however, they are rarer than the grim march of the wounded, which elicited

308 Warrender, My First Sixty Years, 120-121.
anguished emotional reactions in witnesses. In *Six Weeks at the War*, Millicent Sutherland (1867-1955), as a nurse trapped behind enemy lines, recounts breaking into tears after saying goodbye to her patients who are being force marched to prison-trains despite many of them being near death. Millicent recounts her last walk with these soldiers in the following anecdote:

The nurses and I walked up the town beside the stretchers and ambulance carts that were removing them to the Jesuit College. The Jesuit brothers were very kind and very sad also. They said the Germans were taking away the wounded in a pitiable state. Some had only just been operated on, and some were in a high fever. In the big hall of the Jesuit College there were quantities of wounded all herded together. The Jesuit brothers were doing all they could for them, but, of course, it was an entirely different matter to our hospital... When I went to say ‘Good-bye’ to each one and wish them luck, I wept like a child and could not help it.”

Marie Louise also describes the pain of reading daily the lists of wounded and dead, and of treating in her hospital the first waves of British soldiers struck by poison gas, “men half blind and choking their lives away.”

No doubt similar scenes must have played out at “The Princess Patricia Hospital,” which was named after Lady Patricia Ramsey (1886-1974). This devotee of *The Immortal Hour* also had a regiment named after her, many of whom lost their lives on a battle-ground ironically titled “Sanctuary Wood,” and described as a place with nothing but “remnants of ragged stumps and bits of

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309 Millicent Sutherland, *Six Weeks at the War* (Chicago: AC McClurg and Co., 1915), 66. Millicent Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland, was an author and social reformer who was painted by John Singer Sargent in 1904.


311 Lady Patricia Ramsey was one of Queen Victoria’s granddaughters.
splintered boles.”

Did the “Faery Song’s” invocation of joyously marching troops give those in the audience who remembered these dead soldiers an imaginative space to exchange, as a final resting place, the destruction of cursed battlegrounds like “sanctuary wood” for an enchanted and timeless world characterized by youth and happiness? If so, it may have provided those in the audience with an opportunity to embrace an alternative to the terrifying destinies of the soldiers they had cared for, and to recast the image of the marching soldier as a symbol not of bodies soon to be shattered and broken but of a youthful, carefree, and glorious immortality.

Indeed, the “Faery Song” may have offered audiences a way to bring the dead back to life, if only on the stage or in the imagination. In this same spirit, the work as a whole, through its nostalgically romantic aesthetic, evoked the pre-war era, its optimism, and, along with it, the dreams of a bright future that many had had at that time. In his own attempt to justify the work’s popularity, Michael Hurd suggests that *The Immortal Hour* offered a “dream world” that “a war-weary generation were ready to escape into.”

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313 Yeats invokes a similar sense of a new and more pleasant destiny in an untitled selection of poetry from *The Celtic Twilight’s* chapter, “The Queen and the Fool”:

Heardest thou not sweet words among
That heaven-resounding minstrelsy?
Heardest thou not that those who die
Awake in a world of ecstasy?
How love, when limbs are interwoven,
And sleep, when the night of life is cloven,
And thought to the world’s dim boundaries clinging,
And music when one’s beloved is singing
Is death?
dream he alludes to is not just the mythical world represented on the stage, but “the earlier saner age” in which the work was originally composed, and to which its style is indebted. By positing a visit to *The Immortal Hour* as a chance to reanimate long lost dreams, Hurd hints at the notion that such dreams were an unquantifiable casualty of the Great War, and a secondary casualty of the many lives and loves lost to its destruction.\(^\text{314}\)

The idea of the “broken dream” as a symbol of lost love is specifically evoked by Eochaidh in the final scene when he calls out, just before he dies: “My dreams, my dreams, give me my dreams.”\(^\text{315}\) If Eochaidh’s loss of Etain symbolized the loss of a loved one during the Great War, as this investigation has argued, was the evocation of lost dreams in the work’s final lines strong enough to express this? How could any form of expression match the terrible devastation, the grief, and the sense of loss, created by the war? Jay Winter highlights the universality of this question, with his observation that “the Great War brought the search for an appropriate language of loss to the center of cultural and political life.”\(^\text{316}\) One consequence of the difficulty of finding this “appropriate language” was that much was left ‘unsaid.’

The ‘Unsaid’ and Boughton’s modified conclusion to *The Immortal Hour*


\(^{315}\) Libretto taken from the notes of *The Immortal Hour*, conducted by Alan G Melville on (Hyperion Records Limited, 1984), 15.

\(^{316}\) Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 5.
The notion or concept of the ‘unsaid’ manifests itself in different ways in the writings of those in attendance at *The Immortal Hour*. In Lady Warrender’s story, mentioned earlier, of Mr. Jacob and his dinner party of Boer War veterans, the ‘unsaid’ appeals to the idea of the heroic but modest soldier, who neglects to mention that he once killed “two gigantic sepoys” in hand-to-hand combat.\(^{317}\) However, in other situations, the “unsaid” is invoked to stop grief from overwhelming and destabilizing its victims. In one of her most touching narratives, Marie Louise describes her friendship with her dear cousin “Alix, who became the wife of the last Czar of Russia.”\(^{318}\) When Alix is brutally murdered by the Bolsheviks (she was assassinated along with her husband and children), Marie Louise takes it upon herself to deliver the painful news to Alix’s sister, Victoria. She poignantly recalls how,

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we did not talk at great length about it at all; there was so little one could say. The horror of this ghastly tragedy was too overwhelming for mere words, and just the ordinary expressions of condolence seemed utterly out of place.\(^ {319}\)
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Marie Louise emphasizes how not dwelling on what had happened seemed the only right way to deal with it, stating that “silence did not mean careless indifference to what she was suffering, but that it was the only way I could convey my sympathy.” Victoria later writes Marie Louise thanking her for this silence “which had helped her to get a grip on herself and her emotions,” something which wouldn't have happened had they “discussed

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\(^{317}\) Warrender, *My First Sixty Years*, 99-104.

\(^{318}\) Louise, *My Memories of Six Reigns*, 50.

\(^{319}\) Ibid., 146-147.
at length the details of the tragedy and what she had suffered.” How many other British subjects could not allow grief to “interfere with the ordered daily routine of life,” and how many, “after that first half-hour,” never again spoke of the tragedies caused by the war? The subtext of this silence is simple: the search for the “appropriate language of loss” had failed. While leaving things ‘unsaid’ may have helped those dealing with tragedy get through the day-to-day, the consequence of this decision was that grief became an entirely private, rather than public, event. For those who witnessed Etain’s year of love spent with Eoachaidh as a symbolic visitation of a loved one from beyond, is it possible that the work’s dramatic conclusion was able to help express the “unsaid” by taking an expression of the private nature of grief and changing it into a public ritual?

Boughton designed the conclusion of The Immortal Hour in a subtle yet important way that transformed the experience of its final moments. In the play by Fiona Macleod, Dalua has the last word when he states, “there is none left but this… the dream of death,” as he touches and kills Eoachaidh. In this original staging, these lines shift the audience’s focus away from Eoachaidh and onto Dalua, allowing viewers to interpret Eoachaidh’s death from a safe, objective distance, and without the ironic commentary of the “Faery Song.” However, by eliminating these lines, Boughton completely recast the effect of the final scene. Instead of hearing Dalua’s dire pronouncement, the listener hears the immortal “Faery Song” fading into the distance as the Sídhe march and sing together on their way back to the Faery kingdom. It is as if one hears this fading, joyful

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320 Ibid., 146-147.

321 Macleod, The Immortal Hour, ed. Laura Wilson, 75.
chorus from Eoachiad’s ears, and therefore one cannot help but identify subjectively with the Irish King. Indeed, the receding chorus creates an aural illusion, whose effect is quite powerful; one truly feels left behind, in the hall of the Irish King, in a state of emotional devastation. There is no safe distance from which to hide from the irony of the moment: it is the dead that march joyously together offstage to a land of youthful immortality, while the living, are, like Eochaidh, left to die alone from the crushing grief of lost love.

It has been suggested earlier, that as a consequence of leaving things “unsaid,” the inexpressibility of grief made mourning for many Britons a profoundly solitary experience. Eochaidh’s last words, no longer interrupted by Dalua’s lines, resonate profoundly with this loneliness. His call – “My dreams, my dreams, give me my dreams” – is a cry, not for the joyous union of love, but for lost dreams: the broken hopes and anguished memories of those who lived through the postwar era.
Figure 22: Etain leaving Eochaidh to join Midir in the world of the *Sidhe*322

Concluding thoughts about *The Immortal Hour* in London

For audiences of *The Immortal Hour* in the years after the war, Eochaidh’s final utterance highlighted the relationship between grief and loneliness in an explicitly public sphere. It offered those audience members sensitive to these themes a chance to experience such usually solitary feelings as a group. I believe that this created an opportunity for them to acknowledge each other’s losses, and affirm that they were not

alone, but together, in their struggles. Indeed, the work had taken on the group-oriented qualities of, in the words of Sir Denison Ross quoted above, a “religious service.”

Significantly, there is a moment in *The Immortal Hour* that highlights the acceptance of grief, tragedy, and death as one of the work’s most important themes. This is the song “I have Seen All Things Pass,” mentioned earlier:

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I have seen all things pass and all things go
Under the shadow of the drifting leaf:
   Green leaf, red leaf, brown leaf,
   Grey leaf blown to and fro.

I have seen happy dreams rise up and pass
Silent and swift as shadows on the grass:
   Grey shadows of old dream,
   Grey beauty of old dreams
   Grey shadows on the grass
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This song, which seems to have eluded comment in nearly all writing regarding *The Immortal Hour*, perhaps offered audiences the work’s greatest and most effective moment of consolation.\(^\text{323}\)

Perhaps *The Immortal Hour* did not become the focus of international attention in the 1920s because it was not considered sophisticated enough, or because its material took a musical aesthetic that was fading in popularity and blended it with Celticism, Feminism, Theosophy, and Spiritualism in a way that has been underappreciated. Will *The Immortal Hour* re-enter the repertoire when its unique attributes are again needed by society? Indeed, the work’s display of spiritualism was an ideal fit to its times, and to its

\(^{323}\) The moment of silence mentioned in the *Children’s Newspaper* that this song inspired takes on a heightened significance in this context.
post-Glastonbury debut in 1920s London. In this sense, the work itself takes on an aspect of the uncanny, as Boughton could never have imagined in 1912 that a future war would lend his work new meanings, and it seems he never revised his own understanding of how the work communicated with its followers. It gave audience members, whether of high or low degree, a chance to imagine lost loved ones continuing to live happily in a “mirror world” and to re-envision the destinies of the many unfortunate soldiers they encountered during the war.324

The spiritual significance *The Immortal Hour* may have held for audiences once again demonstrates several elements of Celtic Twilight. In Celtic Twilight, Christianity and Celtic spiritualism co-exist in an uneasy and unresolved state. As Yeats had once bragged, he did not “rationalize a single hobgoblin.” Similarly, he left his readers to their own devices when it came to rationalizing the opposing concepts of heaven and the ‘Land of Youth.’ *The Immortal Hour* offered its audiences a similar conundrum. If they imagined their lost loved ones being reborn in *Tir-Na-nÓg*, then the ‘Land of Youth’ was simply a Celtic-heaven. However, the ‘Land-of-Youth’ is in actuality the home of the *Sidhe*, and only in special cases do humans pass through its gateways. In the case of Yeats’s character Red Hanrahan, the troubled and lovesick poet reaches *Tir-Na-nÓg* only to be rejected and cast back into a mortal life of lost and ceaseless wandering. This is similar to Eochaidh’s ‘Immortal Hour’ with Etain; like Red Hanrahan, he is cast out from a previously idyllic state. Another long-standing trope of Celtic spiritualism featured in

324 One reviewer described the work as “a happy lingering in the ‘infinitude called youth.’” Grein, J.T. “‘The Immortal Hour’ at the Regent,” *The Sketch*, Wednesday, October 25, 1922, 33. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001860/19221025/034/0033
the tales of Yeats’s *The Celtic Twilight* is one in which people of great beauty, such as newly wed brides or newly born babies, are stolen away by the *Sidhe*. This trope is especially suited to the war; it implies that those that had died in the war had similarly been stolen.

Yet another way to understand why an officially Christian population would look to spiritualist and folkloric explanations to make sense of recent events is to take a Yeatsian approach and simply avoid rationalizations. One of the War’s most difficult to accept characteristics was the irrationality of its ceaseless destruction. The Christian notion of heaven was simply too rational; the turn to spiritualism that Jay Winter discusses was a turn to the irrational. The conclusion of *The Immortal Hour* offered an irrational way of comprehending what had happened: by suggesting that somehow fallen soldiers lived on in a supernatural ‘otherworld’ that had been a fabric of life and culture on the British isles from long before the arrival of the Christian era.325

Whatever reasons (or lack thereof) may have arisen in people’s minds, what was most important about *The Immortal Hour* was that it was not only the dead that were presented on its stage. Eochaidh, who dies from grief, became a point of self-identification for the sufferers, those unfortunates that the Great War left behind to endure a fate of lonely suffering. He symbolized a projection of their grief onto that “mirror world” of the operatic stage in a way that was dignified and cathartic, that created a sense of community, and helped foster some acceptance of the tragedy brought on by

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the Great War. In this light, the hysterical response of the final curtain that upset Rutland Boughton may have been a real display of gratitude to for his opera. He had created a work that finally “found the appropriate language” – one that transcended rationalizations and instead reached back deeply into cultural memory – and gave voice in the most literal manner to those things that had remained unsaid for years.

Finally, *The Immortal Hour* and its Celtic Twilight aesthetics presented on the stage a fading culture. For devotees of *The Immortal Hour*, the ‘broken dream’ of wartime became intermixed symbolically with the ‘broken dream’ of a fading decadent romanticism that could only could be remembered in a tragic twilit reverie. Onstage the liminal boundary between this world and the next – the essential feature of Celtic Twilight – became not only a boundary between the crushed Irish King and his erstwhile bride, but a boundary as well between the present and the past, reality and what ‘might have been.’ Therefore, even for audience members unaware of its Theosophical resonance, its spiritualist overtones, or its marching soldiers, *The Immortal Hour* still offered a moving experience: it was a looking glass through which to see what had been. As time passed, scar tissue grew over the wounds of war. There were fewer people who had lived during that glorious, romantic, prewar era, and who could therefore identify strongly with the work’s conjuration of yesteryear.326

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326 The following review from a 1934 revival at The Church Institute, Stroud, encapsulates many of the these arguments:

The audience was, if anything, more enthusiastic than on Monday, for many came to see something with which they were familiar, and had learned to love many years ago. The commonplace hall became a dream world. Etaine dreamed, Eochaidh dreamed, even the sinister Dalua and the old Bard, dreamed. The audience only woke...
receded, and its purposeful nostalgia became a cliché separated from a once powerful meaning. A series of stunning revivals eventually lost steam, and the work was forgotten, surviving only as a footnote in music history.

The *Immortal Hour* and the Great War: a second perspective

Those familiar with *The Immortal Hour* will know that long before its staggering runs at the Regent Theatre, the work had experienced a different and more humble form of success as part of Rutland Boughton’s Glastonbury Festivals. The Glastonbury Festivals were yet another Wagnerian derivative. Boughton had hoped to create both an English version of Bayreuth and a cycle of operas based on Arthurian legend to serve as its British equivalent to the *Ring* cycle. Boughton did complete his cycle before his death, but he only succeeded in having it partially performed. However, *The Immortal Hour*, finished in 1912, was the perfect inaugural work for his festival scheme. Boughton went to great lengths to organize the festivals, and even put on several preliminary ‘festival

when the curtain fell, and Etaine melted away with the Prince of Faery.” The reviewer also celebrated “the last half-hour or so, which, in the sheer beauty of its artistic setting, the concerted singing of the chorus, and the pathos and tragedy of the ending, has surely never been surpassed in this district.

That this local revival of *The Immortal Hour* was patronized by those that had grown up with it suggests the generational specificity of the work. Meanwhile, the reviewer’s belief that the work was a pleasurable dream that melted away contributes to the theory the opera was a window through which to look upon a lost past. Anon. “The Immortal Hour,” *Gloucester Journal* Saturday, September 15, 1934, 2. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000532/19340915/019/0002?browse=False
schools’ as trial runs. He advertised these events, in accordance with his socialist beliefs, as the perfect vacation for the weary worker. He even arranged to have Sir Thomas Beecham and his orchestra perform the premiere of *The Immortal Hour* at the first official festival. However, disaster struck. The war began just days before the first performances, Beecham’s orchestra had to cancel, and grandiose talks of a new theatre fell through. Still, Boughton persevered, and *The Immortal Hour* premiered in the Glastonbury assembly rooms with piano accompaniment. Despite all obstacles, critics hailed the small festival as a success. The resilience required of Boughton and his collaborators to pull through as the festival continued during the war years resonated with the general spirit of the war effort. Despite their modest nature, the festivals received considerable press coverage, and in the pages of the daily press mentions of the festival and the Great War became intertwined.

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327 This would become a continual theme for Boughton. In a review of a concert of Boughton’s music given at Aeolian Hall in Oct of 1923, the critic for *The Era* wrote that, “Mr. Rutland Boughton gave the first of two concerts of chamber music ‘for the plain man who likes the common chord and an occasional tune, and not for high-brows.’” Anon., “Mr. Boughton’s Concert,” *The Era*, Wednesday, October 17, 1923, 6. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000053/19231017/057/0006

As late as 1918, Boughton and his associates thought that the festivals and their quasi-socialist agenda still had the latent potential to change the nation. An article co-authored by Boughton and Hebert Antcliffe lays bare what they perceived as the festival’s revolutionary potential:

> The Glastonbury Festival of Music-Drama, with its attached school of opera singing, acting and dancing – forms the pivot of the movement that should, if properly worked, do much to revolutionize British ideas upon and remake the conditions which exist in England with regard to music and all that appertains to the art of the theatre.

While not explicitly stated, Boughton felt that this musical revolution would extended out to the rest of society, and usher in the socialist utopia that he envisioned for mankind. “A British school of Music Drama,”118.
For example, sharing space with a notice for the second Glastonbury festival in the *Western Daily Press*, Monday, July 5, 1915, an essay by the Bishop of Hereford asks for the musical community to offer cheap concerts as a “means of elevating the people.” He argues that such concerts would serve the public good, “not only in providing musical amusement,” but by “doing something to brighten … and make better in all respects the lives of their fellow citizens.” For cultural enthusiasts such as the Bishop, Boughton’s efforts with the festivals were indeed a contribution to the war effort.

The subsequent notice regarding the festival’s program includes performances of Boughton’s *The Immortal Hour* and *The Birth of Arthur*, Edgar Bainton’s *Oithona*, and Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. Boughton, the unrepentant Wagnerian, did not think it amiss to also include excerpts from *Parsifal* and *Siegfried* during a war against German aggression. The juxtaposition of the German Master’s name and an ad in the adjacent column aimed at bringing in recruits to the war effort is jarring:

Glouchestershire RFA: Recruits Wanted, 3rd Line Above the Brigade for Imperial Service. Special Rates of Pay To: Shoeing Smiths Saddlers Fitters Wheelwrights. The First Line of this Brigade is now on active service. Drafts will be supplied from the Third Line to the Service Brigade. Enlist Today, artillery grounds, white ladies road, Clifton.

A few months later, a notice for the festival in the *Western Gazette* comes directly at the end of the “Roll of Honour,” a list of hundreds of local dead and wounded men,

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329 Ibid., 9.

which includes men wounded across the channel, in the Mediterranean, and in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, the notice for the festival promises that it will “be a great attraction to lovers of music.” In this article, there is no mention of Wagnerian excerpts.

As the war began changing the way Britons perceived German culture, Boughton’s idea of a British Bayreuth continued to garner press attention. The Sheffield Independent noted that the scheme was receiving “serious consideration” though it had “been hampered by the war.” The article credits Boughton’s “keenness” for building awareness of the project, and uses the Arthurian lore surrounding Glastonbury as a means of legitimizing Boughton’s plan for a national project. It claims that Boughton met Reginald Buckley, the librettist for the Arthurian cycle, on a visit to Tintagel Castle, a place “rich in Arthurian romance.” The author notes with irony the uneasy relation of Boughton’s project to the country that had become England’s greatest enemy:

Yesterday afternoon and evening performances were given of Mr. Bainton’s opera ‘Oithana’ in two scenes and the second act of Wagner’s ‘Tristan and(sic) Isolda.’ It is remarkable that the first production of the English composer’s work should be given while he is a prisoner in Germany, and that his opera should be followed by the work of a German.

Edgar Bainton, composer of the two-act opera Oithona, on holiday in Germany when the war broke out, had been interred in a prisoner-of-war camp, and the otherwise standard

331 Glastonbury is supposedly the burial site of King Arthur and Queen Guinivere. Glastonbury Tor, a small hill crowned by a small tower-like fortification, is linked with the ‘Isle of Avalon’—King Arthur’s resting place. There is an argument that in the past the water level in the area was higher, and this unusual mound would have been an island.

Wagnerian excerpts now appeared dreadfully out of place. Boughton negotiated his way through the muddle by claiming that, “Wagner was one of the least German in feeling of all German composers, and in his writings there was one continual denunciation of German methods.” Readers interested in more than only musical fare would learn in a notice just beneath the one regarding Boughton’s festival that,

The Zeppelin raid on the East Coast has given a stimulating fillip to recruiting. A welcome resumption of activity was noticeable at the recruiting offices in the City and West End yesterday, and telling posters conveying a stirring message quickly made their appearance, on the boardings. Many young men were successfully persuaded to enlist on their way to business.

In the adjacent column, news of the grim submarine battle emerges:

Thus for the week ended August 4 it was announced that six English merchant ships and nine fishing steamers fell victims to the U boats.

From all sides, news of war surrounds notices for Boughton’s festival. The public, motivated by a brand of artistic patriotism, began showing “considerable interest” in the festival. A report remarks on the success of The Immortal Hour and states that people attended in such numbers that “many were unable to gain admission.” Still, news of the unlikely success of a British opera is only a momentary distraction for readers, as in the adjacent column the war continues its steady march. An advertisement, titled “Gifts and


334 Ibid., 5.

Comforts More Necessary Than Ever,” calls for everything from shirts, to towels, fruit, chocolate, and tobacco to be donated to men at the front.

The appeal of Boughton’s everyman approach, the same used by the army, also became a subject for discussion. In a laudatory review of the festivals, the *Western Daily Press* observes that “the general public were only just beginning to discover that this Festival is as much their show as that of the music-lover.” The reviewer also notices an unusual degree of unity amongst Boughton and his cohort. He writes, “the jealousies of musicians provide amusement to the public. Happily, however, a very different spirit exists among the Glastonbury players.” These comments suggest that the war may have heightened the significance of the festival for its participants and united their interests. Finally, just as its notices rally the troops, the *Western Daily Press* also rallies its readers to support the festival, writing that, “the best help they can give now is to turn up in strength and make a big success in the final week.”

One last press posting should be considered. It comes from after the war and is an anonymously authored poem attached to a notice regarding a war memorial rose garden. It directly links the soldier’s ultimate sacrifice to an immortal hour:

More than the record cut in mould’ring stone
Shall be the witness of the living bloom,
Memorial of that great host unknown,
Whose passing has made beautiful the tomb.

White for their youth; the crimson and the gold
For blazoned glory of their offering;

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For they that wait, the first-sprung bud shall hold
Unchanging promise of their deathless spring.

Summer on summer shall the long years see
Within each rose some memory enshrined,
The fragrance of each opening flow’r shall be
Their names new given to the echoing wind.
True memory of their immortal hour
The flow’r of England writ in England’s flow’r. 337

As the above examples illustrate, the war followed the festival and its showpiece, *The Immortal Hour*, wherever it asserted itself in the newspapers. Furthermore, the festivals became a topic for debate within the broader context of the war because Boughton’s steadfast Wagnerian sympathies and his desire to create an artistic monument to Britain were two ambitions that generated a problematic counterpoint. Still, the festival’s links to German aesthetics did not hamper its popularity, and the march to the theatre was played out in tandem with the march to the recruiting office, both in reality and on the pages of the newspapers. Meanwhile, there was an implicit association made between British patriotism and public support for the festivals. Operating without significant patronage, the success of Boughton’s festivals over incalculable odds mirrored the predicament of a British population pitted in a seemingly insurmountable struggle against the Germans. I have suggested that the reason for the London success of Boughton’s opera was the relationship of its content to the tragedy of the Great War. For

those that remain skeptical, the excerpts above demonstrate that the history of *The Immortal Hour* is deeply entwined with that of the war.

**Adding Boughton to the Celtic context**

With *The Immortal Hour*, Boughton joins the other composers mentioned previously as part of a select group who continued to work in a Romantic idiom well after the fashion for such an aesthetic had passed. Though Boughton stands out for his early success, all these composers are united, not only by their interest in Celtic subject matter, but also by what Pirie describes as an inability to “escape the Wagner craze of the first years of our century.” Their preference for Wagnerian aesthetics in part stemmed from studies with Fredrick Corder, who taught Bantock, Holbrooke, and Bax at the Royal Academy of Music. In recent scholarship, Christopher Little has suggested that many of the composers mentioned above who indulged in Celtic themed works, including Bantock, Holbrooke, Rutland Boughton, Bax, and Havergal Brian, be dubbed the “English Romantics.” These composers were “excluded from the ‘historical-pastoral’

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338 Pirie, “Bantock and His Generation,” 715.

339 Corder encouraged a “late Romantic, German-derived technique” in his teaching. However, his attachment to Wagner and Liszt went deeper than this comment suggests. He and his wife Henrrieta Louisa (née Walford) made “pioneering English translations of Wagner, which did much to spread an appreciation in England of the composer Corder admired above all others,” and as late as 1925 he wrote “an exaggeratedly defensive biography of Liszt.” John Warrack and Rosemary Williamson, “Frederick Corder,” *Grove Music Online*, (2001). https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06467
narrative” that notably championed Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams as the leaders of English musical composition.\(^{340}\)

Much conjecture has been made about the neglect of these “English Romantics.” While Pirie opines that Elgar, Delius, and Holst “retain enough vitality to create their own atmosphere” he also argues that the musical world conjured by Bantock, Holbrooke, and Brian “has gone past our ability to understand fully its peculiar atmosphere and assumptions.”\(^{341}\) Indeed, the ‘giganticism’ that afflicted Bantock and his associates took their works outside the scale of comprehension, distorting Wagner’s grandiose worldview beyond a recognizable scope. However, whatever their quirks may have been, they shared, as the title ‘English Romantics’ suggests, an aesthetic that was unapologetically romantic, unabashedly Wagnerian, and correspondingly backward looking. Boughton’s backward glance in *The Immortal Hour* was particularly poignant, asking audiences to look back at the very abyss of grief, as well as to the pre war era. Though Elgar’s experiments with Celtic Twilight were limited, he certainly captured the spirit of Celtic Twilights’ backwards glance in his correspondence with his friend Alice Stuart-Wortley. He wrote the following on 5 March 1917, as his joy at returning to the countryside was tempered by the tragedy of war and his realization of the passing of time:

> I was dreaming yesterday of woods and fields and, perhaps, a little drive round Harrogate – or a little play journey to Fountains or some lovely

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\(^{341}\) Pirie, “Bantock and His Generation,” 715.
remembrance of long ago idylls, and now deep snow! Well, I have put it all in my music, and also much more that never happened.\textsuperscript{342}

Consider as a final argument, Daverio’s observation that “what I find most telling about the features of Gade’s Nordic [Ossianic] character is their nearly uniform turn in the same direction: toward the past.”\textsuperscript{343} If in Gade’s time – the heydey of Ossian mania – this backward look turned to a dying Celtic culture, after the Great War, it meant a look back to a lost generation.

\textbf{Vaughan Williams’ \textit{Riders To The Sea} and the eclipse of Celtic Twilight musical aesthetics}

Even by the 1910s, compositional innovations in works like Stravinsky’s \textit{Rite of Spring} (1913) or Schoenberg’s \textit{Pierrot Lunaire} (1912) demonstrated that the folksy, romantic idiom of \textit{The Immortal Hour} was by no means at the vanguard of innovation in western classical music. Still, Boughton’s synthesis of romantic and folk aesthetics is commendable and innovative in its own way. As discussed in a previous chapter, Synge’s stage plays, notably \textit{Riders to the Sea}, stylistically eclipsed the Celtic Twilight aesthetic. Similarly, though countless other works can serve as examples of compositions that go well beyond the limited scope of \textit{The Immortal Hour}, Ralph Vaughan Williams’ setting

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{342} Michael Kennedy, \textit{Portrait of Elgar: New Edition}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 273. Elgar wrote this during the time he composed his three great chamber music scores, which are both melancholic and nostalgic.
\item \textsuperscript{343} Daverio, “Schumann’s Ossianic Manner,” 259.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* (circa 1925) is particularly telling in this regard. In his one-act opera, Vaughan Williams advances the treatment of Irish rural life beyond the Celtic Twilights’ musical stylistic parameters in a way quite similar to the way in which Synge’s play had transcended Yeats’s literary incarnation of Celtic Twilight. Of key importance to the stylistic leap that Vaughan Williams brings his subject matter is the use of the octatonic scale. The octatonic scale alternates between whole steps and half steps, and spells out the fully diminished chord. As Walter Clark notes,

> Those who have analyzed *Riders to the Sea* have noted Vaughan Williams’ use of harmonic devices quite advanced for the 1920s, especially bitonality. But the most unconventional procedure that Vaughan Williams employs, one with few precedents in his works before 1920, is the use of the octatonic scale… The octatonic scale contains a tri-tone between the first and fifth degrees of the scale, the ‘tonic’ and the ‘dominant,’ which is an important factor in creating the dark mood of this work.\(^{344}\)

Critics have lauded Vaughan Williams’ version of *Riders* for its “true representation of real people.” This “true representation” is the very same quality of ‘realism’ for which Synge’s theatrical version received praise. Key to Vaughan Williams’ brand of musical realism is the concept that, in the words of Edmund Rubbra, “the melody is no longer shackled to a chord, but is free to companion the subtleties of speech-rhythm.” In addition to liberating its musical speech through octatonic techniques, *Riders* further breaks the shackles of romantic aesthetics by employing “a dramatic kind of recitative that approaches actual lyricism only occasionally.”\(^{345}\) In other words, *The


\(^{345}\) Ibid., 59.

Here Vaughan Williams built on the declamatory innovations of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*. 

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*Immortal Hour* and *Riders*, though they share Celtic subject matter, exist at opposite ends of the compositional spectrum. The combined effect of the innovative lyrical and harmonic elements found in *Riders* are a musical analogue to Synge’s play. What Rubbra calls “a stark earthiness” can justly be called “realism” – perhaps one of the most difficult qualities to convey on the operatic stage.

Clark’s arguments regarding the use of octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea* have not gone uncontested.346 However, the score shows that Vaughan Williams set several of the work’s declamatory passages to octatonic pitch collections:

346 For example, it has been suggested that these pitch collections are more likely ‘hexatonic’ than ‘octatonic.’ See: Alain Frogley, “Review: Vaughan Williams Essays by Byron Adams and Robin Legge,” *Music & Letters* no.89, no. 3 (August, 2008), 405-408.
Figure 23: Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Riders to the Sea*, 43-44.  

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These vocal passages spell out octatonic scales with a sharp, intense declamatory rhythm quite unlike anything found in Boughton’s pentatonically grounded score, and suggest that Clark’s conclusions bear weight. It is through both octatonicism and a brand of declamation derived from Debussy and Ravel that Vaughan Williams creates a distinct musical atmosphere in *Riders*, one which inspired Rubbra to exclaim: “in no sense is this an opera: rather it is a spoken drama raised in emotional power and expressiveness to the nth degree.”\(^{348}\) Therefore, I believe that it would be a mistake to classify Vaughan Williams’ *Riders* as a work that espouses the aesthetics of Celtic Twilight, as tempting as this may be, just as it would also be an error to classify Synge’s play in such a way. In both versions of *Riders*, the folksy-romanticism of Celtic Twilight is abandoned for something altogether more modern.

In contrast to Vaughan Williams’ *Riders*, the symbolism of Boughton’s *The Immortal Hour* stands out ever more clearly. Boughton was anti-realist, and it is through his ingenious invention of ‘living scenery,’ and its debut, in collaboration with renowned dancer Margaret Morris (1891-1980) at a ‘festival school’ he organized in 1913 at the Bournemouth Winter Gardens that critics became attuned to this aspect of his aesthetics.\(^{349}\) *The Musical Times* offered the following explanation of the concept:

(Living scenery) consists in the substitution of persons for stage accessories and scenery – or, in the words of the producer, human staging: that is to say, the provision of the necessary atmosphere and environment is not


\(^{349}\) Boughton’s early ‘festival schools’ were the forerunners of the Glastonbury festivals.
entrusted to stage ‘hands,’ but everything is suggested by means of the gestures and rhythmic movements of a body of dancers and singers.  

Alternatively called “human staging” it was so successful that it became incorporated into many works at the Glastonbury Festivals. The following is a description of the concept in action:

In ‘Sumida River,’ for instance, no attempt was made to bring the ferry boat across the stage in order to represent the crossing of the river, while the usual futile appeal to the imagination by means of cloths was equally avoided. Instead, the chorus, suitably garbed, moved slowly along against a backcloth (which was of a neutral tint with no tracery), and by the movement of their limbs suggested, in a manner more vivid than could have been expected, the motion of the water and the progress of the boat.

The results were impressive, and the festival’s presentation of Boughton’s Birth of Arthur earned the following magnificent headline in the Daily News:

‘SCENERY’ BY SONG AND DANCE
No Vulgar Realism in a Seaside Drama
EVERYTHING LEFT TO THE IMAGINATION

The reviewer for The Musical Times also wrote, in a less jubilant but still praiseworthy manner, “Mr. Boughton has definitely stated that his aims are other than realistic; and indeed the principles of realism could not with success be applied to such a scheme.”

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350 Anon., “‘Dancing Scenery’ at Bournemouth: Mr. Rutland Boughton’s Experiment,” The Musical Times vol. 54, no. 848 (October 1, 1913): 664.

351 Antcliffe and Boughton. “A British School of Music Drama,” 126.

352 Ibid., 126.

353 Hurd, Rutland Boughton, 59.

354 Anon., “‘Dancing Scenery’ at Bournemouth,” 664.
This staging would later become an important part of Glastonbury performances of *The Immortal Hour*.

Boughton’s living scenery fulfilled a vision of a type staging that Yeats envisioned during the period when he first began to conceive of an Irish National Theatre. In a letter addressed to Fiona Macleod from January 1897, Yeats expressed some opinions regarding dramatic scenery:

> My own theory of poetical or legendary drama is that it should have no realistic, or elaborate, but only a symbolic and decorative setting. A forest for instance, should be represented by a forest pattern and not by a forest painting. One should design a scene which would be an accompaniment not a reflection of the text. This method would have further advantage of being fairly cheap, and altogether novel.  

This can only be explained as a case of elective affinity. While ‘living scenery’ appears to have been the product of a moment of artistic inspiration, its successful implementation was a reflection of the importance of dance to Boughton’s music festivals, as well as the involvement of several important collaborators. He collaborated with Margaret Morris to make living scenery, and he delegated set designs to his soon-to-be second wife Christina Walshe. He also recruited Mary Neal, whose contributions to the English folk dance revival are incalculable – if contested at the time – as well as Morris’ pupil, Florence Jolley. At his 1914 ‘holiday school’ Morris ‘interpret[ed]’ the whole of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony.” Meanwhile there were dances by “Mary Neal, Clive Carey, and the Espérance Guild of Morris Dancers” as well as lectures from

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Mary Neal on the art of Morris dancing.\textsuperscript{356} Morris and Neal’s involvement with women’s folk dancing went hand in hand with an advocacy of women’s rights. Furthermore, Mary Neal was, like Boughton, “strongly committed to the labor movement.”\textsuperscript{357} The festival school also included lectures from Edward Carpenter, a sexual progressive who advocated for the rights of homosexuals.\textsuperscript{358}

Boughton’s festivals may have been poorly funded, but his ingenious and enthusiastic colleagues made up for whatever was lacking. Looking back upon the many people that came together over Boughton’s works and festivals and who participated in the success of \textit{The Immortal Hour}, whether on stage or in the audience, it is clear that the world of Celtic Twilight that he conjured with his works and ideas drew to him the most progressive elements of British society. Earlier I suggested that Yeats used various narrative strategies in \textit{The Celtic Twilight} to establish himself as a Bard. Boughton was simply too much of a radical to become the leader of England’s musical establishment, but he was indeed the Bard of Glastonbury.

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\textsuperscript{356} Hurd, \textit{Rutland Boughton}, 70.
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Unfortunately, Mary Neal’s work with the Espérance came to an end with the onset of the war, and therefore her collaboration with the Glastonbury festivals was limited. For more on Neal’s battle with Cecil Sharp over the English folk dance revival, see also this article.
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\textsuperscript{358} However, Carpenter’s lectures were on organic farming and crafts, not ‘gay liberation.’ Boughton was terrified of homosexuals.
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Chapter 5: Celtic Twilight in British Culture and Discourse, and the British Musical Establishment

Before Yeats’s Twilight aesthetic reached Rutland Boughton, it had to make the artistic journey through that natural intermediary: poetry. The nostalgic, backward glance that characterizes Boughton’s Celtic Twilight music did not stand alone, as nostalgia was essential to Celtic Twilight poetry as well. In one of the few proper studies of the Celtic Twilight, The Celtic Twilight and the Nineties, Austin Clarke uses the metaphor of the railway platform to illustrate the different artistic avenues available to artists during to the transitional era of the 1890s:

One feels at times as if one were at a crowded railway platform with trains arriving and departing from various junctions. Some writers felt that a great epoch was ending and turned either to the passing moment or the romantic past. Others, however, like H.G. Wells, G.B. Shaw, felt that everything was only beginning and looked forward with an optimism which has been much disturbed since then, to the dazzling progress of a new century.359

Just as Yeats had conjured the train as the essential symbol of modernity with which to contrast Celtic Twilight, Clarke makes a similar rhetorical move. Clarke singles out, as members of the group who dared to look back, Yeats and other significant poets of the era:

Most of the poets, such as Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons – and we must include W. B. Yeats – looked back to the romantic period, feeling that they were in the twilight of the ages.360

359 Clarke, The Celtic Twilight, 9.

360 Ibid., 9.
Clarke offers the poetry of Lionel Johnson as an earlier example of the Twilight aesthetic:

Lionel Johnson… was one of the first to be influenced by the Celtic Twilight mood. He was of Irish descent and his poem ‘Ways of War,’ was much admired by Thomas MacDonagh. It begins:

A terrible and splendid trust
Heartens the host of Innisfail:
Their dream is of the swift sword-thrust,
A lightning glory of the Gael\(^{361}\)

Clarke identifies the end of the ‘Twilight mood’ in the works of Joyce:

In his first phase, Joyce was fascinated by the Celtic Twilight mood and this is obvious as we read *The Portrait of the Artist*. In *Chamber Music*, most of the poems are delicate experiments in Elizabethan lyric form, but a few echo the Celtic Twilight mood. The best of them is inspired by ‘The Unappeasable Host;’ which appeared in *The Wind among the Reeds*. Joyce’s poem begins:

I hear an army charging upon the land,
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the charioteers.

…. years later Joyce was still lured by the Twilight mood, as in the song ‘She weeps over Rahoon’, which appeared in *Pomes Penyeach*:

Rain on Rahoon falls softly, softly falling,
Where my dark lover lies.
Sad is his voice that calls me, sadly calling,
At grey moonrise.

Love, hear thou
How soft how sad his voice is every calling
Ever unanswered, and the dark rain falling,
Then as now\(^{362}\)

\(^{361}\) Ibid., 46.
(Innisfail meaning “the isle of destiny” – sometimes a synonym for Ireland).

\(^{362}\) Ibid., 47.
As these lines of Johnson and Joyce reaffirm, the various associations of Celtic Twilight with nostalgia, loss, supernaturalism, and militarism are not unique to *The Immortal Hour*. Rather they are well-worn tropes that pervade this aesthetic. In both excerpts, nostalgia and symbol intertwine freely, particularly in Joyce’s lines mentioning “arrogant black armour” of the charioteers; am an image that offers a parallel to the boatsman that waits beside the River Styx. However, if both Johnson and Joyce’s verses verge upon the Ossianic, they are nevertheless penned by cosmopolitans conjuring dreams of an imagined past. These lines are not redolent of someone battling on the heathered hills. They are voiced by one consumed by decadent ‘outworn’ passions and imaginings. 

Perceived through the lens of 1890s Celtic Twilight, the militarism in these verses takes a dimension quite un-Ossianic. For if Ossian symbolizes anything, it is the qualities of heroism and glory, and by extension the “epic;” epic love, epic war, etc. On the other hand, for these Celtic Twilight poets, the warrior is a symbol of fading glory, the losing battle – what Clarke calls “the twilight of the ages.” Such militarism is more likely to kindle forlorn raptures than motivate Napoleonic despots.

Just as militarism of *The Immortal Hour* was an avenue for audiences to enact a broader contemplation of longing and loss, so to does Clarke’s series of examples proceed in a similar manner. In the lines from “She weeps over Rahoon,” Joyce offers a feeling akin to that inspired by Yeats’s vision of the beleaguered dreamer riding the train endlessly, or fruitlessly wandering the rain-soaked hills. “Rahoon’s” lines suggest that the

363 Indeed, Joyce’s poem is not about battles, but about dreams, nightmares, and lost love; its militaristic imagery symbolizes loss and despair.
visions and exchanges with the mystical that the Celtic Twilight enthusiast must forever pursue will also always be “ever unanswered,” except by the sound of the “dark falling rain.” Consequentially, whichever path these three Irish poets lead their readers down, it is, “then as now,” one that ends in nostalgia. This ‘twilight’ obsession with the past is often overdone. However, it gives insight into the spread of Celtic Twilight into the artistic imagination. The aesthetic held a magnetic allure for those artists who were moved, perhaps the by pressure of a new and uncertain century, to ‘look back.’

While encouraging some to aesthetic raptures, the rarefied atmosphere of Celtic Twilight became for others a pretext for mockery. Austin Clarke suggests as much when he observes, “when the prevailing mood is one of languor, world-weariness, and despair, we cannot take it too seriously.”364 In his introduction to The Eighteen-nineties [by Martin Secker], Sir John Betjeman sums up the comic despair of the period with what Clarke calls “the following pleasant recipe”:

Draw the curtains, kindle a joss-stick in a dark corner, settle down on a sofa by the fire, light an Egyptian cigarette and sip a brandy and soda, as you think yourself back to the world which ended in prison and disgrace for Wilde, suicide for Crackenthorpe and John Davidson, premature death for Beardsley, Dowson, Lionel Johnson, religion for some, drink and drugs for others, temporary or permanent oblivion for many more.365

As Betjeman’s lines suggest, a thread of darkly comic fatalism would become associated with Celtic Twilight, one exacerbated by the aesthetic’s deep links to nostalgia. One can observe a similar progression (with unexpected consequences) as Celtic Twilight transformed from a literary and artistic term into a phrase used in common parlance.

364 Ibid., 10.
365 Ibid., 10.
Celtic Twilight as a phrase and part of common discourse

What is most interesting about Celtic Twilight’s infiltration of everyday language is that before the publication of Yeats’s volume, the phrase seems not to have appeared in British newspapers. Whether the term existed before is uncertain, but Yeats’s volume was essential in bringing it, and all its associations, into the popular imagination. However, its use in discourse may not have been altogether to Yeats’s liking. As early as 1901, an essay on humor in the *Warder and Dublin Weekly Mail* describes a talk from a lecturer who had a “preference for the humorists who did not seek to raise a laugh, or for such humour as pervaded Mr. Yeats’s Celtic Twilight.” This comment, from a lecture by “Mr. Stephen Gwynn” at the “Society of Arts, Adelphi, the Session 1900-1 of the Irish Literary Society,” entitled “Humorists of the Nineteenth Century” suggests that even at this early date, and even in locations as close to home as the “Irish Literary Society,” the extreme seriousness of Yeats’s volume had already been reinterpreted as comical.

One peculiar article from the *Dublin Weekly National* (Saturday 30 September 1899), titled “The Beautiful City,” delights in celebrating the billiard club as a place where intelligent men can have open, frank, and witty discourse about the issues of the day. In one instance, a group of men take sides in regards to the electric company’s proposal to line an important street with electric lights. Discussing one man who claims he would prefer that the street stay gaslit, the columnist writes:

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First he objects in the interest of the gasworkers to the additional cost per lamp, though later we find him voting against the scheme, even on condition that it should cost no more than the original one. I pass over the rest of those who voted for the Celtic Twilight, as they did not even attempt to justify their action by argument. 367

This second example, printed relatively close to The Celtic Twilight’s initial publication, shows the speed with which the phrase became common currency. Furthermore, its association of Celtic Twilight and a state of mind that does not engage in reasoned thinking indicates the beginning of a broader trend in which the phrase began to be used for signifying negative view of Irishness.

In a 1968 review of Donald S. Connery’s volume The Irish in the Illustrated London News, the author, arguing for the value of small nations to the world, states:

The example of Ireland is in many ways the most striking, and there seems to be no end to the stream of books about its renaissance. Many of them are of doubtful value, either because they portray it as a verdant Cockaigne alive with leprechauns in the Celtic twilight, or, on the other hand, because they attempt to prove that the modern Irishry are intent on cutting themselves off from their past. 368

This passage offers a subtle variation of the previous use of Celtic Twilight, as here it is viewed as a false and unrealistic presentation of Irishness. Still, the author, Iain Hamilton, puts his subject in somewhat of a bind. He finds that the nostalgia of the Twilight has become an item of ridicule, and yet argues that to be cut off from the past is equally ignominious. For Hamilton, such nostalgia is a trait simultaneously risible and inescapable.


The negativity associated with the phrase also became a part of political discourse and was even uttered spitefully on the floor of the House of Commons. A Mr. Stanley Baldwin from the House (later to become Prime Minister), commenting in 1909 on the perceived “unfair competition of foreign producers in British markets,” uses Celtic Twilight to mock a rival from the opposing party:

(Mr. Baldwin) deplored the change which had come over the Chancellor of the Exchequer since he left the Board of Trade. He was simply the shadow of his former self, wandering in a sort of Celtic twilight contemplating the spoiling of ‘hen-roosts.’ (Laughter and Opposition cheers).

An article recapitulating a speech by Lloyd George about the recent victory of the Labour party over the Tories continues this thread:

Their opponents, he continued, said the victory was not a British one. That was not true. To say that the Government were deriving part of their majority from Ireland, and that therefore it must not count, was a shabby argument. The money of Ireland counted, their taxes counted, their soldiers counted, and their dollars counted in paying rent to Irish landlords – but their votes would not count unless they were Tory. (Cheers.) That was a thoroughly despicable policy. It was ungenerous, unchivalrous, unfair, and un-English. (Cheers.) But the Government would have a British majority of 60 – which was four times what Lord Rosebery had when he governed this country.

Why should they disparage Scotland in calculating the majority? The only man of brains they had got in their party was a Scotsman. (A voice: ‘And he hasn’t got much.’) Well, the only man of first class brains. They had got a great Scotsman leading their party, and he was the one man who lent intellectual distinction to them. (Hear, hear.) Who was the man who supplied them with ideas? (A voice: ‘Garvin.’) Of what nationality was he? (Shouts of ‘Irish.’) They were led by a great Scotsman, their ideas were supplied to them by a great Irishman,


370 Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929), Prime Minister from March 1894-June 1895.
and they were the people who were turning up their noses at what they called the Celtic Twilight. (Laughter.) The Celtic Twilight was, he was afraid, going to lead them into darkness. Their second best man was a Scotsman, but as for the rest, they were the sorriest crew that ever ran a ship aground etc. etc.371

Articles featuring this same material were published in papers across Britain. The particular one quoted above features the attention-grabbing headline: “Mr. Lloyd George on Tory Pretensions,” with the above quotes featured in a subsection fittingly titled “Celtic Twilight.” As Lloyd George would later discover, Celtic Twilight could just as easily be used to attack others as it could be used against oneself. Nine years later, in a column attacking Lloyd George, the Sunday Times writes that though he “is superhuman in his elasticity,” he nevertheless “also has his moments of Celtic twilight.”372 In this instance, Celtic Twilight – and its broader association of being in a vague state of stupor – refers to Lloyd George’s growing difficulty in delivering impromptu speeches, and his habit of finding himself tongue-tied. The implications are clear: Celtic Twilight had not become a good term with which to be associated. It connoted fuzziness of thought and a mental state characterized by forgetfulness and confusion. It symbolized a loss of contact


with hard reality. As the above quotation suggests, people turned to this usage of the phrase not to discuss aesthetics but to draw attention, in an unflattering manner, to the supposed racial differences between the Scottish, English, Welsh (in the case of Lloyd George), and Irish.

As the phrase continued its strange journey through the vernacular, even the death of Synge was not enough to dissuade writers from using Celtic Twilight in this derogatory and racially oriented manner:

Mr. J.M. Synge, who died the other day at the age of thirty-six, promised to grow into a veritable dramatist. He began by accepting the theory of Ireland’s inner life occupied as a basis of theatrical art by the Irish National Theatre. His first two plays: ‘In the Valley of the Shadow,’ and ‘The Well of the Saint,’ were inspired by the idealizing motive which causes the minor artists of the Irish Literary Society to persuade themselves, after endeavouring to persuade the coarse matter of fact Anglo-Saxon, that the Irish peasant is a visionary, living the better half of his life in a Celtic Twilight, thronged with the ghosts of vanished heroes and futile fairies and spectral freaks… in reality, as Mr. Bernard Shaw lately assured us, the Irishman is the truly practical man; it is the Anglo-Saxon who hurries over his work in order to indulge in day-dreams.

Still another article uses Celtic Twilight to create a similar line of demarcation between the English and their less adept neighbors, the Celts of Ireland and Scotland:

The electors have remembered that they are all Englishmen, and received the announcement of the result in that English spirit of mutual forbearance which is an everlasting enigma to the Celtic mind. For the time being, England seems too content to be governed by men who, born and brought up in the Celtic

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373 Tragically, these disconnected states, ‘disembodied moods’ as Yeats had called them, are an essential characteristic of Celtic Twilight that proved easy to mock.

Twilight, cannot tolerate the broad sunlight of a stronger and more wholesome civilization than theirs.  

While the other passages selected sometimes have a cheeky character, the above quotation directly uses Celtic Twilight to assert English cultural and political hegemony. Celtic Twilight now stood as a symbol for the age-old division between Anglo-Saxons and Celts. This meaning developed from the term’s public usage, but that did not mean that the phrase’s artistic connotations remained unsullied. The term’s racial connotations oozed into the art world, and dwelling in Celtic Twilight as part of one’s artistic endeavors soon symbolized the opposite of artistic ‘Englishness.’ This was especially significant for the world of British music, which, after the Wilde trials, became obsessed with musical ‘Englishness.’

Celtic Twilight, essentializations based on race and gender, and their connection to changes in British musical culture after 1895

Racial essentialisms such as those found in the above articles were in common usage in British culture at the turn of the century. Texts from this period that celebrate

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376 For a detailed discussion of the impact of the 1895 Wild Trials on British music, see Byron Adams, “‘Dark Saying of the Enigma’: Homoeroticism and the Elgarian Paradox,” Nineteenth-Century Music vol. 23, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 218-235.
Celtic qualities do so through the process of essentializing mores, as Ernest Renan does famously in his 1904 essay *The Poetry of the Celtic Races*. He describes the Celts as a people who share a “powerful individuality” and “hatred of the foreigner.” For Renan (whose racial theories derived from those of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck – 1744-1829), the Celt is at once “proud in feeling” and “feeble in action.” Furthermore, the Celt (and Renan speaks exclusively of Celtic men) is only at home on his native soil, and once he leaves that land, his sense of freedom and lack off reservation are replaced by the image of a man now “awkward and embarrassed.” According to Renan, the Celt has many qualities that are attractive on a poetic level, but he lacks what at the time were perceived as the masculine qualities of being willing and able to take decisive action in any circumstance. It is implied that such qualities are left to other “races,” and though Renan is himself French, it is the so-called ‘English race’ that is, in the broader invocation of this particular *fin de siècle* discourse, posited as the dialectical opposite of the Celt.

Racial essentialism such as that evinced by Renan went hand-in-hand with discussions of gender that would come across as highly inappropriate today. As a result, the division between the English and Celtic races became one inured with gendered overtones. Renan states that “if it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to (say) without hesitance that the Celtic race… is an essentially feminine race.” Renan continues to write that “no human family, I believe, has conceived with more delicacy the ideal of woman, or been more fully dominated by

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378 Ibid., par. 7
it. It is a sort of intoxication, a madness, a vertigo.” Such a statement might seem an innocuous moment of waxing poetic. However, opinions about the presence and influence of feminine qualities in male artists changed dramatically between 1893 and 1904 when Renan wrote his essay.

As Byron Adams observes, the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 significantly changed the relation of British artists to the concept of femininity. Adams states that the trials led to a “fear of being taken for a homosexual among artists.” Artists enacted a “a wholesale retrenchment,” towards “masculinity,” one that mandated Norfolk tweeds instead of velvet jackets; cakes and plain ale rather than oysters and scented wine; bracing tramps over the Malvern hills rather than languid games of dominoes at the Café Royale; and, in music, modally-inflected diatonicism rather than the Wagnerian chiaroscuro of chromaticism.

The language Elgar uses while delivering his famous Peyton lectures at the Birmingham University in 1905 gives insight into this ‘flight to masculinity.’ As Adams has aptly pointed out, Elgar was particularly desirous to be perceived as a “manly” British composer. As Adams recounts, “Elgar uses the word healthy,” to describe qualities that he desired in British music, healthy being “a word that, like clean, possessed a distinct implication of controlled sublimated, masculine heterosexuality.”

Not only did Elgar want to reclaim masculinity for the artist, but he also he wanted to reclaim nature as a site of masculinity. As Adams argues, “Achieving a ‘healthy’

379 Ibid., par. 7


381 Ibid., 131.
aesthetic for British music” depended on “cultivating an ‘out-of-door spirit.’” Indeed, Elgar believed that “the musical salvation of the younger generation could only be achieved if they eschew the hothouse morbidity of decadence for the health promised by nature.”

The Wilde trials (1895) came neatly on the heels of Yeats’s publication of *The Celtic Twilight*. As previously discussed, with *The Celtic Twilight* Yeats broke through with numerous literary innovations that brought the work to cultural consciousness and gave the phrase a life of its own. However, in addition to all its successes, Yeats had beautifully captured in *The Celtic Twilight* all the ideas about the Celt that would later turn the phrase Celtic Twilight into a racist insult. Furthermore, the features of Celticism, and the traits that people believed to signify a Celtic person, come across in *The Celtic Twilight* – both the volume and the aesthetic – in a highly concentrated form. The Twilight’s constant conjuration of a dream-world where poets linger in languor and rapture was the opposite of British – or more specifically English – masculinity, as well as other supposedly ‘English’ traits such as practicality, the English embrace materialism, etc. Celtic Twilight stood as the antithesis of the ‘English masculinity,’ and, by extension, musical works of Celtic Twilight like those mentioned above stood out against the musical establishment’s desire to curate a ‘manly’ Englishness. There is a controversial theory that runs parallel to this sea change. It postulates that an unremittingly pro-English bias in the British musical community wanted to promote a distinctively ‘English’ style

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382 Ibid., 131.

383 The charge that Celts were by nature effeminate was scarcely refuted after 1895 by Oscar Wilde’s Irish brith.
of music, and that this bias resulted in the exclusion of non-English composers and
Celtic-themed works from the stage, and later, as radio became one of the chief ways of
consuming music in the early twentieth century, the airwaves.

Celtic Twilight in Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes’s Royal College of Music
conspiracy theory: a controversial thesis

The idea that British musical works with Celtic subjects or by Celtic composers
have been purposefully obscured, initially by the musical establishment, but also in terms
of musical scholarship and cultural stewardship, is a provocative hypothesis and one that
Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes (hereafter ‘S. and H.’) articulate in their volume
they argue that a coterie of insiders at the Royal College of Music in London (hereafter
‘RCM’) played a powerful and nefarious role in shaping and constructing British musical
history in a direction that promoted a specific and exclusive ‘Englishness’ over a more
culturally inclusive ‘Britishness.’ While this theory is not without its flaws, this argument
offers a compelling explanation for the dominance of British musical history by the
‘pastoral style,’ a musical trope deeply associated with Englishness. It also addresses the
neglect of some of the English composers mentioned above who wrote some of Britain’s
finest Celtic themed works, and the corresponding preeminence of composers such as
Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, two of pastoralism’s most prominent
representatives.
According to S. and H., the industrious George Grove set the Renaissance in motion by creating the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. For S. and H., this dictionary is “a powerful anglocentric document which gives English musical culture an extraordinary coverage and bias within the overall format.”\(^{384}\) Grove’s second move was to lead the charge to establish the RCM and to use it as the breeding ground for ‘musical Englishness.’ Later, as radio became an important cultural medium after 1922, a group of RCM loyalists, continuing in Grove’s footsteps, used their prestige to obtain power at the BBC. Here this cabal supposedly created a bias in British broadcasting that was almost “relentlessly ethnic” and that favored English composers while relegating Scottish, Irish, and Welsh composers to the sidelines.\(^{385}\)

S. and H.’s arguments have been highly critiqued. However, with the tantalizing binary oppositions of Celtic Twilight/femininity and Englishness/masculinity filling the atmosphere, one must entertain the question: is it possible that, as part of a multifaceted attempt to culturally control the ‘English musical renaissance,’ the influential figures at the RCM actively worked to marginalize (or discipline) artists who strayed too far from appropriate levels of Englishness and dared instead to engage in a dated Wagnerian brand of Celticism loaded with nostalgic, decadent, Celtic and feminine overtones?

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They argue that while Grove himself wrote “the longest articles on Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn” he also included a “profusion” of articles on “the music and musicians of his own day – including Parry, Stanford and Sullivan, and even Prince Albert.”(26)

Though Edward Elgar’s dalliance with the Celtic Twilight is limited, he is perhaps the most prominent composer to make a highly successful career outside of establishment institutions. Aiden Thomson notes that a number of RCM critics aligned themselves against Edward Elgar, including J.A. Fuller Maitland (1856-1936), Charles Maclean (1843-1916), and Henry Haddow (1859-1937). According to Thomson, one of the prime strategies Elgar’s detractors used to discredit him was to associate him with the “ethically suspect school of Wagner and his followers.” Here Celtic Twilight comes into play. The “ethically suspect” qualities of Wagner’s music were its sensuality and eroticism – would not those who objected to these qualities also object to Celtic Twilight because of its connotations of femininity and its suitability to Wagnerian aesthetics?

This is perhaps plausible, but there is plenty of evidence in the RCM’s critical discourse suggesting that the institution was neither ‘racist’ against Irish or Celtic people, nor specifically biased against music treating Celtic subjects or themes. Particularly, Fuller Maitland praised the Celtic themed works of Stanford, who was coincidentally both an Irishman (though Anglo-Irish) and a faculty member at the RCM. Consider the following two comments:

Stanford reached the highest point of his popularity with his “Irish Symphony” given at a Richter Concert in 1887… It is so beautiful from start to finish that it seemed certain of being given occasionally.

Returning to Stanford’s orchestral works, it was about 1901 that he struck his most prolific vein of inspiration with the first of his five “Irish Rhapsodies,”

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386 Ibid., 199.
One cannot help but sympathize with Elgar; he appears to lead the charge for ‘manly’ British music and is simultaneously accused of being an “ethically suspect” Wagnerian.

387 For more detail on this distinction see Curtis, Jr. Anglo-Saxons and Celts, 17-35.
op. 78, a piece that has never lost its hold upon the public…His Second Rhapsody, conducted by Mengelberg at a concert of the Amsterdam Orchestra, is a more extended piece than the first; its title “Lament for the sons of Ossian,” is fitly chosen, and a good many folk-songs are handled with success.\textsuperscript{388}

Fuller Maitland has no qualms celebrating the ‘beauty’ of Stanford’s ‘Irish’ Symphony. Meanwhile, Stanford’s inclusion of Celtic folksong material in the second of his \textit{Irish Rhapsodies} is “handled with success,” and the work’s nod to Ossian goes uncontested.

To further demonstrate that the anti-Celtic bias of the RCM was far from clear-cut, one can also look to the ‘ethnically balanced’ makeup of the board of the English Folk-Song Society, which was stocked with RCM loyalists and featured Fuller Maitland as chair. As Alfred Percival Graves notes, it was intended to be representative of the four nations, its president (Maitland) was and is an Englishman; its vice-presidents, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and Sir Charles Stanford, represent the sister countries.\textsuperscript{389}

As this attempt at cultural inclusiveness suggests, if the RCM was biased – and most institutions are to some degree – the lines of this bias were fungible at best. To say that the RCM shunned ‘Celticism’ in all its forms is an overstatement, though the relegation of Celtic-themed works to the far corner of both the stage and the airwaves may at times have been a consequence of the real bias plaguing the RCM: an institutional bias.

The RCM as an institution preferred its own students. For its students, it preferred upper middle class gentlemen. Of course, talent was the institution’s main criterion for

\textsuperscript{388} Fuller-Maitland, \textit{The Music of Parry and Stanford}, 40.
One notes that Stanford’s Irish pupil, Charles Wood (1866-1926), was lauded by Fuller-Maitland; Wood was also on the RCM faculty.

\textsuperscript{389} Alfred Percival Graves, “Ireland’s Share In the Folk Song Revival,” \textit{The Celtic Review}, vol. 9 (November, 1913): 146.
Mackenzie was a Scot (1847-1935) and director of the Royal Academy of Music.
entry; A promising working class student like Frank Bridge (1879-1941) could certainly earn a scholarship and an Irishman like Stanford, who was also deeply gifted could make the cut. Most significantly, though Vaughan Williams was Welsh, his works in the ‘pastoral’ vein are considered the ultimate exemplars of musical ‘Englishness.’

Nevertheless, despite this seeming inclusivity, Thomson cogently argues that critics loyal to the RCM such as Fuller-Maitland were “particularly keen to emphasize (the) social and intellectual elitism” of an RCM set composed of “university educated, upper middle classes,” and were “less keen… to acknowledge the achievements” of outsiders. Such a bias is of course not limited only to the British musical establishment. It is a well-known trope permeating a society famously divided by class. Keeping this in mind allows one

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390 Keep in mind, however, that Vaughan Williams was a member of the Wedgewood dynasty (and the great nephew of Charles Darwin), Stanford hailed from the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and was certainly to be considered upper middle class, and that Bridge, as shall be demonstrated, became a *persona non-grata* at the various British musical institutions once he progressed beyond his student years.

391 Consider that one of Elgar’s chief critics, Henry Haddow, had been both a “classics Don at Worcester College, Oxford and later vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield.” On the other hand, Elgar was “a lower-middle class, self-taught, provincial Roman Catholic.” Thomson, “Elgar’s Critical Critics,” 196.

392 As L.P. Curtis Jr. notes, the ‘gentlemen’ class was almost its own race in England. He states that, “for some upper class Englishmen, the English working classes were almost a race apart, having darker skin and hair than their social superiors, and having more traits in common with their Celtic counterparts in Ireland than with the supposedly Norman aristocracy at home.” Tellingly, Curtis notes that, “the intimate relationship between class and race consciousness is borne out by the fact that the word race was also used throughout the century as a synonym for class.” *Anglo-Saxons and Celts*, 24.
to see that S. and H. have indeed not uncovered a conspiracy, though they do present their arguments in a way that desperately seeks to convince their readers of one.393

Painfully aware of his working class origins, Elgar knew well that he would never be ‘the anointed one.’ During his Payton lectures delivered at the University of Birmingham in 1905, he launched an attack at the RCM by implying that, “he wanted nothing less than his own ‘renaissance’ in the Midlands.”394 In fact, his fervent calls for ‘manly’ English music during these lectures may have been an attempt to hi-jack the RCM’s own pursuit of musical ‘Englishness.’ Another example of Elgar’s attempts to supersede the RCM can be found “a public letter to Rev. Canon Charles Gorton prior to the 1903 Morecambe Festival” in which he wrote that, “unknown to the sleepy London press… the living centre of music in Great Britain is not London, but somewhere farther North.”395

393 In his review of S. and H.’s volume, Alain Frogley notes that their presentation of information creates an air of conspiracy. He writes, “through guilt by association, or… simple narrative juxtaposition, a colourful anecdote or quotation, often more striking for having been mined from an obscure or hitherto unknown source, is used to create an impression of conspiracy and dissimulation; the reader is usually left to make the final link, or to fill in the gaps as one selective quotation is quickly piled upon another, and with the miasma of conspiracy almost always in the air, connections that would not withstand explicit examination are made to appear beguilingly compelling.” “Review-Article: Rewriting the Renaissance,” 243.

394 While Elgar’s tenure at Birmingham proved unsatisfactory, he had nevertheless, “entered the lists of a kind of tournament which, like the real thing, was a hazardous game… his adversary proved more resilient than he imagined.” The precarious and dangerous nature of Elgar’s assault against the RCM is intimated in a sketch Elgar sent to his close friend A.J. Jaeger in which Elgar depicts himself as a knight at a jousting tournament. Hughes and Stradling, The English Musical Renaissance, 72, 73.

Elgar was not the only one who recognized the RCM’s institutional agenda during its day. Thomson notes that during discussions regarding a National Festival of British Music in November 1903,\textsuperscript{396}

the prospect that that [the] festival might be run on ‘Royal College lines’ caused Musical Opinion’s columnist ‘Common Time’ to remark that the Royal College had a reputation for self-advancement, and that ‘their idea of the best interests of the art [was] too limited by personal considerations.’\textsuperscript{397}

Naturally, there were consequences for fighting the RCM. For Elgar, they were psychological. Deep insecurity offset Elgar’s commendable fighting spirit. He would alternately stand against but then seek inclusion within the society that had cast him out. To distance himself from his humble origins he took on the character of an “English country squire” and adopted various personas to elevate himself culturally.\textsuperscript{398}

Where does Rutland Boughton – this dissertations key Celtic Twilight composer – fit into this context? Is it possible to blame his obscurity on a conspiracy concocted to sideline Celtic works? Like RCM outsiders Arthur Sullivan (of HMS Pinafore fame – 1842-1900), Frank Bridge, and Edward Elgar, Boughton came from a working-class background (his father was a grocer). He also had a distinctive – though not terribly distinguished – relationship with the RCM. When Boughton was a young composer, he read an article by Robin Legge (1862-1933) in the Daily Telegraph in which Legge asked

\textsuperscript{396} These plans did not come to fruition, whereas Elgar did have quite a success with his Elgar festival in 1904.

\textsuperscript{397} Thomson, “Elgar’s Critical Critics,” 205.

\textsuperscript{398} Much of this activity was encouraged – if not instituted – by Lady Elgar. Ever class conscious, she greatly disapproved of Rutland Boughton, who, in her opinion, “never looked like a ‘gentleman.’” Hurd, Rutland Boughton, 208.
where the, “‘New Musical Messiah’ England so badly needed was to be found.”

Boughton enthusiastically mailed Legge a bundle of scores, which were passed on to Stanford. Impressed, Stanford managed to obtain a yearlong scholarship for Boughton at the RCM paid on behalf of the MP of Aylesbury, Boughton’s hometown. However, this did not result in a rags-to-riches success story. Rather, Stanford introduced Boughton to his classmates as “a fellow who’s been playing Beethoven in a barn.” Along with Boughton’s pedigree, his lack of social graces appeared to make him incompatible with the RCM set. He was, as Hubert Parry put it, “a bad mixer.”

When his scholarship ran out, Boughton was unable to renew it, and his brief tenure at the RCM ended. While the other students continued their studies, Boughton endured a period of extreme poverty doing musical hackwork in London.

Boughton went on to overcome his hardships and experience his various triumphs both with the Glastonbury festivals and later with *The Immortal Hour*. However, nearly thirty years after his brief period as a student with the RCM, one can still find him harboring ill-will towards the institution. In his 1929 essay for *The Musical Times* titled “In Mutual Contempt,” Boughton criticized the RCM education:

> very well do I recall how easy it was to get through a week’s work for my teachers at the Royal College of Music; it occupied not more than one or two days at the outside… there was no discipline to ensure that the greater part of the week was profitably spent.

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He described the RCM as a place where most students filled their idle time with hedonistic behavior, while the few who did their exercises became neurotic, even “stupid.” Boughton argued that music students need balance, and looked to J.S. Bach as a model of a balanced musician. Of Bach, Boughton writes that,

(his) manual skill in the construction of musical instruments, and his considerable theological studies were activities quite distinct from his creative musicianship; but they, no less than his purely musical genius, entered into the final make-up of his work.401

Boughton’s attacks gained momentum in 1934 with the publication of his book The Reality of Music, in which he “assailed the Goodly House from a different angle – the ‘Marxist:’”

Boughton argued that use of folk-music was merely another form of capitalist exploitation – a cynical one, for it transformed the protest songs of the suffering workers into the frothy entertainment of the bourgeoisie.402

Boughton’s convictions are ironic, considering that the score of The Immortal Hour is indebted to his studies of folk music.403

The Reality of Music, while giving Boughton a chance to express some of his deepest convictions about art as well as his ire with the RCM, also harmed his reputation. An exasperated review of Reality for the book by H. G. begins quite cuttingly:

Mr. Boughton begins by saying that his book ‘is not addressed to full-fledged musicians. They know of the facts it contains.’ But some of Mr. Boughton’s ‘facts’ will be new to musicians – e.g. ‘the rite of the mass moved Bach so little that whenever he made music for it his creative faculty deserted him, and he was obliged [!] (sic) to use themes and movements previously

401 Ibid., 595.

402 Stradling and Hughes, The English Musical Renaissance, 197.

403 This may further explain why The Immortal Hour’s London success so greatly upset him.
composed for other words’; ‘The last great work of the greatest master of music shows that he had outgrown his religion’; ‘Having secured his themes from whatever source, they were developed not in the cause of reactionary religion, but according to the mathematical principles inherent in music itself’; ‘The autumnal languor of “Parsifal” arose less in the age of the composer as is generally believed, and more in the mental atmosphere of his age, coupled with the fact that Wagner himself, in order to fulfill his work even partially, had been forced to accept a royal patronage, instead of the communal conditions which he had demanded for his work.’  

As this quote suggests, many of Boughton’s statements take a fanciful approach to ‘reality.’ He even goes so far as to argue that “the Church did nothing but hinder the progress of music.” Of this claim, H. G. jokes that, “he can even give us a picture of a dual Palestrina – one hobbled by the Church, the other occasionally escaping from his bonds and expressing himself fully.”

Boughton’s writings, as the above examples illustrate, are highly speculative and informed by an unquestionably socialist – indeed communist – world-view. He finds a way to perceive almost everything through a Marxist lens. As H.G. observes, “many of his best pages are spoilt by his ‘class-consciousness.’” H. G. goes so far as to alert readers that “(those) who are familiar with Mr. Boughton’s articles on music will not be surprised to find the communal idea worked for all it is worth and a good deal more.”


405 Ibid., 277.

406 It is the peculiar nature of Boughton’s writing that can lend insight into Boughton’s relationship with the occult. The kind of fact-free writing in which Boughton indulges in is reminiscent of the language of many books on occult practices being released at the time. Boughton did not directly publish on occult subjects because for him music was the primary avenue to spirituality. The pseudo mystical tone of his writing combined with his predilection for
If one is to speculate about reasons for the disappearance of *The Immortal Hour* from the stage (not to mention the canon) that are not related to its text or score, Boughton’s ardent and combative communism, fully on display in *The Reality of Music*, would certainly be worth consideration: it brought him into conflict with more than his old alma mater.

Boughton had expensive dreams: he hoped to one day stage his Glastonbury Festivals and his five-part Arthurian music drama in a theatre that could rival the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. One figure in particular, Lady Londonderry (mentioned in chapter four), who was very wealthy and well-connected, tried to champion Boughton. She went so far as to arrange for abstracts of Boughton’s music to performed for the King and Queen and to sponsor “a performance of the third act of *The Round Table* in the long gallery” of Lady Londonderry’s “splendid London home.”

Unfortunately, Boughton and Lady Londonderry’s relationship unraveled during the 1926s miners strike. Naturally, Boughton was on the side of the miners, yet this put him at odds with his patron’s husband, a mine owner. Boughton’s presence at Lady Londonderry’s social gatherings became awkward because he never stopped from making his views “crystal clear.”

socialism created for Boughton a unique and personal kind of spiritualism: he was what one might call a spiritual socialist who felt, like Wagner, that music and art should replace religion.

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407 That Lady Londonderry and Boughton hit it off at all is quite remarkable. While Boughton was a card carrying communist, Lady Londonderry was, in the words of Andrew Blake, an “aristocratic fascist.” *The Land Without Music: Music, culture and society in twentieth-century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 43.

retold by Boughton, which takes place at a dinner party where Lady Londonderry is attempting to ingratiate him (for what would prove to be the last time) with her wealthy friends:

During supper Lady Cunard called out ‘You are a communist, aren’t you Mr. Boughton?’ I answered ‘Yes.’ There was a silence broken by Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell who drawled ‘Why are you a communist?’ a proper answer would have meant a sermon on Christianity so I said the first thing that came into my head: ‘I believe that Russia will be the salvation of Europe.’

Unfortunately, on this occasion Boughton had overplayed his hand. Lady Londonderry realized that her attempts to promote this radical in the necessary circles were fruitless. As Boughton states, “it was the last effort of the many she made to establish me in the good will of her friends.”

The coup-de-gras came during the winter of 1926. In the wake of the general strike of May 1926, he insisted on staging his highly successful Bethlehem, a mini-opera based on the Nativity story, in the context of the miner’s strike, with Herod as a mine owner and Jesus as the son of a miner. The result was that his second most successful stage work became an astounding flop. Indeed, Boughton’s far-left views were neither popular with the elites, nor the working-class that he had always kept in mind as his ideal audience when he sat down to compose.

Boughton’s willingness to state obstreperously his political beliefs both on stage and in the presence of unsympathetic company had a disastrous effect on his career. The incidents described above were turning points for him. Though revivals of The Immortal Hour continued into the thirties, his career waned. One can only wonder what he might

409 Ibid., 200.
410 Ibid., 200.
have achieved if only he had been more diplomatic. However, this was not in his character. In this sense, it seems only natural that Boughton’s anti-establishment views should put him at odds with the establishment’s official musical arms, the RCM and the BBC, and, as his writings above indicate, he had no qualms about attacking the RCM.

Shortly before his teacher Granville Bantock’s death, Bantock wrote to Boughton that “the scandalous attitude of the B.B.C. towards Brian, Holbrooke and yourself rouses my wrath and indignation, and you shall have all the support I can give you.”411 Bantock may have been rightly aggrieved, but whatever cabals the various British musical institutions may have supposedly perpetrated against Boughton, it was Boughton himself who did the most to destroy his career.

Conclusion: No Celtic composers on the BBC tonight?

The notion of a British musical establishment populated with insiders and outsiders, allows one to return to the binary opposition that began this enterprise: the cultural opposition of the English and the Celts. The very phrase Celtic Twilight arose out of a need for Irish writers to champion a free Ireland. They wanted to reclaim their cultural heritage and finally achieve victory in a centuries-long struggle with their English oppressors. Yeats’ *The Celtic Twilight*, which created and brought forth to the public Celtic Twilight both as an aesthetic and a term, was the poet’s ingenious attempt to overcome a number of ideological issues associated with a long-standing appropriation of Irish culture practiced by most European nations. Yeats’s solution transformed the genre of the folktale and flew in the face of critics who, thanks their own ideology, could only laud an anthropological approach to the genre.

What Yeats began with *The Celtic Twilight* not only inspired him to create more works in a similar vein, it fascinated other artists as well. But there was an inevitable trade-off. The term lost connection with its nationalist origins and took on a life of its own. Even though realism and Modernism soon eclipsed the aesthetics of Celtic Twilight, it nevertheless lived on, particularly in the scores of certain British composers. These unrepentant romantics took hold of the genre, each attempting to create something transcendent. Many stumbled over the aesthetic’s close association with Wagner. Those
who succeeded followed Yeats’s approach, which leavened Wagnerism with folk influences. In Boughton’s case, this leavening came from his studies of folk song, for Bax, his love of Ireland, and for Elgar, it came purely through his musical intuition.

As the Twilight further diffused into the ether, a retrenchment to masculinity combined with an institutional quest to construct musical ‘Englishness’ in a way that cast Celtic Twilight in opposition to the ‘establishment.’ Just as Celtic Twilight had been used in discourse to invoke the opposite of the practical English mind – the lost dreamer stereotype – so to could Celticism, and the invocation of Celtic Twilight become a focus point for those wishing to identify themselves against the status quo.

To engage in Celtic Twilight during an ‘English Musical Renaissance’ that promoted a ‘pastoral’ school and to do so during a parallel ‘flight to masculinity’ meant to take certain social, political, and cultural risks. Celtic Twilight celebrated a Wagnerian aesthetic of which the RCM theoretically disapproved, and it begged composers to languish in a Celtic wonderland that, for pro-English boot-men hell bent on conveying masculinity, was a forbidden playground. When Elgar, who sought to champion musical ‘manliness,’ realized the error of his ways, he fled the scene. Meanwhile, Arnold Bax, who adopted all things Celtic, relished in the supposedly forbidden fruit of Celtic Twilight and willfully engaged in a Tristanesque, Celticized-decadence. Most of his more inhibited colleagues who still could not resist the allure of Celtic Twilight opted for a safer Ring-inspired Wagnerism in their own Celtic works.412

412 Bax’s Tintagel – with its dual allusions to Tristan and an illicit affair – is a perfect example of a score that dares to engage with the ‘forbidden.’ Boughton’s The Immortal Hour was similarly inspired not only by Fraser-Kennedy’s Celticized folk music but by the Celtic heritage of
Consider further that the ‘flight to masculinity’ manifested itself in more than just various artists’ attempts to avoid creating artworks interpretable as ‘feminine’ and prevent themselves from being perceived as effeminate. It was a retreat from radicalisms of all sorts, a retreat to conservative lifestyles and, to a degree, conservative musical aesthetics. Stephen Banfield describes the “parallel triads, modal scales, duple meters eased with triplets, bass-dominated textures” and other techniques associated with musical “Englishness’ as “the upholding of traditional values.” Upholding “traditional values” meant an end to the spiritualism, esotericism, and other heady indulgences of the 1890s with which Celtic Twilight composers dared to continue. It also meant, as the new century developed, a retreat away from what the public might perceive as disturbing political views, such as Rutland Boughton’s communism, or any flagrant abandonment of propriety, another form of radicalism well practiced by Boughton, who somehow managed to marry no less than three different women during this relatively conservative cultural period.

Therefore, if Celtic Twilight was, as I have argued, a ‘backward glance,’ it was nevertheless a rebellious one that stood for the exact opposite of everything that the

Christina Walshe, the younger woman for whom Boughton left his first wife. According to Hurd, one cannot underestimate Walshe’s influence on Boughton’s *The Immortal Hour*, which “embodies the ideas that Christina brought into his life – Half-Irish herself, she was an ardent champion of Celtic revivalism and her enthusiasm kindled his.” Hurd, *Rutland Boughton*, 53.

(Can the heavy handed, *Ring*-inspired Wagnersim of Bantock and Holbrooke be a consequence of the ‘flight to masculinity’ and an attempt to ‘rescue’ Celtic musical subjects from Celticism’s supposedly inherent ‘femininity’?) Stephen Banfield states of Bax, the Celtacist, and Frank Bridge, the modernist, “they have to be seen as anti-Establishment figures, at odds with the prevailing musical life-styles of their times.” “Review: Frank Bridge: A Thematic catalogue,” 183.

practically-minded upper-class Englishman thought was culturally appropriate. Rutland Boughton’s Glastonbury festivals, where *The Immortal Hour* first premiered, are a shining example of this process of identification in action. Here he gathered artists, occultists, spiritualists, socialists, social progressives, feminists, and the average worker together an experiment in socialist utopia. At these festivals Celtic Twilight found a home where the supposedly ‘feminine’ connotations of Celticism could thrive. Numerous female collaborators contributed to the success of the Glastonbury festivals. Later, when the prize of the festivals, *The Immortal Hour*, reached London, it was attended by prominent noblewomen and featured a young lesbian actress in the leading role. Fittingly, Princess Etain’s fate at the end of *The Immortal Hour* is in contrast to the typical ending allotted to nineteenth-century operatic heroines: it is her husband who dies from ‘hysteria’ while she transcends time and space.

Despite all of its potential, Celtic Twilight had limited impact as a musical force – but not because of the actions of a group of elites running the British musical community. The strengths of Celtic Twilight were, paradoxically, its weaknesses. While its radicalism put it at odds with English musical institutions, it was also perennially backward-looking, always yearning for a nostalgic past. In a twentieth century marked by what art critic Robert Hughes called “the shock of the new,” the inability of Celtic Twilight to move beyond nostalgia insured its eventual decline to the status of an abandoned cult. The movement’s most successful musical work, *The Immortal Hour*, resonated only with

Matthew Beaumont observes that as far back as the 1850’s “spiritualism had been ‘tainted’ (my quotations) by its association with radical reformist causes like feminism, socialism, and the movement for free love.” “Socialism and Occultism,” 224.
British audiences attuned to it at a given moment in history. Meanwhile, it appears that Boughton’s career faded into its own ‘twilight’ because of his unrelenting and equally out-of-touch Morrisite socialist views that were, as Andrew Blake states, based on a vision of “pre-industrial Britain.”

Finally, as the popularity of Boughton’s opera began to fade, Celtic Twilight received a daunting blow from an unexpected direction. The very aesthetic itself came under attack from pro-Gaelic scholars who mercilessly denounced Yeats as a charlatan, despite his decades-long effort to advance Irish culture. This attack was so effective that Yeats’s *The Celtic Twilight* did not appear in Gaelic until the 1980s, nearly 100 years after its initial publication. Tragically, the misuse of the phrase Celtic Twilight, begun shortly after the debut of Yeats’s volume, would continue throughout the twentieth century. In modern times, the phrase appears most frequently in reviews of poorly staged Irish or Celtic-themed plays. However, the bright side to this is that the phrase’s humorous implications appear to have triumphed over the highly racialized ways in which it was used in the early twentieth century.

I hope that what I have labored to do here is to, ironically, take Celtic Twilight out of the twilight gloom that has ensnared its history. It is now possible to understand precisely where and how the term’s historical and cultural precedents arose; how exactly

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it came into being; how it lent agency to various artists; became an important element of early twentieth century British music; entered the vernacular and was misused; and may be used again in the future to cultivate those “impalpable moods” first brought to life by the volume which inspired this investigation.
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