

**FIONA MACLEOD: POETIC GENESIS  
AND THE SONG SETTINGS OF ARNOLD BAX  
AND CHARLES GRIFFES**

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## INTRODUCTION

Artistic creations cannot be separated from the environment that inspired them, and every artist is affected by social, economic, and artistic pressures differently.

William Sharp (1855-1905) lived during a time of extreme British nationalism, social reform, and economic growth. The Industrial Revolution in England was a time of rapid urbanization with jobs in factories drawing the youth away from their rural surroundings into thriving cities.<sup>1</sup> The rise in urban living affected England's regional diversity as local traditions, folklore, and dialects were lost when people attempted to assimilate into the urban persona. A sense of a person's history and cultural identity began to blur in the pursuit for success and wealth.

Born in Scotland, and fascinated with the local culture, Sharp never considered himself a true Englishman. As a child, he felt isolated from his peers due to his imaginative spirit and strong affinity to nature, feeling most free amongst the rural people and wild places of Scotland. The epic tales, songs, and characters of the Highlands stirred a passion and sense of remembrance in him. As he grew, he felt restricted by the modern image of a successful man. He rejected his family's insistence on a respectable career and pursued writing.

His early works lacked success as he experimented with various genres and literary styles, compromising his artistic creativity to match the current demands of publication. England placed a new importance on improvements in children's education and literacy in the nineteenth century. The rising literacy rates combined with high speed printing presses, cheaper wood pulp and new machines for type-setting created an

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 3.

increase in the demand for printed material. The Victorian era had a fascination with popular literature delving into foreign and exotic themes and subject matter. The publishing business needed both new literary voices, and a vast diversity of literary genres to sate the sudden growth in commercial demand.<sup>2</sup>

To emerge in the competitive London publishing market, Sharp conformed to the polished and urban persona. He made his fortune publishing biographies, artistic reviews, periodical articles, and collections of others poems, while failing to express his true creative voice. In *William Sharp – “Fiona Macleod,”* Flavia Ayana states

As realist, symbolist, and local colorist, he played the full range of roles offered by contemporary literary art. Both exploiter and victim of the most extraordinary publishing explosion in history during the London eighties and nineties, he spilled his creative energy into every kind of enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

After almost ten years in the demanding London publishing business, Sharp resigned from all his literary obligations and fled to Italy, no longer willing to compromise his artistic expression for financial gain. His time in Italy, and the inspiration and encouragement from Edith Wingate Rinder led Sharp to create a new literary identity, Fiona Macleod. The pseudonym Fiona Macleod was an outlet for Sharp to reconnect with the folk lore and mystery of his Celtic childhood, while achieving a fresh start in the literary world. The poetry of Macleod drew upon the ancient myths and epic tales of Scotland in a lyric and evocative manner, enriching their folk-like simplicity with Symbolism strongly influenced by Maeterlinck and other authors from the New Belgian School. However, the Romantic folk subjects and evocative symbols were

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>3</sup> Flavia Ayana, *William Sharp—“Fiona Macleod” 1855-1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 2.

tempered by Sharp's earlier literary experience. Macleod's poetry represented the blending of Sharp's youthful imagination with the refinement and knowledge gained during his years as an author and literary critic. The combination of creator and editor led to Sharp's best literary endeavors.

The lush descriptions and romantic tales of lost love provided perfect fodder for song composition. Arnold Bax and Charles Griffes were both drawn to the poetry of Fiona Macleod. As a young composer, Bax felt a kindred spirit with the epic Celtic tales and folk song lyricism found in Macleod's poetry. He sought to merge a melodic simplicity demanded by the folk-like text with a Romantic development of the emotions lying beneath. Bax's virtuosic skills as a pianist are shown in the conception and role of his piano accompaniment. Macleod's symbolic use of the forces of nature (wind and ocean waves) and their interaction with man is enhanced in the countermelodies and chromatic figures of the piano accompaniment. At times, Bax's inexperience with vocal genres and indulgent tendencies for chromatic ornamentation can blur the natural declamation of the text and poetic simplicity. Within his *A Celtic Song Cycle*, humble folk-like songs progress into lush piano tone poems where the voice is a lyric storyteller amidst ever-changing chromatic textures. The layering of diatonic folk tunes on top of chromatic arpeggios and extended harmonics is a trait that Bax will further develop in his mature orchestral portraits featuring similar Scottish themes and stories, such as *Tintagel* and *The Garden of Fand*.

Charles Griffes approached the poetry of Fiona Macleod after fifteen years of song composition. His *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod* blend his virtuosic skill on the piano, sensitive text setting learned from lieder compositions, impressionistic use of

extended harmonies and chromaticism, and a diatonic melodic language evocative of Celtic folksongs. The three pieces create a cohesive song cycle through his repeated use of the triplet figure, bass pedal points, diatonic melodic cells and poly-rhythmic layering. Griffes used melodic motives, often with a folk-inspired lyricism, which repeat throughout the song giving the illusion of musical form. The musical settings of Bax and Griffes create two different interpretations of the Macleod poetry, by composers in very different stages in their careers. Each composer is translating Macleod's combination of Celtic mythology and Romantic symbolism with his own musical languages.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WILLIAM SHARP: YOUTH AND LITERARY APPRENTICESHIP

The poetry of Fiona Macleod is rooted in the childhood and early career of her creator William Sharp, and cannot be separated from his trials and tribulations. His childhood experiences with the Scottish people and their folklore offered the themes and material for many later poems by Macleod. As he pursued a literary career, he struggled to find a unique role within the London publishing industry. The literary refinement offered by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and many of his peers, and the publishing opportunities Sharp pursued in his early career honed his poetic voice as it also tempered his creative impulses. While the subject matter and delivery differ drastically, the early works of Sharp provided the foundation from which Fiona Macleod emerged.

William Sharp was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1855, the eldest of three sons and five daughters.<sup>1</sup> His father, David Galbreath Sharp, was a successful partner in a mercantile store. His mother, Katherine Brook Sharp, was the eldest daughter of the Swedish Vice Consul in Glasgow. The wealth of the Sharp family afforded much travel and luxury to William's childhood. Every summer, the family would travel north into the Scottish highlands to the Firth of Clyde or the Isle of Arran. William was a delicate child, often prone to fevers and weak spells. During the summer months, he would escape the watchful eyes of his mother and adventure into the wilderness around him. He was educated in the myths, songs, and legends of the Highland people by his Scottish

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<sup>1</sup> The account of Sharp's childhood given here is drawn primarily from Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir*, vol. 1 (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 3-15.



nurse, Barbara. His wife Elizabeth later related that Sharp always felt “at one with nature, fellow with the wind, and birds,” during his summer explorations.<sup>2</sup>

Sharp was an avid sailor, swimmer and fisherman. Throughout his youth, he would connect more with the local people and their stories of fairies than with his own family. Sharp felt he had an inner psychic side with the power of vision. During his adventures, he could see the nature spirits Barbara sang about, or feel the past lives of Celtic warriors as he sailed in the Firth. In *The Winged Destiny*, he wrote of one childhood experience with *Banmorair-na-mara*, or Star-Eyes.

I was not more than seven when one day, by a well, near a sea-loch in Argyll, just as I was stooping to drink, my glancing eyes lit on a tall woman standing among a mist of wild hyacinths under three great sycamores. I stood, looking, as a fawn looks, wide-eyed, unafraid. She did not speak, but she smiled, and because of the love and beauty in her eyes I ran to her. She stooped and lifted blueness out of the flowers, as one might lift foam out of a pool, and I thought she threw it over me. When I was found, lying among the hyacinths, dazed, and, as was thought, ill, I asked eagerly after, the lady in white and with hair “all shiny-gold like buttercups,” but when I found I was laughed at, or at last, when I passionately persisted, was told I was sun dazed and had been dreaming, I said no more. But I did not forget.<sup>3</sup>

As a child, Sharp’s imaginative nature and gift of storytelling drew confusion and disapproval from his family and other adults. The disbelief and resistance to his tales of fairy beings led Sharp to separate his wilderness adventures from his familial interactions. At the age of eight, William was sent to a boarding school in Scotland to start his formal education. He struggled to connect with his peers and the rigid curriculum. He ran away three times during his four years.<sup>4</sup> In 1867, the Sharp family moved to Glasgow. William became a day scholar at the Glasgow Academy until 1872, when he contracted typhoid fever and was sent to the country home to convalesce.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>3</sup> Fiona Macleod, *The Winged Destiny, Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (New York: Duffield, 1911), 210.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 1, 17.

During his convalescence, William met Seumas Macleod, an old fisherman who continued his education in the wonder, faith, and mystery of the Scottish highland. Macleod showed Sharp how to live off the land, be one with the earth, and rely solely on nature's bounty. Macleod shared his knowledge of Gaelic along with Celtic tales, and a pagan-like faith with Sharp. In *The Winged Destiny*, Sharp described Macleod as "so blithe in spirit and swiftly humorous, himself a poet and remembering countless songs and tales of old."<sup>5</sup> Sharp recounted sharing one of Macleod's morning rituals.

And on the morrow of his visit came at sunrise upon the old man, standing looking seaward with his bonnet removed from his long white locks; and upon his speaking to Seumas, (when he saw that he was not "at his prayers") was answered, "Every morning like this, I take my hat off to the beauty of the world."<sup>6</sup>

As Sharp grew he would often crave this "green" life, escaping all other demands on himself to achieve it, and rejected the constant burden of a "respectable" life. When he was eighteen, he met and joined a group of gypsies, disappearing from his family and all familial obligations for over three months. He later wrote to his wife, Elizabeth: "To him, who at all times hated the restrictions and limitations of conventional life, to whom romance was a necessity, this free life 'on the heather' was the realization of many dreams."<sup>7</sup> When his family recovered the fugitive William, he was set to work in a lawyer's office and began his studies at Glasgow University. The familial obligations of the eldest son were once more thrust upon him.

As a student at Glasgow, Sharp combined his required classes in law with studies in literature, religion, and foreign cultures, and an interest in the occult and psychic phenomena. The chief advantage of his time at Glasgow University was access to the

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<sup>5</sup> Macleod, *The Winged Destiny*, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol.1, 20.

University library. His studies of the religions and culture of the world gave him a sense of brotherhood with other storytellers and seers.<sup>8</sup> During his leisure time, Sharp blended his love of literature with a new impulse to write, undertaking several large projects in the style of modern literary figures he admired, such as Tennyson and Swinburne. He continued his dual studies until his father passed away in 1875.

The stress of his father's passing caused a recurrence of his typhoid symptoms. His family sent him to Australia to recover, during which time he wrote several articles on the Australian wilderness for travel magazines. As his interest in writing grew, so did his passion for and reliance on his muse, Miss Elizabeth Sharp. Elizabeth Sharp was William Sharp's cousin and a frequent companion during his childhood. She served as an early confidant and William's sole source of encouragement as he explored a career in writing. Their relationship developed from a youthful crush to a dedicated and supportive love. The two continued a secret engagement until 1884, when William Sharp's limited literary success allowed them to marry.

William Sharp returned to London in 1876, and was employed by the City of Melbourne Bank. He struggled to fulfill his duties as a bank teller and maintain his writing ambitions on the side. In 1880, he met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an established Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet.<sup>9</sup> The Pre-Raphaelite movement began among students studying painting at the Royal Academy. Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Everett Millais reacted against the artificial and stilted style of painting at the Academy, rejecting what they considered the conventional and frivolous nature of modern art and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>9</sup> The account of Sharp's relationship with Dante Rossetti is drawn primarily from Elizabeth Sharp's *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod) A Memoir*, vol. 1, 35-57.

choosing to model their own works on art from the ancient and medieval periods. They were inspired by the natural, uncomplicated paintings of fourteenth-century and fifteenth-century Italian art; hence the movement's name, Pre-Raphaelite.<sup>10</sup> They sought an unadorned directness of painting blended with a sensual and mystic romanticism of subject matter, believing in an artistic responsibility to find genuine, heartfelt ideas in which to express in a unique and individualistic manner.<sup>11</sup> Rossetti's lush, warm, and sensual style of painting is best revealed in his work, *Beata Beatrix* shown in Figure 1. The rich colors, the precise details in the character's environment and costume, and the medieval and spiritual subject matter represent Rossetti's mature style of painting.

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<sup>10</sup> Esther Wood, *Dante Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1894), 62-64.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 1: *Beata Beatrix* (1872) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti<sup>12</sup>

Rossetti blended his artistic beliefs about painting with his literary pursuits, and was particularly drawn to the literary works of Shakespeare, Dante, Keats, and Poe. He sought to combine an ease of language and strong use of symbolism with romantic and often gothic stories and ballads. He preferred structured poems with elegance of line, such as the sonnet. His poetry was closely linked with his painting and was often called verbal pictures for its extreme level of descriptive details. His sonnet cycle, *The House of Life*, explored the contrast between physical and spiritual love with sensual language and luxuriant images of nature. In *Dante Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, Esther Wood describes Rossetti's sonnets as "a fusion of the naïve mysticism of romance with

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<sup>12</sup>Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, (accessed January 24, 2011); available from <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/racs/pictures.rac.html>.

austere Platonic Hellenism which we discern in the best Renaissance art. Rossetti never falls in spirit from that standard of beauty and truth.”<sup>13</sup>

Rossetti shared many of his poems and paintings with the young Sharp. Many evenings were spent together discussing the purpose and responsibility of artistic creations. Rossetti became Sharp’s literary mentor, reviewing his works and offering criticism. He offered Sharp an informal training in poetic form, figurative language, and the flow of expressive text, and continually advised him to work on purity and distinction of idea. While Rossetti sought to temper Sharp’s artistic vision with elegance and refinement, he also offered Sharp the encouragement and support lacking from his family.<sup>14</sup> The older Rossetti became a surrogate father figure, providing both artistic and financial support during the difficult early years.

In addition to refining Sharp’s writings, Rossetti introduced him to literary circles from which he had been excluded previously. He introduced Sharp to talented contemporaries such as Philip Marston and Theodore Watts, in addition to publishers of books and periodicals. The endorsement of Rossetti opened many doors previously closed to Sharp. He gained work as the London art critic with the *Glasgow Herald* and succeeded in having a few poems published in small periodicals. After Rossetti’s death in 1882, Sharp received the greatest boon to his career. Due to their close friendship, Sharp was commissioned to write a biographical record summarizing the life of Rossetti. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* was published in 1883 and met with broad success. Over the next few years, Sharp would write similar volumes on the lives of Percy Shelley, Heinrich Heine, and Robert Browning. His analysis of Romantic literary

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 1, 64-70.

giants such as Shelley and Heine expanded his knowledge of Romantic subject matter and literary devices.

On October 31, 1884, William and Elizabeth were married after a nine-year engagement. Over the next ten years, Sharp rose through the competitive ranks in the London publishing circle. His literary output comprised four categories: writing articles and reviews for various periodicals, editing and compiling volumes of poems and stories by other literary figures, creating sensational fiction for young people, and writing his own original poems and novels strongly tied to nature and realism. As Sharp developed as a writer, he created much of his work by mimicking previous authors and masterpieces. Critics found Sharp's work dry imitations of past pieces rather than original literary ideas. His sensational fiction was loosely based on the gothic horrors of Edgar Allen Poe, with stories indulging in the dark Romantic themes of other-worldly spirits and mysterious mishaps without a sense of originality. His short story *Madge o' the Pool* spoke of the woes of the lower class in urban London, much in the style of Charles Dickens.

Sharp realized that the financial demands of his family required him to split his literary sense into two beings: the intellectual writing solely for the demands of the masses, and the internal creative being inspired by the spirit and wonder of nature. While Sharp enjoyed a steady increase in publications and engagement for literary projects, he received little esteem from his colleagues. He was better known for his charismatic and energetic personality than his literary prowess. His original creative volumes received

little attention and attracted broad criticism as being too obsessed with nature, written in artificial language, and having superficial characters that lacked a sense of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

To escape the stresses of urban living, Sharp continually traveled in Scotland, Europe, and the United States. In the fall of 1890, he left London after quitting all his critical and editorial positions. In a letter to a colleague he stated: “I am tired of so much pot boiling, such increasing bartering of literary merchandise, and wish to devote myself entirely to work in which my heart is.”<sup>16</sup> That winter, Sharp travelled to Italy and enjoyed a year wandering the wild “Campagna.” His literary freedom and environment released a wave of creative energy. In his journal Sharp wrote, “The impulse was an irresistible one. I am at the mercy of inspiration, working night and day.”<sup>17</sup> As described in the next chapter, these changes in Sharp’s literary approach soon led him to create a new persona, Fiona Macleod, and the body of work published under her name.

As a result of his apprenticeship in London where he was introduced to famous literary figures and their masterpieces, Sharp rejected his past literary works and refined his writing style. As a self-taught writer, his imitation of past works expanded his use of language, form, and narrative development. While he remained protective of his Celtic background and the folk-lore of his youth, he explored the Romantic period with his association with Rossetti and his later biographies of Heine, Shelley, and Browning. In creating Fiona Macleod, Sharp continued the flexibility he had learned from writing in so many literary genres with the education Rossetti offered in expressive but structured compositions. Those literary experiences then were reunited with the folk-lore and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 289.



fantasy of his youth. While the spirit and passion of Macleod remains concealed in Sharp's early publications, the language and medium in which she will later emerge was becoming more and more polished.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FIONA MACLEOD: A LITERARY REBIRTH

#### *Exploration of New Literary Styles and Themes*

Sharp's rejection of the London publishing market represented a turning point in his literary career. As success was no longer his single goal, he strove to find a unique creative voice expressing the whole of his being. His travels in Italy and the following two years of isolation at Phenice Croft in Scotland allowed Sharp to reconnect with his childhood and the folk-lore of the Scottish people. The freedom from literary deadlines along with new literary influences, Symbolism, and a renewed interest in regional folk-lore encouraged the fancy and fantastic in Sharp. He felt that a new literary voice needed a new name, and thus Fiona Macleod was born on the wild hills of Rome and Scotland. The creation of Fiona Macleod allowed Sharp to escape the censure of his previous literary works while enabling him to become a figure within the Celtic Renaissance and the rising Women's Rights movement. Macleod offered an escape from the past along with a creative and practical outlet to the future.

Sharp abandoned London and his literary obligations in the fall of 1890 and traveled with his wife to Rome during the winter of 1891 to escape the winter cold.<sup>1</sup> While in Rome, he met Mrs. Edith Wingate Rinder, a well-known translator of French literature who also had an avid interest in children's folk stories of various cultures.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Rinder published a volume of translations of Breton folklore called *The Shadow of*

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 1, 277.

<sup>2</sup> The account of Sharp's first trip to Rome and the creation of Fiona Macleod is drawn primarily from Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 1 211-28.

*Arvor*.<sup>3</sup> The two spent long afternoons walking amidst the Italian countryside. In his diary, Sharp wrote of the beauty, joy, and power of Mrs. Rinder, noting that she reminded Sharp of the great Greek and Celtic heroines. Later in his life, Sharp credited Rinder as the inspiration and foundation of Fiona Macleod.<sup>4</sup>

During their time together, Rinder introduced Sharp to the most recent poetry by Mallarmé and the plays of Maeterlinck. Sharp was greatly influenced by the Symbolist literature. In his essay “Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*,” Sharp wrote that among contemporary works, only Maeterlinck’s play “so poignantly conveys the sense of overwhelming pity for the tragic and inevitable mischance of the weak.”<sup>5</sup> In his Symbolist Manifesto *Le Figaro*, Jean Moréas describes symbolism as poetry which seeks to clothe the Idea in tangible form. It is a type of poetic art at once more purely intellectual, yet also more ideally imaginative than the decadence of the Romantic past.<sup>6</sup> The aim of symbolist writers is to suggest and evoke rather than tell or narrate.

Symbolism offered Sharp the manner in which to enrich his creative endeavors. He combined his previous style of writing, the precise and often journalistic descriptions of nature and life, with a more veiled and evocative flow of language. Sharp reveals this new poetic voice in his *Sospiri di Roma* (Sighs of Rome) written during his first winter in Rome. The poems are free verse, unrhymed with an irregular meter, in a similar style to many poets in the New Belgium School. Sharp used repetition and parallelism to achieve

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<sup>3</sup>Alaya, *William Sharp*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Travers, ed., *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism, A Reader in Aesthetic Practice* (London: Continuum, 2001), 151.

a sense of poetic unity and form.<sup>7</sup> Each poem offers one suggestive flash of nature and its inhabitation full of colors and sounds. Sharp insisted that nature should not be a source of imagery and symbols but a place of communion with one's self, one's ancestors, and a transcendent spirit.<sup>8</sup>

With suggestive imagery, Sharp became more uninhibited in his expressions of love, the nude body, and erotic passion. In an excerpt from "The Bather," Sharp compares the swaying naked figure of a female bather to the rustle of blossoming flowers tossed in the breezes off the sea. As the wind caresses the flowers, so too do the poet's eyes and words embrace the beauty and sensual freedom of the bather. Sharp uses the repetition of "moveth" and other "-eth" verb endings, such as "swayeth," and "passeth," to hold together the rapidly shifting images within the poem.

As a waterlily  
Touched by the breath  
Of sunrise-glory,  
Moveth and swayeth  
With tremulous joy,  
So o'er the sunlit  
White gleaming body  
Of the beautiful bather  
Passeth a quiver.  
Rosy-white, as a cloud at the dawning,  
Poised like a swallow that meeteth the wind,  
For a moment she standeth  
Where the sea-wind softly  
Moveth over  
The thick pink sword of the cyclamen-blossoms.  
Moveth and rustleth  
With faint susurrus  
The pale pink blooms  
Of the fragrant Daphne.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William F. Halloran, "William Sharp as Bard and Craftsman," *Victorian Poetry* 10, (Spring 1972): 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> William Sharp, *Sospiri di Roma*, (Rome: La Societa Laziale, 1891), 76-78.

In her Memoir *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, Elizabeth describes her husband's *Sospiri di Roma* as poems that "are filled not only with the passionate delight in life, with the sheer joy of existence but also with the ecstatic worship of beauty that possessed him during those months in Rome."<sup>10</sup> Sharp dedicated "A Winter Evening" to EWR (Edith Wingate Rinder) in his *Sospiri di Roma*. The poem tells of a wild winter tempest ripping through the woods of Borghese, with the final lines questioning the rage and torment of Night's storm, comparing it to the Poet's fierce and forbidden passion of his beloved. Are both the Night and the Poet reveling in their secret or overcome with their sorrow? For a poem dedicated to his beloved muse, it lacks a sense of humanity and emotional content. The questions in the final two lines of the poem are not strong enough to unite a poet's emotions and desires with the rapid and disjointed images of the Italian countryside at night.

Here is the dim gloomy Via dell' Mura  
Nought but the peace of the snow-drift unruffled,  
White obscured, save where from the window  
High in the walls of the Medici gardens,  
Glow a red shining, fiery bloodred.  
What lies in the heart of thee, Night, thus so ominous?  
What is thy secret, strange joy or strange sorrow?<sup>11</sup>

While the exact details of Sharp's and Rinder's relationship are unknown, *Sospiri di Roma* serves as a fervent and loving tribute to their artistic collaboration. The volume was dedicated to Rinder and quickly published in 1891 at Sharp's expense. After the release of his *Sospiri di Roma*, Sharp was criticized for having a frantic, careless writing style. In a later article titled "William Sharp as Bard and Craftsman," William Halloran

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)* vol. 2, 4.

<sup>11</sup> William Sharp, *Sospiri di Roma*, 75.

wrote that: “Sharp’s *Sospiri di Roma* is a sweaty jumble of exotic nude figures, foreign landscapes and vague impressions. The poetry is excessively repetitious, lacks craftsmanship, and cohesion.”<sup>12</sup> Critics felt the poems lacked a connection to the scenery and people depicted. *Sospiri di Roma* offered beautiful snapshots of Rome without a narrative or emotional pull for readers. In “The Bather,” the beautiful woman has no humanity. As she is compared to and surrounded by blooming flowers, she is as cold as a marble statue. She does not smile, speak or acknowledge the presence of the poet. Halloran attributes the literary flaws in *Sospiri di Roma* to the careless rapture in which Sharp wrote the pieces. As stated in Sharp’s diary, his impulse to write was irresistible. Sharp was completely at the mercy of his passion, and the editorial skills learned during his literary apprenticeship had been discarded.<sup>13</sup>

After a year of travel, Sharp returned to England in the summer of 1893, settling with his wife Elizabeth at Phenice Croft near the small town of Horsham. Sharp committed himself to living the “green life.” The quiet leisure amid the rural settings awakened his youthful experiences with the Celtic people and folk-lore. Sharp’s inner dreamer and story teller emerged from its previous prison. No longer did he feel compelled by practical intellect to maintain his literary career regardless of the creative costs. During the two years at Phenice Croft, Sharp’s new poetic voice had the time to mature and develop into a separate literary identity.

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<sup>12</sup> William F. Halloran, “William Sharp as Bard and Craftsman,” 69.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 1, 287-289.

*Creation of a Female Persona*

Fiona Macleod appeared on the literary scene in 1894 with the publication of the novel *Pharais*, Gaelic for “Paradise.” In the novel, the female protagonist is forced to bear the slow clouding of her husband’s mind, the loss of multiple children, and her complete isolation from society. True spiritual transformation finally comes to her husband only upon her death. While the novel and author were received with great esteem across the literary world, the esteem never reached the true creator. If Sharp was finally writing in his true creative voice, why use a pen name? Why create a female persona and completely distance himself from his greatest literary works?

As Sharp’s intimate friends began to suspect the true face of Fiona Macleod, Sharp defended himself, justifying the pen name by saying: “I can write out of my heart in a way I could not do as William Sharp.”<sup>14</sup> The creation of Fiona Macleod was a reconnecting with the innocence and spirituality of Sharp’s past. He drew from the oral tales heard in his youth enriching and embellishing them with a Romantic ideal. Even Fiona’s name emerged slowly from Sharp’s past. Macleod came from the Scottish fisherman Seumas Macleod who taught Sharp how to worship the wild and untamed. Fiona came from the old Gaelic name Fionnaghal (meaning flower) and also the isle of Iona, which was an ancient holy site for the Druids. Sharp felt that Fiona Macleod allowed him to reconnect with what he regarded as his ancestral memory, man’s awareness of what was in the world before them, a oneness with the universal memory and psychic intuition. Sharp felt he was a spiritual reincarnation of the ancient Celtic druids.<sup>15</sup> Fiona Macleod allowed him to live and write within his newfound identity.

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)* vol. 2, 14.

Though Sharp defended the creation of Fiona Macleod with conviction, many of his actions did not uphold his lofty ideals. Throughout his career, William Sharp often used different pen names when experimenting in a new style, offering him the protection of anonymity should the literary endeavor fail. In August of 1892, Sharp created a periodical called *The Pagan Review*, which was to be his first literary contribution to the growing Celtic Renaissance movement, a recapturing of the ancient stories, traditions, and languages of the rural people of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With the rapid urbanization of England, scholars, writers, and activists sought to save the Celtic heritage. The movement was greatly influenced by the earlier ballads of James Macpherson (1736-1796), who wrote two volumes of epic poetry which he attributed to a third-century bard named Ossian. Macpherson's poems were rooted in the oral tradition, taking translations of genuine Gaelic myths and embellishing them with his modern language and imagination.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Pagan Review*, Sharp wrote articles on the Pagan religion and stories and poems with a Pagan spirit. Much like the works of Macpherson, Sharp took Celtic ideals as the literary skeleton and then fleshed the stories out with a modern sense of Romanticism. The articles were written by seven different personas (mainly of French descent such as Gascoigne and Verlayne) and edited by W. H. Brooks (all pen names used by Sharp). The success of *The Pagan Review* encouraged Sharp to continue embellishing his Scottish cultural heritage in other literary genres.

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<sup>15</sup> Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 260.

<sup>16</sup> John Matthews, ed. *From Isles of Dreams: Visionary Stories and Poems of the Celtic Renaissance* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 14.



Subsequently, *Pharais* was started in the fall of 1892 during Sharp's second visit to Rome. His diaries during that time had no mention of Fiona Macleod or any other additional artistic personality. *Pharais* was finished in 1893 and submitted to Richard Stoppard for publication with Sharp as the author. The novel was rejected.<sup>17</sup> Although by 1893 Sharp was an established London literary figure, his literary reputation was as an artistic imitator drawing upon the masterworks of others, not an original creator. He was a high sort of literary hack.<sup>18</sup> His urban persona and dry intellectual writing style seemed completely disjointed from the romantic, dark, and folk-like *Pharais*. The creation of Fiona Macleod not only inspired Sharp creatively, but proved to be an excellent business decision. Fiona Macleod allowed Sharp to reinvent himself, and only when Sharp resubmitted the novel under his new pen name did he receive publication.

The pen name, Fiona Macleod, made good business sense within the context of other social movements as well. Women's rights groups were prominent in London, seeking employment, improvements in women's education, and the right to vote. Mona Caird, a close friend of Elizabeth Sharp, was an active feminist and suffragist publishing many essays and articles on the plight of women. She often wrote of the indignities of marriage and the inequalities suffered by women. The nineteenth century had many strong female literary figures (such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and Elisabeth Gaskell), and a female pen name offered Sharp the opportunity to connect with a still booming literary market. Even as Sharp stayed aloof from the activist branch of the feminist movement, with Fiona Macleod he was able to ally himself with the artistic

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 2, 10

<sup>18</sup> Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights*, 257.

generation that followed him. Fiona Macleod's stories dwelled in the world of prophecy where ordinary women and the modern trials of society and marriage did not exist.

In 1895, Fiona Macleod published her second novel, *The Mountain Lovers*, a volume of short stories titled *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales*, and her first collection of poetry titled *From the Hills of Dream*. Each of these works drew heavily from Celtic folk-lore. Macleod reworked the regional tales and legends from rural Scotland with an enhanced sense of atmosphere and symbolic use of nature. In his essay on Macleod, Paul Elmer Moore groups the themes of her early works into the following categories: stories exploring the hidden supernatural world which manipulated the fates of men, the transformative powers of passion on a person's soul, and man's relentless and futile search for true love and beauty.<sup>19</sup>

Macleod's success drew the attention of the Edinburgh branch of the Celtic Renaissance. Patrick Geddes, a biology professor at the University of Edinburgh, believed in the necessity of preserving the subtler qualities and spiritual heritage of the Scottish race. In conversations with Sharp, Geddes said, "The Celtic Renaissance must be a fresh development of creative energy colored by the nationality and molded by inherited forces."<sup>20</sup> Geddes, along with W. B. Yeats, George Russell, and Standish O'Grady, belonged to the Gaelic League, dedicated to the preservation of the Celtic tongue, music, and literature. The Gaelic League was formed around dual purposes, the political goal of Irish Independence championed by Yeats, and the cultivation of modern Celtic artistic works in the English language. Macleod was gladly welcomed into their

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Elmer Moore, "Fiona Macleod," *The Drift of Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 138.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp "Fiona Macleod"*, vol. 2, 138.

ranks and developed a lasting relationship with Geddes's publishing house. The Edinburgh circle ensured the propagation of Macleod's works along with further creative fodder for writing.

In 1899, Yeats, with the support of Lady Augusta Gregory, founded the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin. His infatuation with the stories of Fiona Macleod led Yeats to commission two plays, *The House of Usna* and *The Immortal Hour*. Yeats's theatre featured plays centered in the Celtic heritage but with escalating diversions into the supernatural and psychological world. In the foreword to her plays, Macleod states "In these short dramas I have attempted to give voice to two elemental emotions, the emotion of the inevitableness of destiny and the emotion of tragical loveliness."<sup>21</sup> Both plays are based on Celtic legends. *The House of Usna* is based *Deirdr  and the Sons of Usna*, and *The Immortal Hour* is based on *Midir and Eatin*. The Celtic legends contain love triangles and a man's struggle against the forces of good and evil. In *The House of Usna*, the lost princess Eatin has her memory stolen by the shadow fairy, Dalua. She is rescued by King Eochaidh and marries him. During the King's yearly festival, Midir, spirit of the light, challenges King Eochaidh to a game of chess. Midir wins and claims Eatin, his true princess, as reward. In Macleod's interpretation of the Celtic legend, the dramatic action of the myth becomes secondary to an examination of the intimate emotional journey of the characters. *The House of Usna* contrasts the mundane love of the mortal realm, Eatin and King Eochaidh, with the endless and spiritual love of Eatin and Midir.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fiona Macleod, *Poems and Dramas* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 297.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

Within the plays and her later works, Macleod's use of symbolism becomes vague and excessive. Images of water, starry heavens, dark shadows, wind, and fire become clichés that lack a clear literary meaning. The dramatic action is constantly halted as characters go into poetic interludes without clear meaning, leading to little development of sympathetic characters or dynamic relationships between characters. In *The Winged Destiny*, Macleod becomes focused on the transcendental nature of the Celtic culture and faith. While the titles of the stories seem reminiscent of Macleod's early poems and dramas, the content is completely different. Macleod draws upon the land, people, and atmosphere of Scotland, but the writing is rhapsodic and complex without a clear narrative journey or even clearly argued spiritual philosophies. Her "Dominion of Dreams" is no longer a geographic location with a sense of humanity, but a vague spiritual realm only accessible to the chosen few.<sup>23</sup>

As Macleod's popularity grew, Sharp sought to protect the mystique around the author. He became the literary agent of Fiona Macleod, allowing him to justify an association with the author. William's sister Mary became the official handwriting for all of Fiona's correspondences. In addition, Sharp struggled to sustain his own literary prowess, and continued publishing volumes in his own name. As the stress of maintaining two distinct writing careers proved too much for Sharp, his health failed, and his wife encouraged him to apply for the British Civil Pension. Sharp refused the financial assistance, since in order to receive the pension, Sharp would have to reveal his female penname. In a letter Sharp wrote to his friend Alex Nelson Hood, he stated that "To betray publicly the private life and constrained ideal of the inward self, for a

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<sup>23</sup> Flavia Ayana, *William Sharp*, 188.

reward's sake, would be a poor collapse.”<sup>24</sup> It is unknown whether Sharp feared a public rebuttal for his female pseudonym, or if he truly believed in the sanctity of his inner creative muse.

Fiona Macleod's early novels and poems were her superior works. The wealth of Celtic myths and legends were enriched with a new freedom of Romantic imagery. However, the language and symbolism were still restrained by the discipline and reason learned in Sharp's long apprenticeship with publication. As Sharp began to exhaust his Celtic resources, the works became more veiled and unfocused, his inspiration no longer tempered with reason. Within her later works, Fiona Macleod abandoned her Scottish roots and folk-like simplicity. The narrative journey and dramatic action was lost in a flow of beautiful imagery, and the humanity of the Celtic persona was lost in a blur of vague symbols and philosophies imbued with overblown Romantic paradigms.

William Sharp died on December 12, 1905 in Sicily. In 1910, Elizabeth Sharp published *The Complete Works of Fiona Macleod* in seven volumes. She also published *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir*, an in-depth biography in two volumes that also contained William's diaries and correspondence. The first volume dealt with Sharp's youth and literary career up to 1884, while the second volume focused on Fiona Macleod and the building of a second literary reputation. Mrs. Sharp wanted to credit her husband with the works published under the Macleod penname. She also sought to explain the creation and sustaining of the female persona.

The public reaction to the revelation that William Sharp had written the works of Fiona Macleod in secret was very negative. Macleod's literary merit was discredited as

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)*, vol. 2, (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 207.

many people reacted to the perceived deception. Feminists charged Sharp with deceit and declared his Macleod works as opportunistic shams. Previous literary supporters, including Yeats and Russell, criticized Macleod's works as forgeries making a mockery of a noble race and its cultural heritage. The public outrage served as further proof to the necessity of Sharp's pseudonym. The literary works did not change after his secret was revealed; however, the negative response of the public gave credit to Sharp's previous demand for secrecy. The pseudonym had both practical and creative justifications, and Sharp paid for his conceived deceit with fierce literary reviews. Throughout the twentieth century, the works of William Sharp and Fiona Macleod slowly fell off the literary circuit.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POETRY OF FIONA MACLEOD

Fiona Macleod published her first collection of poems, *From the Hills of Dream* in 1895. Many literary critics found Macleod's poetry to be her truest and most original literary creations, as she combined Celtic folk-lore and atmosphere with Romantic literary themes and expressive use of figurative languages. Sharp took the criticism of *Sospiri di Roma* to heart when writing and revising the Macleod poetry. The poems blend the vivid atmospheres of Sharp's past works with a poetic protagonist who invites the audience into her emotional realm. Sharp relied on the Celtic tradition for inspiration as he also gave greater concern to prosody and use of figurative language within his poems. Macleod's poetry combined the expressive freedom of Symbolism, and established Romantic themes of loss and rebirth with the simplicity and vivid humanity of Celtic folk-lore.

*From the Hills of Dream* contained poems Macleod titled as "Mountain Songs" and "Island Runes." The "Mountain Songs" drew upon the simplicity of the Celtic ballads and oral tradition of storytelling. They are rhymed poems with simple language, clear poetic form, and stories or characters taken from Celtic folk-lore. The poems use Celtic names, such as Eilidh, Alasdair, and Isla, and suggestive titles, such as "Morag of the Glen" or "The Hills of Ruel" as the basis for new narrative interpretations or emotional laments. The Celtic names and selective use of Gaelic add regional flavor to poems that blur the line between authentic lyric ballads and imaginative forgeries.

The poems often feature a brief introduction, explaining the character or source of the folk-lore material. In “Dead Love,” Macleod states that the poem comes from a Gaelic song sung by an old woman on the Island of Tiree.<sup>1</sup>

It is the grey rock I am,  
And grey rain on the rock:  
It is the grey wave...  
That grey hound.

What (is it) to be old:  
(It is to be as) the grey moss in winter:  
Alasdair-mo-ghaol,  
It is long since my laughter.

Alasdair-mo-ghaol,  
The breast is shriveled  
That you said was white  
As canna in wind.<sup>2</sup>

Within “Dead Love” the color grey serves two purposes: the repetition creates unity through the stanzas, replacing the need for a final rhyme scheme, and the word itself symbolizes the woman’s grief and approaching death. Time has stolen the woman’s brilliant white youth (as beautiful as the Canna Lily) and her beloved companion Alasdair, leaving her shriveled and discolored by the approaching black of death. She is trapped in a world of transition, not truly alive but not yet dead, and the cold and stark grey of her natural surrounding personifies her physical state even as it comforts her during her final journey. The poem’s language is simple but poignant and enriched with Celtic references, such as the use of Gaelic for my love (mo-ghaol) and the mention of the Highland Canna lily, creating a folk-like exoticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiona Macleod, *Poems and Dramas* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



In “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” Macleod explores the power of the human gaze. Eilidh’s eyes are truly the window to her soul. With a single glance, the poet feels connected to her, a connection which can even conquer death. The light or fire within Eilidh’s glance can pull the poet from his heavenly slumber and return him to her arms. Throughout Macleod’s poetry, fire is used as a recurrent symbol of the ideal union of nature and the supernatural, body and soul, or of true spiritual love.<sup>3</sup> Eilidh’s eyes and the passion which they emit represent that love which is stronger than any earthly restraints, a supreme Romantic ideal realized in a simple songlike form with three four-line stanzas and an ABCB rhyme scheme. Macleod creates a cyclic unity by using the verb “leap” in both the first and third stanzas. The use of that verb in both the present (“leaps”), the future (“will leap”) and the conditional or subjective tense (“would leap”) adds a timeless quality to the poem. The poet is drawn to Eilidh’s gaze now and forever. The vivid images and steady poetic pulse makes “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine” ideal for musical settings.

Thy dark eyes to mine, Eilidh,  
Lamps of desire!  
O how my soul leaps  
Leaps to their fire!

Sure now, if I in heaven,  
Dreaming in bliss,  
Heard but a whisper,  
But the lost echo even  
Of one such kiss—

All of the Soul of me  
Would leap afar—  
If that called me to thee

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<sup>3</sup> William Halloran, “William Sharp as Bard and Craftsman”, *Victorian Poetry* 10, no. 1, (Spring 1972), 77.

Aye, I would leap afar  
A falling star!<sup>4</sup>

The second type of poems found in Macleod's *From the Hills of Dream* is "Island Runes." According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, a Rune is "any letter of the earliest Germanic alphabet, used especially by the Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons from the third century A.D. Runes were characters or poems carved on wood or stone, and were believed to have magical powers or significance."<sup>5</sup> Macleod's "Island Runes" are a similar type of literary forgery as the Ossian poems of Macpherson. Sharp did not translate or research any ancient Celtic carvings; rather, the poems called "Island Runes" are meant to evoke ideas of the ancient and magical even as they are modern embellishments of Celtic tales or new literary compositions. The poetic form of her "Island Runes" is similar to Sharp's *Sospiri di Roma*. The poems are free verse, often lacking a regular rhyme scheme, a pattern of syllabic stress, or uniform stanza length. The subjects of these poems vary from prayers and incantations to cautionary tales, all dealing with supernatural and divine forces.

"The Rune of the Four Winds" is more of a protective incantation than a poem. In the first section, the protagonist is summoning the four white winds from their various heavenly realms; there is true power in the calling of a name. The references to the stars and heavens, such as Polestar, Heat-star, Sigh of the Rainbow, adds an element of the divine to the opening couplets. The summons of the four winds is followed by a poetic triplet pleading for protection over the land and sea. The second section of the rune

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<sup>4</sup> Fiona Macleod, *Poems and Dramas* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 5th ed., S.V. "Rune."

involves the summoning of the three dark winds from their respective realm. The formal tone of the language and the Celtic locations and terminology creates a strong sense of mystique. Macleod creates a very convincing reproduction of an invocation worthy of the ancient Celtic druids.

By the Voice in the corries  
When the Polestar danceth;

By the Voice on the summits  
The dead feet know:

By the soft wet cry  
When the Heat-star troubleth:

By the plaining and moaning  
Of the Sign of the Rainbows:

By the four white winds of the world,  
Whose father the golden Sun is,  
Whose mother the wheeling Moon is  
The North, and the South and the East and the West:  
By the four good winds of the world,  
That Man knoweth,  
That One dreadeth,  
That God blesseth—

Be all well on the mountain and moorland and lea,  
On loch-face and lochan and river,  
On shore and shallow and sea!

By the Voice of the Hollow  
Where the worm dwelleth:

By the Vice of the Hollow  
Where the sea-waves stirs not:

By the Voice of the Hollow  
That sun hath not seen yet:

By the three dark winds of the world;  
The chill dull breath of the Grave,  
The breath from the depths of the sea,  
The breath of To-morrow:

By the white and dark winds of the world,  
 The four and the three that are seven,  
 That man knoweth,  
 That One dreadeth,  
 That God blesseth—

Be all well on the mountain and moorland and lea,  
 On loch-face and lochan and river,  
 On shore and shallow and sea!<sup>6</sup>

Through her career, Macleod continued to revise her poetry. She released subsequent printings titled, *From the Hills of Dreams: Threnodies, Songs and Later Poems* in 1901 and a posthumous edition in 1907. In addition to the poems previously published in her 1895 edition, Macleod included three new groups of poems titled: *Through the Ivory Gates*, *Foam of the Past*, and *The Hour of Beauty*. Macleod's later poetry delved deeper into many themes prevalent in Romantic literature and Celtic folklore: a person's isolation from or rejection of society, the pain of loss and man's acceptance of fate, and the existence of supernatural beings and their meddling with human beings.

Her later poems drew more heavily from Celtic mythology and were inspired by her short stories and other literary genres. "The Moon Child" from *Foam of the Past* is a poem based a prose tale titled "The Three Marvels of Hy," which told the Celtic legend of the seal-man or silkie. A silkie, also spelled selkie, is a mythical ocean creature that can walk on land as a human by removing its seal skin, or silkie pelt. The silkie must then carefully hide the pelt, because if a human possesses the pelt the silkie is trapped on

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<sup>6</sup> Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, 52-3.

land and becomes bound to that human.<sup>7</sup> Macleod drew upon the silkie myth to create “The Moon-Child” from the viewpoint of the silkie’s child, after the father found his pelt and returned to the sea. The child is lost between worlds; it is neither human nor supernatural, neither of the land nor of the sea. With no human companions, the child is lost in a world with only nature to guide and comfort him. Macleod refreshes the myth’s narrative by focusing on the isolation and longing of the silkie’s offspring, bringing a new depth of humanity to an established tale.

A little lonely child am I  
That have not any soul:  
God made me as the homeless wave,  
That has no goal.

A seal my father was, a seal  
That once was a man:  
My mother loved him tho’ he was  
‘Neath mortal ban.

He took a wave and drowned her,  
She took a wave and lifted him:  
And I was born where shadows are  
In sea-depth dim.

All through the sunny blue-sweet hours  
I swim and glide in waters green:  
Never by day the mournful shores  
By me are seen.

But when the gloom is on the wave  
A shell unto the shore I bring  
And then upon the rocks I sit  
And plaintive sing.

I have no playmate but the tide  
The seaweed loves with dark brown eyes:

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 413.

The night-waves have the stars for play,  
For me but sighs.<sup>8</sup>

In “The Lament of Ian the Proud,” Macleod offers another emotional snapshot of the character Ian, rather than an embellished retelling of a Celtic myth. The poem offers no background information or narrative journey; rather Ian the Proud represents the supreme Celtic and Romantic figure, a man who accepts fate and loss without self-pity or melancholy. The relationship between Ian and his natural surroundings highlights his isolation. Wind symbolizes fate and both the past and unknown future. Only the wind communicates with Ian and knows his true grief, for he lacks all human companions. The whirling leaf symbolizes Ian the man at the mercy of greater forces beyond his control. He is old, weary, and blind, yet he continues to persevere. These vast Romantic ideals are delivered in a poetic ballad with an abbcddbbc rhyme scheme strengthened by the repetition of final words, such as “leaf,” “grief,” and “blind.”

What is this crying that I hear in the wind?  
Is it the old sorrow, or the old grief?  
Or is it a new thing coming, a whirling leaf  
About the grey hair of me who am weary and blind?  
I know not what it is, but on the moor above the shore  
There is a stone which the purple nets of the heather bind,  
And thereon is writ: She will return no more.  
O blown whirling leaf,  
And the old grief,  
And wind crying to me who am old and blind!<sup>9</sup>

In the preface to *Foam of the Past*, Macleod writes “So you, perhaps, may say of some of these lines in *From the Hills of Dream* and *Foam of the Past* that they come

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<sup>8</sup> Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, 50-1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

familiarly to you in other than the sense of mere acquaintance.”<sup>10</sup> In her poetry, Macleod is not attempting to rewrite the Celtic mythology, but to enrich its tales and folk-lore with modern expressive literary tools. The poetry of Fiona Macleod focuses on the interaction between outer and inner realities: man’s thoughts and desires against cruel reality, and the natural world interaction with supernatural forces. The Celtic mythological references are developed in tight verbal and poetic structures. The poems are filled with dreams and visions, structured with a strong sense of atmosphere and symbolic use of natural elements. The stars, the moon, and all heavenly references represent the spiritual truth and afterlife, while nature with its creatures and forces (rain, wind, and snow) is intimately tied to humanity. The uniting of one’s body and soul, the wonder and power of the natural world, and the inevitability of loss, death, and despair are common themes within the poems. Macleod’s poetry combined the inspiring Celtic stories of Sharp’s youth with a new restrained use of expressive figurative language, dramatic narratives, and tighter poetic structure. Macleod’s balance of inspiration, creativity, and literary restraint created beautiful poetry that enhances ideals of the Celtic Renaissance and the Late Romantic literary period.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 104.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ARNOLD BAX AND *A CELTIC SONG CYCLE*

The compositions of Arnold Bax bridge two schools of compositional thought, the Late Romantic influence of Wagner and Strauss and the folk song lyricism and transparency of English Nationalist composers such as Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams. *A Celtic Song Cycle* reflects both ideals and techniques as Bax sets Macleod's folk poetry with lyric diatonic tunes that are enhanced with complex harmonic sonorities and layering of countermelodies within the virtuosic piano accompaniment. The duality within the song cycle highlights the duality within Bax's musical education, both at the Royal Conservatory, and his self-guided explorations of the opera scores of Wagner and Strauss, and his conflicting artistic personae that sought to find a creative identity within the Scottish and Irish cultures that were foreign to him as an English gentleman. *A Celtic Song Cycle* is an amalgamation of Bax's enthusiasm for the Highland folklore and melodic ballads with the Late Romantic chromaticism and density of counterpoint, resulting in a song cycle which portrays the drama and passion of Celtic mythology in a tightly crafted musical and narrative journey.

#### *Finding His Voice: Rise of the Composer*

Arnold Bax grew up during a time of conflicting musical styles and philosophies. The Late Romantic influences of Wagner and Strauss conflicted with a Nationalistic movement urging composers to return to simple and authentic English folksongs. Bax's early musical education was largely self-taught, combining a virtuosic proficiency on the piano with an early infatuation with the operas of Wagner and tone poems of Strauss.



During his student years at the Royal Academy of Music, he struggled to expand his compositional output beyond solo piano pieces, and lacked a distinct and unique style of composing. The Celtic Renaissance and poetry of W. B. Yeats offered Bax both the inspiration for compositions in different genres ranging from art songs to orchestral tone poems, and also the thematic material that allowed him to combine two contrary schools of composition.

Bax was born in Steatham, England (a suburb of London) on November 8, 1883.<sup>1</sup> He enjoyed an affluent childhood with private tutors and frequent travels, but lacked an early formal academic and musical education. Music was an inherent part of the wealthy family's leisure time and in his memoir *Farewell my Youth*, Bax states,

I cannot recall the long-lost day when I was unable to play the piano—inaccurately. It seems that I could always read printed music at the piano-stool with the same unthinking ease with which a man reads a book.<sup>2</sup>

Bax was largely self-taught on the piano, improving his technique and sight-reading by studying and playing through “an ancient, foxed and yellowing edition of Beethoven’s symphonies, arranged for piano solo.”<sup>3</sup> At age twelve, he broadened his musical sphere to include composing while recovering from sunstroke after a summer game of cricket. His first compositions were piano sonatas, minuets, and mazurkas, all in the style of Beethoven and Chopin.<sup>4</sup> In 1897, Bax’s father took Arnold’s *Clavierstücke*, Opus 1, a collection of 28 solo piano pieces, to Sir Frederick Bridge for a consultation on

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<sup>1</sup> The account of Bax’s early childhood and musical education given here is drawn primarily from Lewis Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and His Times* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1987), 1-43.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Bax, *Farewell, My Youth and Other Writings*, ed. Lewis Foreman (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and His Times* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1987), 7.

his son's prospects in music. In his memoir, Arnold remembers Bridge "deigned to admit that I had a better sense of composition than himself had at my age."<sup>5</sup> The following fall, Arnold began formal studies at the Hampstead Conservatory, taking piano, theory, and composition lessons from Dr. Arthur Greenish, a church organist. Bax's youthful enthusiasm for Beethoven was soon joined with a passion for the operas of Wagner, who he believed held the musical language of passion.

While studying at Hampstead, he attended a lecture by Cecil Sharp, head of the Conservatory, titled "Folk-song and Art-song." Sharp, an avid Nationalist musician, insisted that the folksongs melodies of rural England were the only true path for English composers, and those tunes should be considered more precious than all melodies by previous masters, such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Bax was not convinced; as he later wrote, "The truth is that Sharp often talked a great deal of nonsense."<sup>6</sup> In his mature works, Bax would consciously strive to achieve a folk-like melody and atmosphere without direct quotations of folksongs.

In 1900, Bax entered the Royal Academy of Music, studying piano with Tobias Matthay and composition with Frederick Corder. The Royal Academy of Music, under the direction of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, taught a progressive school of composition emphasizing the innovations of Wagner and Liszt over more traditional German Romantic composers. Frederick Corder was an acknowledged Liszt scholar and author of the first Liszt study written in English.<sup>7</sup> Liszt's rejection of traditional musical form,

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<sup>5</sup> Bax, *Farewell, My Youth and Other Writings*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Foreman, *Bax*, 12.

concept of thematic transformation, and virtuosic piano playing greatly influenced Bax during his studies and throughout his career.

Despite his intellect and enthusiasm, Bax did not immediately shine at the Royal Academy of Music. He lacked knowledge of established genres and styles of composition and was overshadowed by his contemporaries, such as Benjamin Dale and York Bowen. During his first two years of study, Bax searched for a compositional voice. In 1902, Bax encountered two artistic innovators who changed the direction of his future musical and literary output; Richard Strauss and his orchestral tone poems and the Celtic poetry of W. B. Yeats.

Bax delighted in Strauss's blending of chromatic and diatonic melodic counterpoints, expansive and coloristic orchestration, fluidity of musical form, avoidance of final cadences, and combination of literary and musical forces in programmatic pieces. Strauss's tone poems *Don Juan*, *Macbeth*, and *Tod und Verklärung* all were inspired by literary works and gave subtle hints towards the literary journey in the music without an extensive narrative program. Bax would adapt Strauss's style of subtle programmatic pieces with subjects inspired by Celtic legends in his mature tone poems, such as *The Garden of Fand* and *Tintagel*.

The Romantic and nationalistic poetry of W. B. Yeats provided a literary influence equal to the music of Strauss and Wagner. Bax later wrote that as he read W. B. Yeats's *The Wandering of Usheen*, he felt the Celt within him stood revealed.<sup>8</sup> While he had no direct Celtic heritage, the Irish sentiment captured his heart. Bax's financial stability gave him the freedom to compose only when passion or inspiration struck him, and Ireland's folklore provided him with that musical and literary stimulation. Over the

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<sup>8</sup> Bax, *Farewell, my Youth and Other Writings*, 36.

next few years, he traveled to Ireland several times and began to compose songs to the poetry of Fiona Macleod, Moira O'Neill, and Padraic Colum, even as he created an Irish pseudonym, Dermot O'Byrne, for his own evocative poetry.<sup>9</sup> Bax strengthened the validity of his Irish persona Dermot O'Byrne by learning Gaelic and actively participating in the literary circles of Dublin. In *Farewell, my Youth*, Bax comments that AE, the author George Russell, was totally unaware that he was a musician during his time in Dublin.<sup>10</sup>

His enthusiasm for Celtic poetry led him to explore setting text to music in the art song genre. From 1903 to 1908, Bax led a double life, composing over eighteen songs to the poetry of Fiona Macleod even as his alter ego Dermot O'Byrne wrote a volume of poetry titled *Seafoam and Firelight* and a volume of short stories titled *Children of the Hills* published in 1909. The Celtic Renaissance offered Bax a cultural identity and mythology which both inspired his musical and literary creativity. The two artistic forces unite in *A Celtic Song Cycle*, as Bax creates music flavored by both the Late Romantic German chromaticism and diatonic English folksongs and unites five of Macleod's poems into an extended poetic journey akin to those of O'Byrne.

### *A Celtic Song Cycle*

Bax wrote *A Celtic Song Cycle* from 1902 to 1904, during his student days at the Royal Academy of Music and the beginning of his infatuation with all things Celtic. The song cycle provides a unique opportunity to see the developing composer's use of

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<sup>9</sup> Foreman, *Bax*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Bax, *Farewell, my Youth and Other Writings*, 87.

chromaticism, counterpoint, and blending of Romantic melodic development with traditional Irish folk characteristics. While the pieces are written for voice and piano, the accompaniment hints at the complexity of counterpoint and frequent chromaticism found in his mature orchestral tone poems, such as *Tintagel* and *The Garden of Fand*. Bax uses small rhythmic and melodic cells to create cohesion in the evolving through-composed songs. Though the vocal melody is sometimes overshadowed by the bombastic piano accompaniment, the passionate and evocative counterpoint uplifts the poetic atmosphere and mystique of Fiona Macleod. In addition, *A Celtic Song Cycle* is the only closed grouping of poetry and song conceived by Bax, rather than grouped for publication by the publisher, showing the influence of his poetic persona O'Byrne in creating extended poetic narratives or literary themes. The influences of Bax as musician and O'Byrne as poet combine in *A Celtic Song Cycle* to achieve a Romantic interpretation of a Macleod's Celtic poetry.

The song cycle consists of five songs for voice and piano with poems taken from Macleod's second edition of poetry titled *From the Hills of Dreams, Threnodies, Songs and Other Poems*. The poems feature a simple folk-like language with a clear poetic structure and rhyme scheme. O'Byrne's influence is seen in the selection of poems, as they all focus on a female character, Eilidh and a poet's unfulfilled quest for her love. Macleod's poetry compares the illusive Eilidh to various images from nature such as the sprightly fawn, the blooming flower, and the morning star. She is beautiful to behold, irresistible to pursue and impossible to possess. Each poem has a clear protagonist calling to Eilidh with his own voice and the forces of nature, such as the wind and flowing ocean waves. Differences in symbolism and literary structures are held together

by themes of man's pursuit of the unattainable, the inevitability of death, and the acceptance of grief and loss.

Within Macleod's poems, the wind personifies the emotions of the poet during his pursuit of Eilidh. It carries the poet's cries through the wilderness and taunts him with imagined responses from Eilidh. In the poem "Eilidh my Fawn," Macleod uses two different poetic images to show the wind's ability to stir the poet's passion and carry his ardent pleas to his beloved, as highlighted in bold in the poetry below. With the first appearance of the fawn, the poet's heart surged to meet her like the blowing wind; and, as his hunt continued, the wind carried his calls of Eilidh throughout the wilderness, as shown in the bolded print below.

Far away upon the hills at the lighting of the dawn,  
I saw a stirring in the fern and out there leapt a fawn:  
**And O my heart was up at that and like the wind it blew,**  
Till its shadow hovered o'er the fawn as 'mid the fern it flew.

**And Eilidh! Eilidh! Eilidh! Was the wind song on the hill,**  
**And Eilidh! Eilidh! Eilidh! Did the echoing corries fill:**  
My hunting heart was glad indeed, at the lighting of the dawn,  
For O it was the hunting then of my bonnie, bonnie, Fawn!<sup>11</sup>

In "Closing Doors" and "At the Last," Macleod uses surging ocean waves and the approaching tide to symbolize man's inevitable fate, death. In both poems, the tide is compared to closing doors which separate the two lovers for eternity, as shown here in an excerpt from "Closing Doors."

Come near, call low, for closing doors are as the waves o' the sea,  
Once closed they are closed for ever, Eilidh, lost, lost for thee and me,  
Lost, lost, for thee and me.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Fiona Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

The simplicity of Macleod's nature symbolism strengthens the folk quality of the poetry, even as it creates lush visual images for the audience. Macleod also uses Gaelic phrases, such as *mo chree* (my love) and *Lennavan-mo* (peace be with you) within the poems to capture the authentic spirit of the Celtic people.

While Bax was captivated by the nostalgic and folk elements within the poetry of Fiona Macleod, he struggled to express those qualities in a musical style. Bax was horrified by the superficial Irish settings of Stanford and Parry. He felt they lacked the passionate emotions which lay beneath the simple folk text, and he sought instead to capture the essence of the Celtic music rather than merely quoting it.<sup>13</sup> He was challenged by words that required simplicity but emotions and images that demanded a full Romantic musical treatment. He set that poetry's simplicity within the vocal melodies, drawing upon the tradition of Irish folk elements codified by Thomas Moore in his *Irish Folk Melodies*, such as the use of lyric pentatonic melodies, contrasting of triplet and dotted rhythmic figures, ascending leaps of major sixths and cyclic musical forms, often ABA. He balanced the folk elements with Romantic countermelodies, chromatic sonorities, and virtuosic piano accompaniments heavily influenced by Wagner, Liszt and Strauss. While the voice type is not specified, the majority of the songs lie in the lyric soprano register.

"Eilidh my Fawn" shows Bax's combining of the Irish folksong heritage with Romantic text painting and chromaticism. The piece opens with a lyric melody in the piano, as shown in Example 1. The melody features an arched melodic shape with a sustained A at its peak. In his book *Sensibility and English Song*, Banfield suggests that

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<sup>13</sup> Foreman, *Bax*, 31.

the melody is predominantly pentatonic with the non-scale tone, the A, a suspension resolving to the G sharp. Banfield's analysis of the melodic cell also creates another clear reference to Irish folk tunes, an ascending major sixth melodic gesture, if you allow the suspension to resolve to the G sharp.<sup>14</sup> The suspension figure returns throughout the piece in different variations, always maintaining its rhythm (the dotted quarter note resolving to three eighth notes), and its sense of melodic drive.

The opening accompaniment figure in the left hand anticipates a melodic gesture later developed in the voice, and harmonizes to the A, thereby giving an additional pentatonic set of E, F sharp, A, B, and C sharp. The gesture is repeated four times within the right and left hand ascending seamlessly to the first vocal entrance.

Example 1: "Eilidh, my Fawn," mm. 1-9

The musical score for "Eilidh, my Fawn," mm. 1-9, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment in bass clef, with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked "Allegretto Impetuoso." and the dynamics include "mf" and "cresc.". The second system shows the piano accompaniment in treble clef, with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamics include "f" and "trmm" (trills). The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major (two sharps), and features a pentatonic melody in the right hand and a bass line with a repeating figure of a dotted quarter note followed by three eighth notes.

The opening melody in the piano is repeated three times with a sparse piano accompaniment that suggests the strumming of a harp. Bax sets the melody in three bar phrases, resisting the urge to establish the more traditional two or four bar arched lines of folk ballads. Each melodic repetition ascends an octave until the folk-tune has

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and the English Song, Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, vol 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 254.



encompassed a large expanse of the piano. After the third ascent, the harmony turns chromatic, with an A sharp diminished arpeggio in the accompaniment against the A natural in the right hand melody (measure 7). In the following two measures, the right hand turns chromatic as it slowly ascends another octave in a melodic rush that is Wagnerian rather than folk-like in style, while the left hand trills a half diminished A sharp chord. Bax avoids any sense of a tonal center or functional harmonic progressions until measure 16, when both the voice and piano cadence on an E major triad. The layering of folk-song melodies and nonfunctional harmonic motion is a compositional trait that Bax will use throughout the song cycle.

With the entrance of the voice, the piano doubles the melody with parallel sixths in the right hand as the left hand continues with its strummed figurations, as shown in Example 2. The piano accompaniment and lyric folk melody are reminiscent of *sean nós*, the “old style of singing” in Gaelic, which involved a solo vocalist singing with only a strummed harp accompaniment.<sup>15</sup> *Sean nós* was used with various styles of song, such as love songs, lullabies, and laments, and was characterized by its long melodic lines which evolved through repetition with improvised ornamentation. The songs were modal with a free sense of rhythm and strummed accompaniments, allowing flexibility of interpretation around the flow of the Gaelic text.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dorothea Hart and Stanley Scott, *Music in Ireland, Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

## Example 2: “Eilidh my Fawn,” mm. 12-16

The musical score for Example 2 consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and the beginning of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The piano accompaniment begins with a descending pentatonic arpeggio in the right hand (G4, F4, E4, D4, C4) and a similar figure in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line with a long note on C5, followed by a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The piano accompaniment features a descending pentatonic arpeggio in the right hand and a similar figure in the left hand, with triplets and a suspension in the final measure.

Bax uses the concept of ornamentation from *sean nós* to enrich the repetition of folk melody throughout the first stanza of poetry. The first transformation occurs in mm. 14-15 on the text “at the lighting of the day,” as shown in Example 2. The original melodic idea is transposed up a third and is extended by a descending pentatonic figure before cadencing on a C sharp minor triad. The piano accompaniment echoes the descending pentatonic arpeggio before Bax modifies the melodic cell again with the text “I saw a stirring in the fern,” shown in Example 3. The melodic pick-ups are now an octave, and the suspension involves a major seventh to major sixth suspension.

In the final two lines of the first stanza, Bax continues to ornament the opening melodic phrase while the piano accompaniment delves into the text for musical word painting. The strummed harp figure from the beginning of the piece cascades up four octaves with the text “And O my heart was up at that,” as the piano accompaniment combines doubling the voice line with melodic countermelodies depicting the passion of the poet. With the close of the first stanza of poetry, Bax reprises the opening two measures of the piano introduction in the right hand of the piano before slowly fragmenting the folk melody as he leads into the second stanza of poetry and a new musical texture.

## Example 3: "Eilidh my Fawn," mm.17-29

I saw a stir - - ring in the fern - - - And out there left a  
 Fawn, And O my heart - - - was up at that and  
 like the wind it - - - blew - - - Till its shad - - - ow hover.ed  
 o'er the fawn - - - As through the fern it flew

The first two lines of the second stanza of poetry are full of Macleod's symbolic images of wind, and Bax layers the wind's strength within the piano accompaniment, as shown in Example 4. He combines a chromatic triplet figure that meanders throughout the piano registers, with inverted triads in the right hand that progress without any harmonic function. The vocal line blends a slow chromatic climb on the text of "And

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh!” with a chromatic modification of the early folk melody on “was the wind’s song on the hill.” The sudden change in musical texture and melodic shape is quite shocking after the previous ballad feel.

Example 4: “Eilidh, my Fawn,” mm. 36-42

The musical score for "Eilidh, my Fawn" (mm. 36-42) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first two lines of text. The vocal line begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The piano accompaniment features a *murmurando* texture with triplets in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with a *m. s.* marking in the piano part. The third system shows the final two lines of text, with a *m. d.* marking in the piano part. The score includes various dynamics and performance instructions such as *cresc.*, *f*, *murmurando*, *m. s.*, and *m. d.*.

With the second line of text, “And Eilidh, Eilidh Eilidh! Did the echoing corries fill,” (mm. 44-50), Bax inverts the piano accompaniment, putting the chromatic triplets in the right hand with the inverted seventh chords in the left hand, and transposes the vocal melody up a half step. He then uses the chromatic triplet scale as a musical transition back to the folk song elements of the first stanza of poetry.

In the final two lines of poetry, Bax returns to an ornamentation of the original folk melody but layers the strummed harp accompaniment with moments of chromatic triplets, building to the climax of the song, “For O it was the hunting then.” The layering of the ascending vocal line and descending chromatic triplets creates a surge of energy, which disguises the vocalist’s breath between the words “dawn” and “for,” and

crescendos into the high note and loudest dynamic of the song, as shown in Example 5. The song then ebbs away, closing with a long piano postlude featuring a slow breaking down of the folk melody before ending on an E major triad, one of very few complete triads within the entire song. In “Eilidh, my Fawn,” Bax combines a lyric semi-pentatonic melody, cyclic musical form, and expansive Romantic chromatic counterpoint to create an innovative ballad.

Example 5: “Eilidh, my Fawn,” mm. 56-59

The musical score for Example 5, "Eilidh, my Fawn," measures 56-59, is presented in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "at the lighting of the dawn, For O it was the hunt-ing then, For". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with triplets and dynamic markings such as *ff* and *meno f*. The score is written on three staves: a single treble clef staff for the vocal line and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) for the piano accompaniment.

Though Bax is drawn to the poetry of Fiona Macleod, he cannot resist modifying the stanzas to suit his own poetic and musical voice. The literary prowess of Bax’s counterpart Dermot O’Byrne is showcased most in the second song, “Closing Doors.” In this song, O’Byrne combined two poems by Macleod: “Mo-Lennav-a-chree” and “Closing Doors.” From “Mo- Lennav-a-chree,” O’Byrne took the first four lines of poetry, and changed a few descriptive words to tighten Macleod’s poetic rhythm, as shown below in bold. As Macleod’s poem begins to discuss Eilidh’s beauty, O’Byrne transitions to another poem focusing on the longing of the poet and its personification in the surging waves of the sea. The fourth line of “Mo-Lennav-a-chree” with the text “on

the sands of my heart, my sweet,” and its nearly exact repetition at the beginning of “Closing Door” creates a strong word bridge between the two poems.

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, dear to me, dear and sweet

In dreams I am hearing the sound of your little running feet  
The sound of your running feet that like  
the sea-hoof beat  
A music by day an’ night, Eilidh, On the sands  
of my heart, my Sweet!

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, **heart of me**, dear  
and sweet,

In dreams I am hearing **the whisper**  
The sound of your running feet that like  
the sea-hoofs beat  
A music by day and night, Eilidh, On the  
sands of my heart, my sweet.

Eilidh, blue i’ the eyes, flower-sweet as children are,  
And white as the canna that blows with the billbreast wind afar,  
Whose is the light in thine eyes-the light of a star? - a star  
That sitteth supreme where the starry lights of heaven a glory are!  
Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, put off your wee hands from the heart o’ me,  
It is pain they are making there, where no more pain should be.<sup>17</sup>

Fiona Macleod’s “Mo-Lennav-a-chree”

Revisions (in bold) by Bax

Macleod’s “Closing Doors” uses the blowing wind and surging seas to symbolize the poet’s ardent pleas for Eilidh even against the rising tide of loss. O’Byrne continues with his poetic revisions in “Closing Doors” by adding a repetitive tag to the end of the first stanza, as the extra text allows Bax to continue his pattern of four bar melodic phrases. In the second stanza of Macleod’s poem, the relationship between Eilidh and the poet is revealed with the text “My heart you have broken, your troth forsaken, but love even yet can be.” O’Byrne stays with Macleod’s passionate urgency but changes the text to keep a veiled sense of the relationship between suitor and beloved.

O sands of my heart, what wind moans low along thy shadowy shore?  
Is that the deep sea-heart I hear with the dying sob at its core?  
Each dim lost wave that lapses is like a closing door;  
‘Tis closing doors they hear at last who soon shall hear no more,  
Who soon shall hear no more.

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, call low, come back, call low to me:  
My heart you have broken, your troth forsaken, but love even yet can be:  
Come near, call low, for closing doors are as the waves o’ the sea

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<sup>17</sup> Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, 36.

Once closed they are closed for ever, Eilidh, lost, lost, for thee and me,  
Lost, lost, for thee and me.<sup>18</sup>

Fiona Macleod's "Closing Doors"

O sands of my heart, what wind moans low along they shadowy shore?  
Is that the deep sea-heart I hear with the dying sob at its core?  
Each dim lost wave that lapses is like a closing door:  
'Tis closing doors they hear at last who soon shall hear no more  
Who soon, soon shall hear no more, **my grief, no more!**

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, **come home to the heart of me!**  
**'tis pain I am having ever, Eilidh, the pain that will not be.**  
**Come home, come home,** for closing doors are like the waves of the sea;  
Once closed they are closed for ever, Eilidh, lost, lost for you and me.

Revisions (in bold) by Bax

Bax's musical setting of "Closing Door" blends the influence of Wagner and Strauss with the layering of chromatic and diatonic counterpoints, linear approach to harmony, and angular vocal melodies. In a 1921 interview with Katherine Eggar, Bax related his harmonic progressions to the compositional practices found in Wagner's operas:

Let them take a course of reading the Wagner piano scores— preferably not the simplified vocal scores with the inner parts taken out, but the piano reductions of the whole thing. There they will find the contrapuntal basis of harmony exemplified, and that I think is what bothers them in my music. My harmonies come about as the result of contrapuntal movement. It's no use thinking in up and down blocks of harmony if you are trying to read my things, each part must be taken as a melodic line.<sup>19</sup>

His linear approach to harmonies is clearly shown in "Closing Doors" which is centered in the key of A but lacks any clear or conventional harmonic progressions or firm cadences. Instead Bax uses the repetition and transposition of one- or two-bar segments to create cohesion and flow within the song, as shown in Example 6. The piano

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>19</sup> Bax, *Farewell, my Youth and Other Writings*, 161.

accompaniment opens with a rocking motive featuring a chromatic descent of inverted major and minor triads, with an accented E on the second beat. He layers a lilting semi-pentatonic vocal melody over the descending triads blending folksong elements with a dense chromatic accompaniment.

Example 6, "Closing Doors," mm. 1-6

At a slow swinging pace.

*p* Ei - lidh, Ei - lidh,

*sf* Ei - lidh, heart of me, dear and sweet

As the imagery within the poetry becomes more descriptive, Bax layers virtuosic piano figures underneath rising chromatic melodies, as shown in Example 7. Bax creates a two-bar piano accompaniment which features two different divisions of the 6/8 pulse as the right hand alternates a dotted sixteenth note and triplet gallop with triplet arpeggios which encompass over three octaves of the piano. Bax then repeats those two bars down a minor third creating cohesion underneath the soaring four-bar vocal phrase.



Example 7, “Closing Doors,” mm. 12-15

The image shows a musical score for Example 7, "Closing Doors," measures 12-15. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 12-14) features a vocal line with lyrics "like the sea - hoofs beat a" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a "cresc." marking and a trill in the left hand. The second system (measures 14-15) features a vocal line with lyrics "music by day and night, Ei - lidh," and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a "p" marking and a trill in the left hand.

Bax's transition to the "Closing Door" poetry is marked by a sudden change of rhythmic pulse, an agitato tempo marking, and a shift to chromatic melodies with numerous marcato accents, as shown in Example 8. The piano accompaniment continues to blur the rhythmic pulse with a syncopated pedal E in the left hand, over which Bax layers inverted triads moving in a linear fashion similar to the accompaniment in many melodies by Debussy. With poetry describing the deep sobs of the ocean, Bax drops the previous vocal melody with its repeated wave-like motion down a major sixth and layers an undulating C major triad underneath the gliding inverted triads in the left hand. The chromatic accompaniment propels the vocal line forward even as it blurs any sense of key center or functioning tonality. In measure 32, Bax uses almost the entire chromatic scale (omitting only D#) in the piano accompaniment, creating a virtuosic density and wealth of melodic material. Parry wrote after the 1904 premiere, "Young Bax's stuff sounds like

a bevy of little devils.”<sup>20</sup> The accompaniment is a cascade of notes which can smother rather than illuminate the vocal melody and poetic message. While the surging lines and throbbing left hand pedal is wonderfully evocative for a piano solo or orchestral tone poem, the voicing of the accompaniment completely overshadows the voice due to their shared registration. The poetic narrative within the voice takes a secondary role to Bax’s Romantic musical depiction of nature’s might.

Example 8: “Closing Doors,” mm. 28-35

The musical score for "Closing Doors" (mm. 28-35) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment starting with a *pp* dynamic. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "sands, of my heart, what wind moans low— a - long— thy shad - ow - y". The piano accompaniment features a dense, cascading texture of notes, particularly in the left hand, which often overlaps with the vocal line. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "shore? — Is that the deep sea - heart I hear with the". The piano accompaniment is marked *Largamente. più forte* and *Largamente.* The third system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "dy - ing sob at its core? —". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar dense texture.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Stephen Banfield, “Bax as a Song Composer,” *Musical Times* 124, no. 1689 (November 1983): 666.

With the final stanza of poetry, Bax blends lyric folk song elements in the vocal line with a chromatic piano accompaniment, as shown in Example 9. The text “Come home to the heart of me” has an ascending diatonic melody over an F# major triad that cadences on an E minor triad. The change in the density of the piano accompaniment and the stability of the triads is a stark contrast to the rest of the song, which Bax strengthens by repeating a variation of those two bars down a half step in the piano. The poet’s lament, on the text “’Tis pain I am having ever, Eilidh the pain that will not be,” is set with a descending chromatic melody in the voice and descending diminished seventh chords (which are lacking their thirds) in the piano, in a Romantic revision of the use of descending tetrachords in Baroque period laments.

Example 9: “Closing Doors,” mm. 53-58

The musical score for Example 9, "Closing Doors," mm. 53-58, is presented in two systems. The first system, marked *Lento.* and *p*, features a vocal line with the lyrics "Come home to the heart of me!" and a piano accompaniment marked *pp*. The second system, marked *a tempo*, features a vocal line with the lyrics "'tis pain I am hav - ing ev - er," and a piano accompaniment marked *p ma pesante*. The score is in F# major and 4/4 time.

The complexity of the piano accompaniment returns with the ocean imagery in Macleod's poetry, employing arched chromatic arpeggios in the left hand with strummed seventh chords in the right hand, all invigorated by an *agitato* tempo, as shown in Example 10. Throughout the piece, contrasting motives within the right and left hands of the accompaniment blur rhythmic pulses and conceal any sense of key center or functional harmony. The piece closes with an extended piano interlude that returns to a variation of the opening rocking accompaniment figure which suddenly falls into an A major triad without cadential treatment, leaving the final major arpeggio feeling unsettled and unresolved.

Example 10: "Closing Doors," mm. 60-63

The musical score for "Closing Doors" (mm. 60-63) is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It begins with the tempo marking "Agitato." and the dynamic "mf". The lyrics are: "home, come home, for closing doors are like the waves of the sea;". The middle staff is the right hand of the piano accompaniment, featuring strummed seventh chords. The bottom staff is the left hand of the piano accompaniment, featuring arched chromatic arpeggios. The dynamics are "mf" and "cresc.". The score concludes with a final major arpeggio.

In "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," Bax continues his avoidance of functional harmony and an establishment of a key center, instead creating the illusion of musical form by repeating and modulating one or two bar phrases within the piano accompaniment. The piece opens with arpeggiated diminished and half diminished seventh chords in a fashion similar to the French Impressionist works of Ravel and Debussy. In the third measure, shown in Example 11, Bax combines an ascending D# half diminished seventh chord with a chromatic descending figure in the right hand. He repeats this measure for four

bars, creating a cohesive framework for the opening vocal phrase, which gives a lyric outline of the same seventh chord. The peak of the vocal phrase, in measure seven, features an F# octave descent in the voice above a German augmented sixth chord (if the B sharp is allowed to be its enharmonic equivalent of C). The augmented chord does not resolve according to traditional rules of counterpoint, as the next measure features an octave F sharp in the left hand with a variant of the piano figure from measure three on a melodic D sharp diminished triad arpeggio. The augmented sonority heightens the drama and harmonic tension within the song, while the incomplete resolution prevents any semblance of a tonal center.

Example 11: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 3-8

The final three lines in the first stanza of poetry in “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine” receive a similar musical portrayal, as Bax transposes the accompaniment figure from measure 3 (based on a D# diminished seventh) to a C# major triad with a similar

descending chromatic figure on beats 3 and 4. He repeats that figure for measures 10 and 11 and then transposes it down one half step and arpeggiates a C minor triad, which the vocal melody outlines with an impassioned ascent. The vocal line is conceived around the evolving harmonies and outlines the sonorities below even as the final vocal phrase “Leaps to their fire” anticipates another transposition to an F diminished triad. The piano accompaniment and Bax’s linear ideas of harmony and counterpoint are the musical storytellers throughout this song, with the vocal line serving a secondary role as narrator.

With the second verse of poetry, Bax combines his use of repeated melodic figures within the piano accompaniment with increased rhythmic vitality. The opening two vocal phrases, shown in Example 12, have a diatonic lyricism and triadic foundation which are surprising after the harmonic ambiguity of the previous sections. Bax replaces chromatic countermelodies in the piano with rhythmic intensity, having three different rhythmic layers existing at once in measure 25 to energize the music while maintaining a sense of transparency.

Example 12: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 25- 30

The musical score for Example 12 consists of two systems. The first system (measures 25-27) features a vocal line in G major with lyrics: "Sure now if I in heaven Dream - ing in". The piano accompaniment is marked *p staccato* and consists of rapid, arched chromatic figures in both hands. The second system (measures 28-30) features a vocal line with lyrics: "bliss Heard but the whis - per". The piano accompaniment is marked *mf* and continues with rapid, arched chromatic figures, including triplet markings in the final measure.

As Macleod’s poetry becomes more passionate, Bax combines rhythmic intensity and a layering of subdivisions with arched chromatic figures in both the piano and voice. With the text “All of the soul of me would leap afar,” he layers three contrasting rhythmic subdivisions with an indulgently chromatic vocal line which receives no support from the piano accompaniment, as shown in Example 13. In measures 43 through 46, he has a different chromatic pitch and rhythm on almost every sixteenth-note subdivision, adding intensity to the musical portrayal but also distracting from a clear declamation of the text. Bax again relies on repetition and modulation to organize the virtuosic piano accompaniment, by creating two-bar phrases for measures 43 and 44, which he repeats up a whole step. The piano accompaniment not only portrays the poetic imagery and emotion, it creates a framework for the vocal line to soar over. The rapid arched phrases within the piano accompaniment represent the passion and turmoil within the poet’s soul.

Example 13: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 43-46

The musical score for Example 13 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "All of the soul of me would leap a far If that". Above the vocal line, the syllables "cre - - - scen - - - do" are written. The middle and bottom staves are the piano accompaniment, also starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano part features arpeggiated chords and a fermata over the final note of the piece.

With the final line of poetry “leap afar a falling star,” Bax combines two musical images within the piano and voice line which contrast the poet’s desire with the star’s heavenly journey. As shown in Example 14, the vocal line portrays the poet’s heroic leap with an ascent of a major fifth followed by a second fortissimo leap of an octave sustained with a fermata. The piano represents the star’s heavenly and unattainable realms, as it cascades up and down F sharp diminished and B major arpeggios. Despite the poet’s attempts, the star eludes his grasp much like his beloved Eilidh. Bax returns to his opening strummed arpeggios (this time transposed to F sharp major) and echoes the opening vocal melody in the right hand.



Example 14: "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," mm. 55- end

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," measures 55 to the end. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "a fall - - - ing star" and the piano accompaniment. The piano part features a prominent eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "a fall - - - ing star." and includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *m.s.* (mezzo-soprano). The piano accompaniment continues with complex textures, including arpeggiated figures and sustained chords. The third system shows the vocal line ending with a fermata and the piano accompaniment concluding with a series of chords and a final cadence.

In *A Celtic Song Cycle*, Bax envisions the piano as the primary storyteller. It often introduces important melodic motives before the vocal line. In the fourth song, "A Celtic Lullaby," Macleod's poem is a tribute to a mother's love and her eternal faith in a spirit divine even after the loss of her child. Bax sets the four stanzas in a quasi-strophic form with a gentle rocking motive serving as a refrain, as is typical with Irish folk lullabies. The cradle motive first appears in the right hand of the piano with a transparent ballad-

like accompaniment, before it is immediately repeated with a chromatic alteration in the final chord, as shown in Example 15. The early chromatic treatment of the cradle motive enhances the melancholy within Macleod's poetry and hints at the grief developed in the later stanzas of text.

Example 15: "A Celtic Lullaby," mm. 1-2

**Andante con moto.**

The musical score for Example 15, "A Celtic Lullaby," measures 1-2, is presented in 6/8 time and the key of B-flat major. It consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Andante con moto." The piano accompaniment features a sustained Eb pedal in the left hand and a descending chromatic bass line with lightly strummed fourths in the right hand. The vocal line is marked with a "rit." (ritardando) in the second measure.

A diatonic version of the cradle motive returns with the entrance of the voice and is then associated with the Gaelic word, "Lennavanmo," (a Gaelic equivalent to Hush-a-bye), as shown in Example 16. Bax uses a lyric diatonic melody with a hint of pentatonic flavor and a lilting 6/8 meter for the opening stanza of poetry, creating a folk-like innocence. The piano accompaniment enhances a ballad-like feeling, doubling the vocal line at consonant intervals in the right hand as the left hand contrasts a sustained Eb pedal and descending chromatic bass line with lightly strummed fourths. However, the lullaby's tranquility is quickly shattered as the piano accompaniment foreshadows a deeper sense of conflict and loss with its interlude leading to the second verse of text.

Example 16: "A Celtic Lullaby," mm. 7-14

*p*  
 Len-na-van-mo Len-na-van-mo who is it swing-ing you to and fro  
*un pochettino più lento*  
 With a long low swing and a sweet low croon.  
*a tempo*  
*p*

As the second verse unfolds, Bax draws upon his love of Wagner and Liszt and creates a chromatic counter-melody in the right hand of the piano which mimics the rocking gesture, but with a much faster rhythmic setting and a displaced pulse. The left hand has a melodic sway with a large jump of register while the voice repeats the “Lennavanmo” refrain with a slight ornamentation. The layering of three different melodic motives adds a frenetic energy contrary to the text, as shown in Example 17.

Example 17: "A Celtic Lullaby," mm. 23-24

Len - na - van - mo Len - na - van - mo  
*pp*

With the text “I am thinking it is an angel fair,” Bax abandons all Irish folk characteristics as the chromaticism in the piano obscures any sense of tonality while the vocal line meanders with little thought of text setting or vocal grace. Bax’s inexperience with vocal writing is obvious, as the rhythmic setting of the poetry is awkward and does not reflect the natural flow of the English text. The vocal line also lacks melodic gestures which enhance the descriptive imagery in the text. As the poem mentions an angel looking down from the lowest step, Bax creates an ascending melodic line with a final leap of a tritone. He treats the vocal line as one additional layer in his musical counterpoint. The rhythmic cell of the cradle motive (used throughout the right hand of the accompaniment) gives the only sense of musical unity to the refrain, as shown in example 18.

Example 18: “A Celtic Lullaby,” mm. 28-36

The musical score for Example 18, "A Celtic Lullaby," mm. 28-36, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first phrase: "I am think.ing it is an An - - gel fair. The". The second system shows the continuation: "An. gel that looks on the gulf from the low - - est stair. And". The piano accompaniment features a cradle motive in the right hand and arpeggios in the left hand. The vocal line is in a soprano register and has a tritone leap at the end of the phrase.

As Macleod’s poem describes the image and power of God, Bax trades the virtuosic complexity of the previous stanza for transparency and a linear sense of harmonic motion. The piano strums two-octave arpeggios centered on the key of G

major as the vocal line ascends in lyric melodies which outline seventh chords. With the second line of text, “He whose wish is a seven-mooned leaping star,” Bax contrasts a rising augmented Bb seventh chord in the voice with arpeggiated G major and minor arpeggios grounded in an accented descending chromatic bass line, as shown in Example 19. The contrasting counterpoints create a virtuosic expansiveness which represents the power of Macleod’s deity.

Example 19: “A Celtic Lullaby,” mm. 57-62

The musical score for Example 19, "A Celtic Lullaby," measures 57-62, is presented in two systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking "Poco più mosso." and the lyrics "he whose faintest thought is a world afar." The second system continues with the lyrics "It is He whose wish is a seven-mooned leaping" and includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp*. The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords in the right hand and a descending chromatic bass line in the left hand.

Bax’s *A Celtic Lullaby* returns to its folk-song beginnings with the final verse of text. The cradle motive returns in the vocal line and descends chromatically as the grief-stricken mother says her final goodbyes, as shown in Example 20. The piano ornaments its opening statement of the cradle motive with a chromatic conclusion before it ascends upwards with rolled chords to a sustained E-flat major chord and final open fifth of Eb and Bb. The piano’s ascension into the treble register combined with the inconclusive

open fifth ending closes the lullaby with a sense of ambiguity perfectly suited for Macleod's poem.

Example 20: "A Celtic Lullaby," mm. 90 to end

The musical score for "A Celtic Lullaby" (mm. 90 to end) is presented in two systems. The first system features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the instruction *p molto espressivo* and *pp*, with lyrics: "Ei.lidh mo chree, Len.na.van - mo Len - na.van - mo." The piano accompaniment includes a prominent open fifth in the bass register. The second system is marked *ritenuto* and *a tempo*, with dynamics *pp* and *ppp*. It concludes with a final chord in the piano register.

Bax's final song, "At the Last," points to his mature tone poems, such as *The Faery Hills* (1909), *Rosc-catha* (1910), and *Tintagel* (1919) with the contrasting and layering of different melodic counterpoints in different registers of the piano and voice. In *Tintagel*, Bax draws upon the Celtic legend of King Arthur to create a programmatic piece without a strict poetic narrative. He creates three different melodic ideas (a regal castle performed by the brass, the restless sea performed by the strings and a long meandering folk melody performed by the high strings) which he uses individually before layering them in a loose ABCBA form.

"At the Last" has two separate motives which repeat and transform throughout the song in a similar manner to *Tintagel*. The song has a *Lento* tempo marking, and opens

with a slow funeral march in the piano as shown in Example 21, featuring an unusual harmonic progression which moves from a minor third (g and Bb) to a German augmented chord (Db, F, Ab and B natural). Once again, Bax does not resolve the augmented chord according to the fundamental rules of counterpoint. The augmented sixth (B natural) resolved down to A natural as the root of the chord (Db) resolves up to D natural, creating a D major sonority. Bax combines his unusual harmonic progression with a half note, dotted quarter and eighth note rhythm that propels the funeral march forward even as it blurs any sense of tonal stability.

Example 21: “At the Last,” mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of 'At the Last'. The tempo is marked 'Lento'. The score is in 3/4 time. The piano part features a half note, dotted quarter, and eighth note rhythm. The harmonic progression starts with a minor third (g and Bb) and moves to a German augmented chord (Db, F, Ab, and B natural). The augmented sixth (B natural) resolves down to A natural, and the root (Db) resolves up to D natural, creating a D major sonority. The score includes dynamic markings 'mp' and 'un poco più f'.

Bax immediately repeats the funeral march motive in measure three transposed up a fourth to C minor with another German augmented sixth (Gb Bb Db and E) “resolving” to G major. The dotted quarter eighth note rhythm is then repeated throughout the piece with the same descending counterpoint. The funeral march motive returns twice at the end of the song serving to punctuate the through composed form, as shown in Example 22. With the repetition in measures 37 and 38, Bax replaces the previous German augmented sixth chord with two stacked triads, one a major triad (Gb Bb Db) and the

other an augmented triad (Fb Ab and C.) The two stacked triads clash and then resolve in an unconventional manner to an open fifth featuring G and D.

Example 22, “At the Last,” mm. 35-to end

The musical score for Example 22, "At the Last," mm. 35-to end, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, starting with the lyrics "more?" and "July-August 1904." The middle staff is the right-hand piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the left-hand piano accompaniment in bass clef. The music is in 4/4 time. The vocal line features a sustained note with a fermata. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, *diminuendo*, and *pp*. The score shows a complex harmonic structure with stacked triads and an open fifth resolution.

Bax contrasts the stately but harmonically unpredictable funeral march motive with an ascending chromatic gesture that represents the ocean tide. The first appearance of the ocean tide motive in measure 14 is surprise, as the right hand of the piano accompaniment leaps out of bass clef and up a fourth while the sustained lyric line also contrasts the previous measures of syncopated block chord accompaniment, as shown in Example 23. The ocean tide motive is a chromatic embellishment of major and minor triads, with the first appearance sustaining an E natural before chromatically rising to a G and Bb. The second appearance in measure 17 gives a chromatic outline of an Eb triad which is strummed in a syncopated manner underneath the treble melody. Throughout the song, the ocean tide motive is used in its original form and a descending melodic inversion, representing the coming force of water and its inevitable fate.



Example 23: “At the Last,” measure 14-18

The image shows a musical score for measures 14-18 of the piece "At the Last". The score is written in bass clef. The vocal line is on a single note, B-flat, with the lyrics "Time too is dead." written below it. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays a complex, rhapsodic melody with various dynamics including *f*, *pp*, and *dimin.*. The left hand plays a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The overall texture is dense and atmospheric.

Bax continues to contrast these two melodic motives and their musical imagery throughout the piece, using the vocal line as a pedal point providing the foundation for the piano development. Bax sets the vocal part in bass clef, a surprise as the rest of the cycle is written for a lyric soprano voice. The text is droned on a repeated Bb with a rhapsodic rhythm that blurs the rhythmic pulse or meter. The voice line is almost a sustained pedal point (as common practice with bagpipes in Irish folk ballads) as the piano motives evolve above and below the vocal pitch. The vocal line only changes with its final note as it ascends to a D natural, as shown in example 22. The chord progression preceding the vocal change is a variant of the funeral march’s German augmented sixth progression once again “resolving” to a g minor triad without proper functional counterpoint. The entire song lacks a true key center, even as Bax hints at various triads and seventh chords. The polarity of tonic and dominant is lost in a blur of linear counterpoint and unresolved chromaticism.

*A Celtic Song Cycle* combines Bax’s youthful exuberance for the literary themes, culture, and folk music of the Celtic Renaissance and an emerging mature musical style. The poetry of Macleod evoked a musical vision in Bax enriched with a linear sense of harmony and chromaticism, and layers of rhythmic and melodic counterpoints.

Throughout his career, Bax would work to find a balance in his musical portrayals of Celtic poetry and mythology, struggling to combine simple folk melodies appropriate for the textual simplicity with the lush Romantic expression of the strong emotions underlying the poems. *A Celtic Song Cycle* achieves that delicate balance with lyric folk-like melodies that evolve through repetition, such as in “Eilidh my Fawn” and “A Celtic Lullaby,” becoming more expansive in their use of the vocal range and chromaticism as demanded by the text. Macleod’s passionate imagery is portrayed in the piano accompaniment with a layering of rhythmic subdivisions and repeated melodic motives which create a vital framework as they avoid functional harmony or a sense of tonal center, such as in “Closing Doors” or “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine.” Bax treats the vocal line as one additional color or layer of counterpoint in his musical ensemble, sometimes creating melodic gestures based on harmonic ideas; it may seem at times that he loses sight of a clear declamation of text or a balancing of the vocal line within the complex and virtuosic piano accompaniment. While this approach is troublesome at times, the compositional techniques developing in *A Celtic Song Cycle* later blossomed in his orchestral tone poems based on the same Celtic themes and characters, such as *Tintagel* and *The Faery Hills*, where varied orchestration of his multiple motives creates vitality and complexity without overshadowing a poetic narrative. The Celtic culture captured Bax and remained his muse throughout his career, as both musician and his poetic alter-ego Dermot O’Byrne. Together the two artistic parts of one personality created a poetic narrative and musical elements that join for a cohesive and dramatic story in *A Celtic Story*, as they also highlight an emerging musical style that Bax continued to refine and develop throughout his career.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CHARLES GRIFFES AND THE THREE POEMS OF FIONA MACLEOD

#### *A Merging of Experience and Inspiration*

The *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod* represent Charles Griffes's masterpiece in song composition drawing upon his past experience with German Lied, the French Impressionist influence of Debussy and Ravel, and his fascination with Chinese folk poetry and the pentatonic scale. Griffes was an experienced musical story teller able to create lush piano accompaniments which complement and enhance the lyric vocal melodies. He drew upon his experience composing songs within established classical art song forms, but enriched them by layering various rhythmic and melodic motives with opulent chromaticism, and extended harmonies. The voice line blends a folksong lyricism with an expansive use of the soprano vocal range and careful attention to the declamation and musical expression of the poetry.

Charles Griffes was born in 1884 in Elmira, New York.<sup>1</sup> His father Wilbur was an avid self-learner whose formal education was cut short due to the financial obligations of his family. Wilbur was a lifelong scholar interested in foreign languages, the musical arts and English literature. He continually encouraged his children to "Do it your own way," striving to craft their learning around their interests rather than being restricted by established education system.<sup>2</sup> Charles's mother Clara had a well-rounded education with lessons in music, and painting and an enthusiasm for poetry and the visual arts.

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<sup>1</sup> The account of Griffes's childhood give here is drawn primarily from Edward Maisel. *Charles T. Griffes: The Life of an American Composer* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984). The material is from Chapters One through Four.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Maisel, *Charles T. Griffes: The Life of an American Composer* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984), 6.

From his parents, Charles inherited a passion for learning and was fascinated with painting and photography from an early age. He often would escape the house during the spring to wander for hours in the flowering fields around Elmira. He dabbled at painting and expressed little interest in music until 1895, when he was struck down with typhoid fever and required a lengthy recovery. During that time, he was intrigued by his sister Katherine's piano playing, and her practicing of Beethoven piano sonatas so captivated him that upon his recovery he demanded lessons. Griffes quickly overtook Katherine's instruction and began taking lessons with the Professor of Piano at Elmira College, Mary Selena Broughton.<sup>3</sup>

Broughton taught Griffes the piano works of Liszt, Chopin, Wagner, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven. Amidst the Romantic composers, Broughton also stressed the technical demands of clarity, dexterity and musicianship in Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. In addition to his piano lessons, Broughton urged Griffes to begin composing and augmented his education with rudimentary studies in counterpoint and harmony. Composing allowed him to combine several childhood passions (music, painting, and poetry) into one artistic expression. From an early age, Griffes associated different colors with various key centers, such as Eb major having a golden yellow color while C major was a brilliant white.<sup>4</sup> His first pieces were piano preludes and art songs strongly influenced by his mother's enthusiasm for Romantic poetry. His earliest vocal compositions were two French *mélodies*, *Si mes vers avient des ailes* and *Sur ma lyre*,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 11.

*l'autre fois*, written in 1901 and later performed on his senior recital with soprano Mrs. William Barron.<sup>5</sup>

He graduated from Elmira College in 1903, and afterwards Broughton felt she had nothing more to teach Charles. She suggested he further his studies in Berlin and “get culture.”<sup>6</sup> Griffes wanted to pursue a career as a concert pianist, and Broughton financed the next step in his education. In August, Griffes enrolled in the Stern Conservatory in Berlin, where he studied piano with Ernst Jedliczka and Gottfried Galston and composition with Philippe Rüfer.<sup>7</sup> During his studies in Berlin, Griffes was an active solo pianist and accompanist, and, despite his initial career goals, he began to focus more intently on composition. Upon viewing Griffes’s French *mélodies*, Rüfer emphasized greater precision in the setting of French and all languages, in addition to a refinement in melodic counterpoint within the accompaniment. During his studies with Rüfer, Griffes wrote several string quartets, piano solos, a *Symphonische phantasie*, and over fifteen lieder. His lieder were greatly influenced by Brahms, Wolf, and Strauss, and his *Five German Poems* (written from 1905 to 1909) were to texts by Heinrich Heine, Nikolaus Lenau, and other traditional German Romantic poets. The songs are harmonically conservative and show an innate gift of lyricism within the vocal melody. The text is set with careful attention to the expressive flow of the German, while the piano accompaniments blend firm harmonic support with expressive countermelodies in the right hand.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 38.

In addition to the German musical influences, Griffes's neighbor Rudolph Ganz introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel. Griffes heard Ganz playing Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau* through their shared apartment wall, and the sheer joy and musical imagery of the piece led Griffes to study the piano preludes of Debussy and the orchestral tone poems of Ravel. The use of different scales (whole-tone and octatonic), avoidance of cadences and functional harmony, and expanded use of the piano registers greatly influenced Griffes's compositions.<sup>8</sup> Several years later, Griffes renewed his friendship with Ganz and dedicated to him a piano tone poem "The White Peacock," from his collection titled *Roman Sketches*.

In the fall of 1905, Griffes left the Stern Conservatory to seek more progressive composition lessons. Rüfer was a rigid supporter of the Early German Romantic style and resisted the influence of Wagner, Strauss, and Debussy. Griffes sought the private instruction of Engelbert Humperdinck, a progressive teacher of composition who was also a Wagnerian scholar and composer of many famous vocal works including the opera *Hansel und Gretel*. Humperdinck encouraged his students to look beyond the formal rules of composition to find their own musical style. While Humperdinck was an encouraging teacher, Griffes only received twelve lessons over the next year due to Humperdinck's busy schedule and frequent travels.<sup>9</sup>

In 1907, Griffes's father passed away. His father's passing combined with the increasing costs of living abroad caused Charles's return to the United States. That fall, Griffes took a teaching position as Director of Music at the Hackley School in Tarrytown,

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<sup>8</sup> Marion Bauer, "Charles T. Griffes as I Remember Him," *Musical Quarterly* Vol 29, no. 3 (July 1943): 363.

<sup>9</sup> Maisel, *Charles T. Griffes*, 74.

New York, where he taught piano and organ, directed the choir, and performed regular concerts as a soloist and with musical guests. While his teaching load was quite demanding, the school gave Griffes room and board, leisure time for composing, and a certain degree of financial stability. In his letters Charles wrote, “I don’t believe in the starving in the garret type of artist.”<sup>10</sup>

Over the next three years, Griffes would slowly abandon the heated emotional content and strong tonal harmonies of his German Romantic studies, and become more influenced by the elusive tonality, extended harmonies, and parallel chromaticism in the French Impressionist style. The influences of Debussy and Ravel began to blend with the rhythmic layering and counterpoint of Stravinsky. Griffes explored the poetry of Oscar Wilde and other avant-garde English poets. Griffes set several poems of Oscar Wilde during his early years at Hackley including his *Four Impressions* (written between 1912 and 1915, published in 1970) which are through-composed songs with a new sense of tonal ambiguity. In *La Mer*, Griffes tolls ninth and eleventh chords within the right hand as he blurs the rhythmic pulse in the left hand with a syncopated bass pedal. The gliding of parallel chords and use of the whole-tone scale show the strong influence of Debussy’s melodies, and become a common compositional device in his mature songs and piano pieces.

During his time at Hackley, Griffes struggled to balance his teaching demands with a drive to compose and have his pieces performed and published. He constantly traveled to New York City during school vacations to meet with publishing houses, collaborate with other musicians, and further his own education with score study and

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas E. Tawa, “Charles Griffes and Marion Bauer” *Mainstream Music of the Early Twentieth Century America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 142.

concert attendance. During the summer of 1915, he shared an apartment with William Earl Brown, a vocal student of the famous Italian singing teacher Giovanni Battista Lamperti.<sup>11</sup> Brown taught him the basics of vocal production, including breath support, vibrato, vowel production, and lyric legato phrasing. Griffes used Brown's vocal insights to enrich his compositional style, previously ruled by his expertise on the piano and studies in counterpoint and harmony.

In 1916, Griffes met the actress Eva Gauthier during another trip to New York. Gauthier had just returned from several years in the Orient, and she gave Griffes Japanese melodies that she had copied during her travels. He used the melodies for his Japanese pantomime, *Sho-jo*, which was a collaboration with the Adolf Bolm ballet and featured Michio Ita, a Japanese pantomimist.<sup>12</sup> The success of *Sho-jo* and Griffes's fascination with Asian cultures led to his *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan* written in 1917. The poems were English translations of Chinese poems written between the sixth and thirteenth centuries, and the songs featured five Chinese folk melodies Griffes had received from Annie Way, a Chinese Methodist minister he had met in New York City's China Town. The songs stay true to their folksong roots as Griffes musically explores the pentatonic scale, harmonization in open fourths and fifths, and reiteration and development of a limited number of brief melodic ideas. Gauthier premiered the song cycle in November 1917 on a MacDowell Program concert.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Maisel, *Charles T Griffes*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Bauer, "Charles T. Griffes as I Remember Him," 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.



In 1917, Griffes discovered the poetry of William Sharp/Fiona Macleod and wrote a collection of 4 piano tone poems titled *Roman Sketches* inspired by Sharp's *Sospiri di Roma*. Each piano piece opened with a small segment of the poem that motivated its composition, such as the following excerpt from Sharp's "Al far della Notte" preceding *Nightfall*.

The long day is over  
Dusk, and silence now;  
And Night, that is as dew,  
On the Flower of the World.<sup>14</sup>

*Roman Sketches* delved into the colorful and exotic descriptions of Italian countryside. In these pieces Griffes blended parallel gliding sonorities with quartal harmonies which blurred the key center, and used an unprecedented use of chromaticism. In her article "Charles T Griffes as I Remember Him," Bauer described how in *Clouds* Griffes was moving toward atonality with perfect fifths juxtaposed with tritones in left hand arpeggios while the right hand stacks fifths and sixths with augmented seconds. Bauer called Griffes's *Roman Sketches* "some of his most original and prophetic writing."<sup>15</sup>

In the spring of 1918, Griffes began work on his *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod*. The songs are a union of his mature musical style and literary inspiration, blending the various influences on his compositional style with the vocal insight he gained from Brown. The German Lieder and French mélodies strengthened his nuance in text setting, while the Chinese and Japanese folk music advanced his use of motive development and

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<sup>14</sup> William Sharp, *Sospiri di Roma*, (Rome: La Societa Laziale, 1891) 51.

<sup>15</sup> Bauer, "Charles T. Griffes, as I Remember Him," 368.

familiarity with the pentatonic scale. Together Griffes's compositional experiences uplifted the Romantic imagery found in the folk-like poetry of Fiona Macleod.

### *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod*

Griffes chose the poems from Macleod's 1910 volume *Poems and Dramas*. The three poems, "The Lament of Ian the Proud," "Thy Dark Eye to Mine," and "The Rose of the Night," come from Macleod's early collections of poems, *From the Hills of Dream* and *The Hour of Beauty*. Griffes sets the poetry of Macleod with extreme care, staying true to the text and even including all of her punctuation. Griffes chose three poems that create a narrative journey and a nostalgic reflection on the pain of lost love. In "The Lament of Ian the Proud," an old man remembers his lost beloved, and his grief is both comforted and intensified by the blowing wind. "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine" is a passionate declaration of love with a man willing to "leap afar, a falling star" for one last kiss from Eilidh. Before the final song, "The Rose of the Night," Griffes included a brief introduction quoted from Macleod explaining the Celtic myth and vivid poetic imagery.

There is an old mystical legend that when a soul among the dead woos a soul among the living, so that both may be reborn as one, the sign is a dark rose, or a rose of flame, in the heart of the night.<sup>16</sup>

The legend clarifies Macleod's poetic imagery of the rose and darkness of night. The thematic materials of the two previous songs combine to create a spiritual rebirth and rejoining of Ian and Eilidh into one spiritual body as Griffes unites three separate poems into one unified poetic narrative.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles T. Griffes, *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: G. Schirmer Inc, 1989), 21.

Griffes reinforces his poetic journey by creating melodic gestures that function similarly to Wagnerian leitmotifs, associating expressive melodies with literary connections, and creating a sense of musical form through their repetition. The development of the short melodic cells combines Griffes's Late Romantic German influences (especially from his studies with Humperdinck) with a more current exploration of motivic variation in Asian music. Griffes creates recurring melodic cells that can appear in the voice, the piano or both and give a sense of form and cohesion to each song, as Griffes has moved beyond the strict strophic forms of his earlier German Lieder.

In "The Lament of Ian the Proud," as shown in Example 24, the piano opens with an ascending diatonic triplet gesture over a perfect fifth drone in the left hand, modifying three traditional Irish folk elements (triplet rhythms, sustained harmonic drones, and ascending major 6ths now replaced by a perfect fifth) to create a ballad-like atmosphere. The triplet melody, which functions as the grief motive, has two repetitions of the ascending fifth before inverting its melodic gesture and descending to create an arched phrase.

Example 24: "The Lament of Ian the Proud," mm. 1-4

The musical score for Example 24, "The Lament of Ian the Proud," measures 1-4. It is written for piano in 4/4 time, marked "Lento" with a tempo of quarter note = 60. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The right hand features a triplet melody starting on G4, moving up to D5, then down to C5, B4, A4, G4, and finally F#4. The left hand provides a sustained perfect fifth drone (G4 and D5). The score includes dynamic markings "p espressivo" and "pp".

The grief motive goes through several modifications within the piano and vocal lines, appearing for the first time in the vocal line on the question “Is it the old sorrow and the old grief?,” as shown in Example 25. Griffes then creates a dialogue between the voice and piano in the following measures as the voice asks a question and the piano answers with the grief motive underneath the sustained vocal note.

Example 25: “The Lament of Ian the Proud,” mm. 13-16

The musical score for Example 25 consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "Is it the" and a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment features a descending eighth-note triplet in the right hand. The second system continues the vocal line with "old sor - row and the old" and the piano accompaniment with a *pp* dynamic. The third system shows the vocal line with "grief?" and "Or is it a" and the piano accompaniment with a *p* dynamic and a triplet in the right hand. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The dialogue continues throughout the first stanza of text, as the grief motive in the piano punctuates vocal phrases and provides melodic excitement during sustained notes or rests in the vocal line. At the end of the first stanza of poetry, the grief motive appears in a shortened version in the right hand, inverting the final vocal phrase and

helping the song transition into a new mood and musical section, as shown in Example 26.

Example 26, “The Lament of Ian the Proud,” mm. 22-24

Later in the song, Griffes uses a sudden change of accompaniment and the recurrence of the grief motive to separate quoted text from the emotional response of Ian. The text “She will return no more” is the inscription on his beloved’s grave and after a hushed and slow delivery of those poignant words, Griffes immediately changes the musical texture. The piano jumps into the treble register with a delicate transparency, and the grief motive appears with a striking transformation as it ascends to a tritone (due to the C natural, a half step below the previous C#), as shown in Example 27. The poignant tritone in the grief motive offers a glimpse into the true emotions of Ian, as he acknowledges his beloved’s death and his own mortality. As the song ebbs away, the grief motive occurs fragmented one last time in the treble of the piano.

Example 27: “The Lament of Ian the Proud,” mm. 37-39

The musical score for Example 27, measures 37-39, is presented in three staves. The top staff is the vocal line in treble clef, marked with a tempo of *Tempo I°*. It features a melodic line with a *more.* marking and a *flebile* marking. The middle staff is the piano line in bass clef, marked with *pp* and containing a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is another piano line in bass clef, also marked with *pp* and containing a triplet of eighth notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

As Macleod’s poetic wind imagery evolves, Griffes transforms the triplet figure from the grief motive into an expansive arpeggio which cascades throughout the piano accompaniment. The triplet arpeggios musically portray the wind’s energy, adding a countermelody to the lyric vocal line and combining with the syncopated block sonorities to blur the meter and rhythmic pulse, as shown in measures 15 and 16 in Example 25. The grief motive and triplet wind gesture interact seamlessly to build musical vitality during pauses in the vocal line or transitions within the musical form. During the climax of the song’s middle section, the triplet gesture allows Griffes to alternate rapidly between vertical sonorities with a sense of linear harmonic motion, as shown in Example 28. Even as Griffes layers contrasting melodies in the voice and piano, he never obscures the vocal declamation or poetic meaning, a skill honed during his studies of German Lieder with Rüfer. While the piano has virtuosic passagework, Griffes’s knowledge of piano voicing and registration insures a transparency and focus on the vocal line.

Example 28: “The Lament of Ian the Proud,” mm. 32-36

The musical score for Example 28, "The Lament of Ian the Proud," mm. 32-36, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 32-34. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "heath - er bind, And 'there -" and features a dynamic marking of *p* and a tempo marking of *poco meno mosso*. The piano accompaniment includes a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tempo marking of *poco meno mosso*. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 35-36. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "on is writ: She will re - turn no" and features dynamic markings of *pp* and *riten.*. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *dim.*, *pp*, *espressivo*, and *PPP riten.*

“Thy Dark Eyes to Mine” is both a tribute to Griffes’s past German lied and a vast departure from its tonal simplicity. Melodically, it has an ABA form, with the opening melodic gesture returning at the end of the song with a modified cadence. The A section has an abac melodic form (with two-bar phrases), similar to many Irish folk ballads and German Lieder, and features a lyric opening melody with an ascending leap of a minor seventh and strong E tonal center, as shown in Example 29. Griffes fragments the opening vocal phrase and repeats both its melodic gestures and the dotted-quarter-eighth-note rhythmic cell throughout the piece, adding a sense of familiarity and cohesion throughout the song.

Example 29: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 3-5

The musical score for Example 29, "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," mm. 3-5, is presented in a standard format. It consists of three staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is Ab major (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the lyrics "Thy dark eyes to mine, Ei - lidh,". The piano accompaniment features a right hand with triplets and a left hand with a sustained drone of Ab and Eb, and a syncopated chord of Eb, Bb, and Ab. Dynamics include *dim.* and *pp*.

He contrasts the melodic simplicity of “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine” with a sense of tonal and metric ambiguity by layering non-functional sonorities with syncopated or contrasting rhythmic subdivisions in the piano accompaniment, as shown in Example 29. The left hand juxtaposes a sustained Ab and Eb drone with a syncopated chord which stacks two vertical fifths (Eb and Bb, and Ab and Eb). The right hand has triplets that oscillate continually, outlining an F minor seventh chord. This chord is the foundation of the opening vocal melody. The open fifth pedal within the left hand anchors the opening of the song in the key of Ab. As the poetry gets more expressive, Griffes uses parallel chromaticism within the oscillating triplet sonorities and eliminates the drone pedal to add color and harmonic freedom appropriate for the passionate imagery, reminiscent of the Impressionistic style of Debussy’s piano preludes and *mélodies*.

The B section of “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine” departs from the transparency of the opening, becoming more chromatic and complex due to the disappearance of the sustained left hand drone, more expansive vocal melodies, and countermelodies within the right hand of the piano accompaniment. The oscillating vertical sonorities are replaced with arpeggios and arched melodic phrases within both hands of the



accompaniment, featuring contrary harmonies and rhythmic subdivisions, as shown in Example 30. The vocal line and right hand create a supportive dialogue with arched phrases that double a segment of a melodic gesture, as in measure 17, before diving into large arched gestures in contrary motion, as in measure 18.

Example 30: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 16-18

The musical score for Example 30, measures 16-18, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 16 and 17, and the second system covers measures 17 and 18. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line includes lyrics: "Heard but a whis - per, But a lost e - cho e - ven of one such kiss, e - cho e'en". The piano accompaniment features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *p*, *cresc.*, and *f*. Arched phrases are used to connect notes across measures, creating a sense of continuity and dialogue between the vocal line and the piano accompaniment.

At times, Griffes continues to use a chord in the harmony as the basis of his melodic gestures, as in measure 20 and 21 in Example 31. The piano accompaniment centers on a Bb minor seventh chord, which is the framework for the vocal melody above it. A sustained Eb pedal returns into the left hand as the right hand of the piano dives into a *molto espressivo* melodic cell, which contains the dotted quarter and eighth note rhythm

from the opening melody, preparing both a harmonic return to an Ab tonal center and melodic return to our A melodic material.

Example 31: “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” mm. 20-22

The musical score for Example 31, "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," mm. 20-22, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the right hand of the piano, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "All of the soul of me\_ would leap a - far," and includes a sustained Ab note. The piano accompaniment features a linear flow of triplets in both hands, with dynamics ranging from forte (f) to pianissimo (p). Performance instructions include "colla voce", "molto espressivo", and "p".

The opening melody (a) returns with the text: “If that called me to thee,” but enriched with a linear flow of triplets within both hands of the piano accompaniment. The return of the A section is abbreviated and builds into a bombastic cadence in both the voice and piano accompaniment. The voice rises to a sustained Ab with the text “Aye, I would leap a far” before dropping a minor seventh to a Bb at a pianissimo dynamic for the text “a falling star.” The beautiful simplicity of Griffes’s musical imagery in the voice is reinforced with a piano accompaniment that rapidly climbs into the treble register of the piano with multiple subdivisions only to drop to a sustained half diminished chord with the falling star text. Even though the return of the A section is abbreviated, Griffes reinforces the cyclic feeling of the song in the piano postlude, which has a final statement of the melodic cell with a repetitious treatment of the dotted rhythm motive, as shown in Example 32.

Example 32: "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine," mm. 26-33

The musical score for "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine" (mm. 26-33) is presented in three systems. The key signature is G-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line is in the upper staff of each system, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The lyrics are: "Aye, I would leap a - - - far, A fall - ing star." The piano accompaniment features a prominent chromatic sextuplet figure in the right hand, which outlines an A key center. Dynamic markings include *p*, *pp*, and *dim.*. Performance instructions include "sempre Ped." and "\* fto."

In "The Rose of the Night," Griffes creates another leitmotif, similar to his grief motive in "The Lament of Ian the Proud," to add cohesion to a through-composed song and musically enhance the imagery of the poem, as shown in Example 33. He composed a chromatic sextuplet figure in the right hand which outlines an A key center even as the chromatic passing tones and rapid rhythm evoke an unsettled and ominous atmosphere. The sextuplets could depict the force of the wind that blows throughout the poem, the

longing of the beloved, the seductive power of the dark rose, or the dead soul's luring of its victim. The melodic sextuplets are accompanied by triplets in the left hand, as shown in measure 2 of example 33. The triplets oscillate from a major seventh (G# and G natural) to a major third (C natural and E). The layered sextuplet figure and triplets combine to blur any sense of harmonic function or tonal center.

Example 33: "The Rose of the Night," mm. 1-2

Moderato (♩ = 66)

*pp* *pp*

*sempre i due pedali*

Beyond its melodic appeal, the sextuplet figure gives the only sense of constancy in the song. The figure anchors the first vocal entrance, as shown in Example 34, providing pitch stability with its A centered melody and Romantic text painting. While the vocal line is highly chromatic, Griffes mirrors the rise and fall of the pitches to create an arched melodic phrase, which is an elongated inversion of the sextuplet's melodic figure.

Example 34: “The Rose of the Night,” mm. 6-8

The musical score for Example 34, "The Rose of the Night," mm. 6-8, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first two measures. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "The dark rose of thy" and is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a chromatic scale in the right hand and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next two measures. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "mouth Draw nigh - - er, draw" and is marked with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment continues with the same chromatic scale and eighth-note accompaniment.

With the text “Thy breath is the wind of the south,” he replaces the sextuplet motive with highly chromatic scales and arpeggios in the piano accompaniment that move at times in contrary motion to the vocal line, surging with the power and vitality of Macleod’s wind imagery. His counterpoint is a linear layering of melodic phrases and rhythmic motives, rather than placing an importance on vertical sonorities and functional harmony. The wind countermelodies erase any sense of a key center (briefly created by the A centered sextuplet motive) and have equality with the vocal line. The piano accompaniment in “The Rose of the Night” rarely doubles the vocal melody, as shown in Example 35.

Example 35: "The Rose of the Night," mm. 10-13

The musical score for Example 35 consists of three systems. The top system is the vocal line in G major, with lyrics: "breath is the wind of the south, A wind of fire!". The piano accompaniment is in the same key and time signature. The left hand features a sustained drone on octave C# and G# in the lower register. The right hand features a syncopated octave of G# and C# in the upper register. The score includes dynamic markings: *p* (piano) at the beginning, *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the middle, and *f* (forte) at the end. There are also trill markings and a triplet in the piano part.

With the text "Deep silence of the night," Griffes abandons the complexity and chromaticism of the previous stanza of poetry. He uses a sustained drone on octave C#s and G# within the left hand, and layers a syncopated octave G#s and C# sonority in the right hand. The open fifths and blurred rhythmic pulse create a rhapsodic atmosphere on top of which he floats a soft lyric melody in the voice, as shown in Example 36. The sudden texture change is another example of his sensitive text painting, and it offers a moment of musical relaxation and reprise from the previous passionate and complex music. The reflective middle section allows Griffes the opportunity to rebuild the dynamics, rhythmic complexity and layering of counterpoint for the final climax.

Example 36: "The Rose of the Night," mm. 21-24

Griffes returns to the sextuplet figure in the piano interlude between the second and third verses of poetry giving an illusion of an ABA musical form that is strengthened by the repetition of the opening vocal melody with the text “as a wind eddying flame Leaping higher and higher.” The moment of familiarity is quickly discarded as the vocal melody climbs to bombastic vocal climax with Griffes layering virtuosic arpeggios underneath in the piano accompaniment, as shown in Example 37. He fluctuates meters according to his melodic setting of the text, even as he blurs the rhythmic pulse with tied and syncopated figures in the piano. All sense of key or tonal stability is lost, especially in measure 47 where the voice sustains G# and then F# over a G# pedal in the left hand underneath a repeated D Major triad with a G# non chord tone. The voice climbs chromatically to a sustained A in measure 49 while the piano accompaniment builds drama by layering countermelodies, such as in measure 44 in the right hand, and its repetitive striking of parallel octaves and cluster chords.

Example 37: "The Rose of the Night," mm. 44-49

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 44-47, and the second system covers measures 48-49. The vocal line is written in a soprano clef, and the piano accompaniment is in grand staff notation. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

The song closes with an extended piano postlude, which fluctuates between various triads (such as D sharp major) with half diminished and diminished seventh chords (such as a B# diminished seventh chord.) The rapid sequencing of sonorities results from a linear chromaticism in the triplet arpeggios and the developing of the melodic cells found in the right hand of the piano in measures 44-47. The postlude peaks in measure 58 with a C-major triad in the right hand and a return of the oscillating triplets (G# and G alternated with C natural and E) and sextuplet motive from the opening. The right hand slowly ebbs away, leaving the left hand with a final sonority of G#, C, E, and G. While a C major triad is present (even though the key signature suggests E major or C# minor), the Major seventh between the G# and G obscures a true cadential sensation.



Example 38: “The Rose of the Night,” mm. 58-61

Griffes composed the song cycle originally for piano and voice, and orchestrated them in the winter of 1918. The orchestrated version has a full Romantic orchestra featuring a complete string section, two flutes, two oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, and three trombones. He was carefully in his orchestration of the repeated melodic motives, often giving them to the upper woodwinds to avoid overwhelming the vocal line. Both his grief motive and the sextuplet figure from “The Rose of The Night” first appear with a solo flute. The orchestration enhances the various countermelodies with the string section used mainly in the oscillating triplet figures while the woodwinds and brass pierce the rhapsodic accompaniment with solo deliveries of the various melodic gestures. Griffes’s experience in orchestral genres (such as his tone poem *The Pleasure-Domes of Kubla Khan* and his *Notturmo für Orchester*) ensured a coloristic use of the orchestral forces without a density of counterpoint which would overwhelm the vocalist.

Griffes’s *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod* were premiered in March 24, 1919 by soprano Marcia van Dresser and the Philadelphia Orchestra. On April 2, she gave them again with Griffes at the piano on a program presented at the MacDowell Gallery by the

Modern Music Society of New York.<sup>17</sup> The songs were extremely well received due to their soaring and innately vocal melodies, rich harmonic language, vital rhythmic energy, and cohesive sense of form within each song independently and the cycle as a whole.

The *Three Poems of Fiona Macleod* show Griffes's various artistic influences, such as German lieder, French Impressionism, Irish folk ballads, and Asian exoticism, blended into a tight dramatic and narrative journey highlighting his mature compositional style and creative genius. Throughout the song cycle, he combines repeated melodic motives, linear triplet accompaniment figures, sustained pedal drones, and syncopated and layered rhythmic cells to create an energized and passionate accompaniment on top of which he floated his lyric vocal melodies. The vocal insights of William Earl Brown and his mentor Lamperti are seen in Griffes's natural declamation of the text, lyric arched melodies, and vocally intuitive pacing of the breath lines, use of the vocal registers and phrasing of the vocal climaxes in each song. He is less focused on capturing an authentic Irish folk song quality in the songs, even though he uses characteristics, such as a sustained drone, and ascending diatonic melodies, in "The Lament of Ian the Proud." Instead, he musically enhances the passionate text by combining Romantic elements of melodic development with Impressionist ideas on counterpoint and harmony. Griffes's *Three Poems on Fiona Macleod* are a modern setting of Celtic folk poetry, meant to explore the emotions in the text without the responsibility of setting that text in an authentically Irish manner.

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<sup>17</sup> Bauer, 371.

## CONCLUSION

Artistic creations are born of an artist's life experiences as well as the pressures and innovations of the world in which he lives. One cannot isolate oneself from the financial demands of life or the images and stereotypes of society. William Sharp, Arnold Bax, and Charles Griffes are three artists who matured during an unprecedented time of economic growth, artistic diversity, and personal discovery. Each man sought to find a true voice for his artistic expression. While their medias and techniques differ, they borrowed sense of nostalgia and grief from the past, refreshing it with modern methods of imagery and musical or poetic expression.

William Sharp and Fiona Macleod are two sides of the same artistic being, the first being bound to reality and the financial and social demands of success, while the other was able to escape into the dream world of the Celtic people and reinterpret their lives, stories, and spiritual beliefs. However, neither persona could be truly successful without elements of the other. Macleod needed the literary refinement and education Sharp gained through his time with Rossetti and the publishing connection that were opened due to that relationship. Sharp escaped his prison of literary mimicry and endless tomes of biographical research with the passionate folklore and Romanticism of Macleod's Celtic portrayals. He was able to release his previous literary ties, which were slowly strangling his creative spirit, due to the support and encouragement of Mrs. Rinder. She saw beyond his previous literary works and encouraged him to explore new styles and genres of writing, introducing him to the Symbolist French poets and playwrights. The lush and veiled imagery of the Symbolist movement offered Sharp a path to connect the folklore from his youth with a passionate Romanticism. The works of

Macleod are not genuine Celtic stories meant to preserve a culture; rather, they are a modern retelling of themes and legends meant to connect an audience with the emotional core of a people and culture.

In many ways, the musical settings of Arnold Bax and Charles Griffes have a similar struggle: how to set a poetic text with such a strong sense of cultural identity but without strictly quoting the folk music of those people. Bax distained the repetition of folk songs championed by composer Cecil Sharp and other British contemporaries and felt English composers needed to re-interpret the melodic material beyond strict quotations. In “Eilidh my Fawn,” he created a lyric vocal melody with folk elements, such as ascending sixth jumps, a pentatonic melodic flavor, and contrasting rhythmic figures of triplets and dotted eighth and sixteenth notes, that he then repeated and embellished throughout the song to evoke the *sean nos* style of Irish ballad singing.

The development of Macleod’s imagery and passionate emotions were tied to the layering of countermelodies and rhythmic gestures in the piano accompaniment. In “Thy Dark Eyes to Mine,” Bax floats an arched vocal gesture which outlines a half diminished D# seventh chord on top of arpeggios of that same chord and a descending chromatic scale in the piano part heightening the simplicity of the vocal line by the virtuosic piano accompaniment. As the song continues, the vocal simplicity and its balance with the surrounding piano accompaniment is weakened as Bax layers various countermelodies within a linear harmonic language to portray an escalation of Macleod’s star and fire imagery. However, he returns to the song’s ballad roots in the piano postlude by repeating a fragment of the opening vocal melody. The complexity of Bax’s Late Romantic counterpoint and melodic development is always tempered by his demand for a

folk-like melody, which often gives each song a sense of cyclic form. The poetry of the Celtic Renaissance, and Fiona Macleod specifically, drew Bax and his poetic alter ego Dermot O'Byrne into a passionate realm of myths and legends, unlocking his creative inspiration. In *A Celtic Song Cycle* and many of his later orchestral works, he combines cultural elements to evoke the story even as he enhances the story with a modern musical language and counterpoint.

Charles Griffes approached the poetry of Fiona Macleod as an American composer with a diverse history of song and orchestral compositions. He had composed songs in German, French, English, Japanese and Chinese, evolving elements of their musical style into his own compositional language. While attracted to the Celtic poetry, he did not feel the responsibility that Bax did of setting the poems in a culturally appropriate manner, and instead he enriched the poems with his diverse experience in text setting and art song composition. "Thy Dark Eyes to Mine" blends an ABA song form (common in his German lieder) with oscillating seventh chords which shift in a linear fashion, producing coloristic but nonfunctional harmonic progressions. Like Bax, he layers various figures within the accompaniment, blurring a rhythmic pulse, obscuring a tonal center and creating a rhapsodic energy in the piano accompaniment. However, the vocal line remains the principal melodic architect, supported by a virtuosic piano collaboration but never overshadowed. Griffes's main goals were the musical painting of the text, focusing on the intimate gestures, rather than Bax's musical setting, which created a large scale mood or atmosphere for each song. Griffes's piano accompaniments are very complex, but never cross the line into Bax's creating a "bevy of little devils."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Banfield, "Bax as a Song Composer." *Musical Times* Vol. 124, no. 1689 (November 1983), 666.

Griffes and Bax both enliven Macleod's poetry with modern ideas on counterpoint and harmony, in a similar fashion to Sharp's enriching of the Celtic legends and myths with modern imagery and poetic form. The poems and song settings of Fiona Macleod are an amalgamation of their creators' experiences, which combines to make them truly personal and touching works of art.

## Appendix I: Major Works of William Sharp

1882 *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope and Motherhood*

Collection of Essays and Poems, including a cycle of Sonnets influenced by Sharp's association with Dante Rossetti

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study*

Biography of Rossetti's life and works. The success of this volume opened many new opportunities in the publishing circles of London. Sharp would write similar volumes on the lives of Heine, Shelley and Browning for the *Great Writers series*.

1884 *Earth's Voices: Transcripts from Nature: Sospittra and Other Poems*

1886 *Jack Noel's Legacy*

A serially sensational novel printed in the *Young Folks' Paper*.

1887 *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*

*Under the Banner of St. James: A Romance of the Discovery of the Pacific.*

A serially novel published in the *Young Folks' Paper*.

1888 *Life of Heinrich Heine*

1889 *Life of Robert Browning*

1891 *Sospiri Di Roma*

New collection of poetry featuring an irregular meter and no poetic rhyme scheme. The poems are passionate and erotic images from the Italian countryside. The volume was dedicated to Mrs. Edith Rinder and initially published at the composer's expense.

1892 *The Life and Letters of Joseph Severn*

*A Fellowe and His Wife*

This novel is a series of letters written between Count von Jaromar (written by Blanche Willis Howard) and those of his wife, Countess von Jaromar (written by William Sharp.) The exchange of letters discusses infidelity, the confines of marriage and the deeper definition of love. This novel is the first example of Sharp writing in a female voice.

1892 *The Pagan Review*

Only one edition of this review was published. All seven articles (based on pagan ideals and mythology) were written by William Sharp, but published under different pennames. With *The Pagan Review*, Sharp is testing the literary waters with new Celtic and folk like material.

1894 *Vistas*1896 *Madge o' the Pool: The Gipsy Christ and Other Tales*

The first publication of stories written from 1884-1889.

*Ecce Puella: and Other Prose Imaginings*1898 *Silence Farm*1912 *Selected Writings of William Sharp*

Mrs. Sharp selected and edited the works of her husband after his death in 1905. The *Selected Writings* were published in five volumes and only included works completed under Sharp's actual name.



## Appendix II: Major Works of Fiona Macleod

1894 *Pharais: A Romance of the Isles*

Novel started during Sharp's second visit in Rome. The novel is dedicated to EWR. Sharp originally submitted this novel for publishing in his own name. After several rejections, he created the penname, Fiona Macleod and resubmitted the novel of publication.

1895 *The Mountain Lovers*

*The Sin-Eaters and Other Tales*

*The Washer of the Ford and Other Legendary Moralities*

The previous two collections are embellished retellings of Celtic legends, faiths and myths passed on through generations by oral tradition.

*From the Hills of Dream: Mountain Songs and Island Runes*

(re-issued in 1899 with revisions)

This is Macleod's first collection of poetry. The poems are very influenced by the Celtic ballad tradition. They are free verse, with short poetic lines. Many of them have Gaelic characters in the titles and a song-like style. The majority of composer's musical settings are from this initial collection of Macleod poems.

*The Laughter of Peterkin: A Retelling of Old Tales of the Celtic Wonderland*

This is a collection of children stories and fantasies.

1899 *The Divine Adventure, Iona: By Sundown Shores: Studies in Spiritual History.*

1903 *The House of Usna*

This play was written and premiered in W. B. Yeats' Irish Repertory Theatre.

1904 *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of Gael*

1907 *From the Hills of Dream: Threnodies, Songs and Later Poems*

This collection contains many poems and short stories written between 1894-9 and previously published. Sharp continued to revise his poetry until his death in 1904.

1908 *The Immortal Hour: A Drama in Two Acts*

This play was written and premiered in W. B. Yeats' Irish Repertory Theatre.

1910 *The Works of "Fiona Macleod"*

After William Sharp's death, Mrs. Elizabeth Sharp collected all the works of "Fiona Macleod." The works were published in seven volumes. The re-issuing of the works coincided with Mrs. Sharp's release of *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod), A Memoir* written in two volumes. The memoir released the secret of Fiona Macleod's true identity, and tried to justify the literary pretense to the artistic world.

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