ARNOLD BAX AND THE POETRY OF TINTAGEL

A Dissertation submitted to the College of Fine Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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ARNOLD BAX AND THE POETRY OF TINTAGEL (213PP.)

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The latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries saw what is commonly accepted as a resurgence in music from the British Isles, but to this day, most of the actual music of this resurgence remains unknown to all but the most knowledgeable of art music aficionados. Among the composers active during this period, one of the most heralded in his day but little recognized now is Sir Arnold Bax (1883 – 1953). To the aforementioned aficionados, he is known for several substantial yet infrequently performed contributions to the symphonic repertoire, among them the tone poem Tintagel.

Known in England as a composer, Bax carried on a separate life as a writer of poetry and drama in Ireland, working under the name Dermot O’Byrne. At the time of composition of the tone poem, Bax also wrote a four-stanza verse poem titled “Tintagel Castle.” Both were written for and dedicated to the pianist Harriet Cohen, with whom he was having an affair.

The focus of this dissertation is an extensive look at the circumstances surrounding the composition of Tintagel, examining factors of development in Bax's compositional style, his personal life including the affair with Harriet Cohen, and the influence of Yeats and Irish culture on Bax's writings as Dermot O’Byrne. Using historical information drawn from biographical and periodical sources, in addition to musical analysis, and tools of comparative arts, I have developed comparisons between the tone poem and the poem, and examined
the differences in mood and scope between these two works. The final section of this dissertation establishes historical context for Bax’s *Tintagel* and his work in general within the genre of the symphonic poem and the realm of late-romantic/early twentieth century British music, presenting both composer and composition in a stronger light.
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Figure 1. *Arnold Bax c. 1945*
CHAPTER I
BAX: HISTORY AND CHARACTER

The latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries saw what is commonly accepted as a resurgence in music from Great Britain and Ireland. This rebirth of the creative spirit among the British and the Irish is first recognized in the work of Edward Elgar (1857–1934), though it should in large part be credited to the efforts and teaching of C. Hubert H. Parry (1848–1918), Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), and Alexander C. Mackenzie (1847–1935). From these three men, we can map much of the direction of the resurgence, for it was their students who proved Elgar not an anomaly and who brought new and original British music from the Isles to the European Continent, as well as to America. One of the most notable of the young composers to come from that background, from a group that included Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, John Ireland, Frank Bridge, and Arthur Bliss, was Arnold Bax.

Much of the musicological interest in Bax may be derived from examining the duality that seems to pervade his life. This duality takes on many forms, but is perhaps most pointedly seen in his overall acceptance and appreciation within the musical community. A conservative Romantic in the first half of the twentieth century, Bax found sympathy from some, including greats such as Elgar, Rachmaninoff, and Sibelius, but his musical aesthetic was looked down upon by the progressives of the period, and it was the progressive attitude that ruled in the time after World War II. Bax’s music was not entirely forgotten in the first decade after his death, but his principal publisher treated the works
with apathy, his longtime companion Harriet Cohen held certain works inaccessible to the public, and a number of officials at the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) treated his music with hostility. All of this combined to reduce the number of performances heard for a time, and it is just in the last twenty years or so that Bax is being rediscovered.\textsuperscript{1} An article by Peter J. Pirie further supports this position, as he notes the lack of recognition of musical excellence in Bax and others of his generation only a few years after the composer's death. Based on questions asked to his Workers' Educational Association classes, Pirie concludes that “the average English music lover has possibly heard of Britten and certainly Elgar; has never heard of Bax or Ireland; knows of Delius only as a legend; wonders if Holst wrote anything besides The Planets, and will soon have forgotten all about Vaughan Williams.”\textsuperscript{2} In another article written a decade later, Pirie looks at Bax's lack of acceptance by the English public from a different angle. He observes that Bax opens his autobiography with “the tentative beginnings of rational self-defense,” as the composer states that, despite rumors to the contrary, he is not Irish. Pirie explains that of all the stock characters an average Englishman finds ridiculous, and therefore easy to dismiss, that of the stage Irishman is considered the worst.\textsuperscript{3} Clearly, there are factors that have worked against the recognition of this composer.

On the shelf of most university libraries, one can find Lewis Foreman's biography of the composer. Some libraries will also hold a copy of Colin Scott-Sutherland's biography. One can also find without too much difficulty Bax's

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autobiography, an obviously invaluable source for study of this composer. There exists now a comprehensive catalog of his works, and it is not unusual to find a new article or two dedicated to Bax study each year. Thus, one might inquire as to the need for another examination of this man and his music. Perhaps the best answer comes from Graham Parlett, who suggests that we follow Peter Evans’ train of thought. Evans asks in his book, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, “How many Hummel analyses have been printed to how many of Mozart?” Parlett feels that if we substitute Bax for Hummel and Britten for Mozart, the relative lack of work dedicated to Bax is seen more clearly.4

In the words of the composer, found in his autobiography, we begin to see a bit of the duality that makes him an interesting study, even in the simple act of establishing his birth:

> I have been informed (in print) that I was born on an island in the middle of a bog-lake in County Mayo. It has also been asserted that I am a “spoiled priest,” as the Irish call one who has studied for Holy Orders and has later abandoned the career on discovery of a lack of vocation. And did not George Russell (“Æ”) once send me a cutting from the *Dublin Freeman’s Journal* (now long defunct) proclaiming that “Arnold Bax” was a pseudonym, adopted solely for musical purposes, by a West of Ireland poet and novelist named Dermot O’Byrne? (Well, there was some small excuse for this as will be shown later.) These fantasies are picturesque, but unfortunately not true, and though those fellows may have been right, and I had come to the wrong place, I reaffirm that I was born uninterestingly – except perhaps to my mother and myself – at Streatham in the County of Surrey, at 8.30 in the morning of November 8th, 1883. 5

Arnold Edward Trevor Bax was born into a family of the upper middle class. His father, Alfred Ridley Bax (1844–1918), was a lawyer, though he did not practice. By most accounts he was a “mild, serious, reserved man of

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4 Parlett, p. 1.
considerable culture and learning,” but “a dreamer rather than a thinker like his brother Ernest.”\textsuperscript{6} He is further described as more interested in antiquarianism and family history than in practicing as a barrister, and is said to have kept aloof from the running of the household.\textsuperscript{7} He came from a Quaker background and was “unfamiliar with any of the common pleasures, or any form of art save that of music,” according to Francis Colmer, who was the tutor to Arnold and his brother Clifford for years.\textsuperscript{8} His mother, Charlotte Ellen Lea Bax (1860–1940), on the other hand, was a strong-minded, inquiring, attractive, and sympathetic woman full of restless energy. She was socially alert, a born organizer who tended to gather around her people of distinction and taste.\textsuperscript{9}

Arnold Bax describes being confronted by “a very eager and inquiring young mother, and a somewhat remote father with whom I never really became intimate.”\textsuperscript{10} It seems that Bax thought of his father mostly as an elderly man “nearly forty when I was born,” with “rigid – almost Calvinistic – principles,” who rarely had much to say to his children, or they to him. This contrasts with his memories of his mother, whom he describes as lively, restless, socially alert and ready to help the needy, perhaps over-sensitive, quick-tempered and quick to forgive, and a live wire in the dull society of her early married days. Both parents were very religious. Alfred’s “stern-lipped” mother instilled in him a disdain for the theater, believing that such places of entertainment were

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. (from unpublished notes sent to Colin Scott-Sutherland, May, 1963).
\textsuperscript{9} Scott-Sutherland, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{10} Bax, p. 10.
“boiling vats of moral evil – antechambers of hell.” Meanwhile, Charlotte was unusually tolerant of the beliefs of others, and in fact explored most of the forms of Christianity before eventually settling on Catholicism.\(^{11}\) One can see the two distinctly differing personalities with which the young Arnold Bax would have contended, and postulate on how those personalities would begin to shape his own.

Francis Colmer developed his own assessment of the developing personalities of Arnold and his brother Clifford, and remarked specifically on the influence of Charlotte on the two boys. He wrote that, “Both Arnold and Clifford had an undeniable feminine streak in their character which they certainly derived from their mother.”\(^{12}\) He went on to describe that feminine side as a “precious gift when allied with unusual intellectual power,” and contrasted the tenderness and beauty of which they were capable with the “more violent emotions of the masculine mind.”

In *Farewell, My Youth*, Bax waits before telling the reader of his parents. As previously noted, he begins with his vaguely defensive remarks about his non-Irish heritage. From there, he moves directly into a discussion of the location of his home and of his love for that particular area outside of London, and then there is a page spent on his first conscious realization of beauty before any substantive mention of his parents can be found. If we seek an understanding of the duality of Bax’s personality as a key to the examination of his music, then perhaps this arrangement of autobiographical information provides some minor insight. It is also possible, though, that the author simply

\(^{11}\) Ibid., pp. 10 – 11.
\(^{12}\) Foreman, p. 5 (from the previously noted notes to Colin Scott-Sutherland).
chose to use a literary device to transition from a bold opening statement into the more typical material of an autobiographical work. Interpretation could lead one in either direction on this point.

Arnold’s education seems to have been scattered between periods in regular schools and periods of study with Colmer, who was an exhibitioner from Exeter College. Both Arnold and Clifford were very successful students, but the lack of a consistent scholastic program coupled with Colmer’s sympathetic and lax study regime, added to the dreamer’s sensibilities inherited from their father, left both children rather undisciplined.

Bax tells us that he could not remember a time when he was unable to play the piano or read music. He writes of improving his playing and sight-reading by working through old piano solo arrangements of Beethoven’s symphonies and sonatas, and, later, Wagner’s music dramas. Ernest Belfort Bax, Alfred’s brother and a music critic for one of the London evening papers, seems to have been Arnold’s primary influence in the beginning, as he encouraged the boy to improve in the spirit of competition for time in the family circle. Alfred Bax had been a subscriber to the Saturday Concerts at the Crystal Palace since 1860, attending each weekend without fail. Arnold’s first experience with orchestral music was at these concerts, as the figure of conductor August Manns attracted his attention. He describes the playing as “pretty rough; for example, there was no unanimity of phrasing amongst the strings, each player bowing according to his individual fancy, and the notes of the horn were often all too liquid.”

These concerts, however, provided a further

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13 Bax, p. 12.
musical stimulus to young Arnold. His father had kept every program booklet from the concerts he attended. They were all neatly bound, year by year, and stored in the dining room bookcase. Bax describes spending hours pouring through these volumes, amusing himself by improvising absurd symphonies and overtures based on the material of the musical excerpts in the notes. Along with his time at the piano, he also took lessons on the violin starting in 1896. Despite all this, Arnold had no formal musical education until 1898.

By 1897, Bax had begun to compose. A notebook from a year later entitled “Clavierstücke by A.E.T. Bax 1897–1898” contains twenty-eight pages of manuscript comprising a Minuet in E minor, two Hungarian Dances, three Mazurkas, two Scherzi, a Prelude in G major, a Nocturne in B major, a Minuet for eight instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and strings), and a Sonata in D minor.¹⁴ Alfred Bax came to the conclusion that Arnold must be examined by an expert to determine whether he might reasonably pursue a serious musical career. The pair went off to Westminster to consult with Sir Frederick Bridge, then the principal at the Royal College of Music. As Bax put it, Bridge “deigned to admit that I had a better sense of composition than himself had at my age, a verdict that greatly pleased and impressed my father.”¹⁵ It was assumed from this moment that Arnold Bax would begin his musical study in earnest and work toward a career in the field.

In 1898, Bax was enrolled at the Hampstead Conservatoire, an institution presided over by Cecil Sharp. He studied piano, theory, and composition with Dr. Arthur Greenish, who was Hampstead’s organist for

¹⁴ Foreman, p. 7.
¹⁵ Bax, p. 16.
several decades, and who also conducted Alfred Bax’s private choral society. Arnold was not particularly impressed with either of these teachers, noting that Sharp “often talked a great deal of nonsense” and Greenish “knew little or nothing of” Wagner’s *Tristan* and the *Ring* scores.\(^\text{16}\) Prior to Greenish’s tenure with the Bax Choral Society, John Post Attwater served as director of the choir. It was Attwater who convinced Alfred Bax to further advance his son’s musical education by enrolling him in the Royal Academy of Music (R.A.M.). Arnold passed his entrance exam and began study there in September of 1900. His classmates included Adam Carse, Benjamin Dale, Stanley Marchant, Eric Coates, Montague Phillips, Harry Farjeon, Paul Corder, W.H. Reed, York Bowen, Myra Hess and Irene Scharrer.\(^\text{17}\)

The principal at the R.A.M. during Bax’s time was Sir Alexander C. Mackenzie. Among Mackenzie’s duties was conducting of the student orchestra. Bax suggests that Mackenzie saw him as a thorn in his side from the beginning, and particularly notes a rehearsal of one of his “tentative and irritatingly difficult” compositions in which Mackenzie “was wont to fling down his stick and ejaculate my short name with the effort of an imprecation.”\(^\text{18}\) To his credit, Mackenzie had known Liszt personally and introduced several of Liszt’s works to the school. Further, Mackenzie had been an enthusiastic progressive in his younger years, adding many other modern works to the students’ repertoire. This leaning toward Liszt and Wagner pervaded the school, marking it as

\(^{16}\) Ibid., pp. 16 – 17.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 19.  
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 20.
substantially opposed to the more Brahmsian inclinations of the Royal College of Music (R.C.M.).

Bax’s composition teacher at the R.A.M. was Frederick Corder, another progressive in the Liszt-Wagner camp. Among Corder’s achievements were the earliest translation into English of Wagner’s libretti, and an arrangement performed during Bax’s period of study of Liszt’s *Orpheus* for organ, strings and harp. Corder’s influence upon his students was considerable. There is an anecdote from John Ireland in which he once expressed surprise that, on looking through a collection of compositions from one of Benjamin Dale’s students, he could see the influence of Corder extending to a second generation. This charismatic teacher was highly thought of by critics of the period, and might even have made a compositional conquest of Europe had it not been for the greater notoriety of the stylistically comparable Richard Strauss. Yet Corder was also described as liberal and somewhat sloppy in his approach with students, many of whom achieved short-term success but did not find the staying power or technical skill of students trained at the R.C.M.

Bax seems to have gone back and forth on the matter of the value of his education at the R.A.M., whether the topic was Corder or his piano instructor, Tobias Matthay. Lewis Foreman points out that Bax was not particularly kind to either man in his memoirs, though he spoke well of them in other writings. There can be no argument that Bax owed a lot to both men, and much of his

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19 Foreman, p. 11.
20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Scott-Sutherland, p. 10.
24 Ibid., p. 16.
attitude reflects their teaching. We find Bax following in Corder’s footsteps with regard to the technique of composition, declaring that “purely scientific compositions” such as the fugue, canon, or madrigal no longer excite or appeal to “the modern mind,” though “there is a technique for everything,” and no inspiration can compensate for a lack of skill or knowledge of how to employ “the resources of one’s art.” Matthay also exhibited a great deal of influence on the technique of his piano students and of the composition students. Foreman quotes another of Corder’s students, Arthur Alexander, in a commentary on Matthay, saying that his “patience and kindness were inexhaustible, and his explanations of musical and technical problems could not have been more lucid.” Bax’s study with Matthay was obviously successful, despite his referring to the professor as “a benevolent Svengali.” Under Matthay’s tutelage, he won the school’s Macfarren scholarship for piano in 1902. (Bax also chose to leave the R.A.M. in 1905, just prior to completing his period of formal study.) The most important thing that Bax gained from his mentors was a sympathetic environment in which to grow. He found friends his own age with similar talents, and he had the help and companionship of established musicians who gave him a means of getting his own early works performed and heard.

Bax was very much encouraged by the permissive atmosphere at the R.A.M., and happily immersed himself in everything the musical world of that

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25 Ibid., p. 15.
26 Ibid., p. 17. (From Alexander’s article “I Remember Matthay,” RAM Magazine (October 1958), pp. 52-53.)
27 Bax, p. 19.
time had to offer. He was thoroughly taken with the excitement of creative endeavors, the discovery of new ideas in music and literature, and the currents of young romance. Under Corder’s guidance, he composed prolifically. He won the Charles Lucas medal for composition with a set of Symphonic Variations later read in the finals for the first S. Ernest Palmer Patron’s Fund concert in 1904, and several of his works were performed at college concerts under the direction of Mackenzie. Among these was a Concert Piece for viola and orchestra written for Lionel Tertis, and an orchestral overture *A Connemara Revel*, premiered again by Mackenzie in April of 1905.29 A *Celtic Song Cycle* for voice and piano, from late 1904, is often mentioned as one of Bax’s first successful forays into the Celtic world he would soon embrace. It consists of five songs on texts by Fiona Macleod (the pseudonym of William Sharp), and was performed in part by Ethel Lister, soprano, with Bax accompanying, on the second Patron’s Fund concert, a chamber music program in November of 1904. (The first complete performance paired Lister and Bax again, in June of 1907.)30 Along with being one of Bax’s first works ever published, it is the first of his scores to have entered the concert repertoire, though it has fallen from that lofty position since.31

Bax found many influences during his time at the Academy. Among them was literature, an interest he had shared with his brother Clifford since youth. Arnold explored every source available to him, writing that, “in every hour not devoted to music I read feverishly all the literature I could come upon, poetry

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29 Scott-Sutherland, p. 12.
30 Parlett, pp. 51-52.
31 Foreman, p. 32.
and prose, British and Continental. Clifford once announced that ‘Arnold has read everything, though no one has ever seen him with a book in his hands.’ A picturesque exaggeration, of course, but, though I do not care to boast of a critical faculty, my soul certainly adventured greatly amongst masterpieces.”

Sometime in the spring of 1902, Bax happened upon the poetry of William Butler Yeats. As Clifford has recalled, Yeats’s example “was far stronger than we realized. For a few years Ireland swept the board. No poet was much praised in the press if he did not write of Cuchulain or the fairies.” While the Irish influence was an important but passing one on Clifford, his brother Arnold maintained a lifelong fascination with the land, its people and its culture.

The poem that Bax found on that spring day in 1902 was *The Wanderings of Oisin*, and he writes of his discovery in a well-known quote, saying that, “the Celt within me stood revealed.” Going on to ask himself what such a statement might mean, Bax explained by saying, “In a famous passage the Breton, Renan, declared that, ‘The Celt has ever worn himself out in mistaking dreams for reality,’ but I believe that, on the contrary, the Celt knows more clearly than the men of most races the difference between the two, and deliberately chooses to follow the dream. There is certainly a tireless hunter of dreams in my own make-up. I love life. I am an appreciative inhabitant of this world, ... yet a part of me is not of it.” In this, one can clearly see the influence of Alfred Bax, the dreamer, upon his son.

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32 Bax, p. 23.  
33 Foreman, p. 21.  
34 Bax, pp. 41-42.
The discovery of Yeats was followed by a number of excursions to Ireland. Clifford accompanied Arnold on those first trips, and later his sister Evelyn made the journey as well. Exact dates for these trips are unknown, though they took place during Bax's time at the Academy. What is known, though, is that the place he visited most often was Glencolumcille in County Donegal, in the northwestern-most part of Ireland.  

Bax returned to this location again and again throughout his life, until it was as much his home as was London.

There were other influences, both musical and non-musical, that took hold in Bax's mind as well in those Academy and immediate post-Academy years. He became quite enamored of the Russian Ballet, particularly as Tchaikovsky was in vogue in London. Yet another was a sort of Pre-Raphaelite Impressionism. Finally, Bax found himself intrigued by a Nordic style he mostly identified with Sibelius.

Though he never studied composition with Mackenzie, Stanford, or Parry, he had occasion to be around and learn in one way or another from all three. It is interesting to learn what Bax had to say about these precursors to Elgar. He tells us that, "Parry was too ingrainedly the conventional Englishman," though he was "consistently jovial, hearty, and old-bufferish." Of Stanford, he says, "If Parry was too robustly English, Stanford was not Irish enough." He suggests that Stanford began many of his works, "not without a certain spark of authentic musical imagination," but that he would then seek Continental models, or, as he put it, "he went a-whoring after foreign gods,"

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35 Foreman, pp. 21-22.
36 Pirie, “More Than a Brazen Romantic,” p. 32.
before completing each score, so that the “original flicker was smothered in the outer darkness of Brahms.” Then, of Mackenzie, he notes that this composer began life as a comparatively poor man who was obliged to struggle upward to reach his station at the R.A.M., but “he had no literary taste and little general culture of any kind.” “Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie – they were all three solid reputable citizens and ratepayers of the United Kingdom,” Bax writes, “model husbands and fathers without a doubt, respected members of the most irreproachably Conservative clubs, and in Yeats’s phrase had ‘no strange friend,’ Of this I am sure.”

It was 1901 when Bax first met Elgar, and perhaps that meeting had something to do with his apparent lack of awe for the esteemed professors of the R.A.M. and R.C.M. One might also suggest that, by the time of writing his autobiography, Bax had attained a status that left him less impressed with the notables of his youth. In any case, his description of that first meeting with Elgar shows Bax to be much more positively inclined.

After first hearing of Elgar by way of a review of Caractacus in a local newspaper in 1898, Bax had eagerly found scores to that work and also to King Olaf, and had become an “enslaved admirer.” Two years later, the premiere of The Dream of Gerontius “took utter possession of what religious sense I have.” While on summer holiday in Malvern in 1901, a friend of Bax’s named George Alder, who was an accomplished horn player and who was well acquainted with Elgar, suggested that the two of them should pay a visit to Birchwood, where the older composer was staying.

37 Bax, pp. 27-28.
38 Ibid., p. 29.
By Bax’s account, the meeting went very well. They had a pleasant conversation with his wife in the gardens while they waited for Sir Edward to join them. Bax’s first impression of Elgar pictures him as “Hatless, dressed in rough tweeds and riding boots, his appearance was rather that of a retired army officer turned gentleman farmer than an eminent and almost morbidly highly strung artist.” Further, he says, “He was not a big man, but such was the dominance of his personality that I always had the impression that he was twice as large as life.” They talked at length, mostly of Elgar’s successes and failures, of a poor performance of *Gerontius* in Birmingham the previous autumn, and of his contempt for the critics. The greatest impression on Bax, however, beyond the overall impression made by the great composer, seems to be related to his working methods. Bax relates that he asked Elgar how many pages per week in full score he averaged in the writing of *Gerontius*. “Oh, about forty, I suppose,” was the reply. Bax tells us that, at the time, he had no experience with orchestration, but came to learn in later years just what a quantity this was.

There were other trips during the years of his youth beyond those to Ireland. During the spring of 1906, Bax went to Dresden for the first time, still intrigued by the music of Wagner. Along with doing a bit of carousing, he was able to see several operatic performances, including Ernst von Schuch’s (1846 – 1914) productions of *Siegfried, Tristan, Elektra*, and the “fifth performance” of the premiere production of *Salome*, which apparently made a great impression.

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39 Ibid., p. 30.
40 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
on the young composer. Schuch was known in his time as a master conductor and an excellent orchestral educator. These would have been particularly fine performances. For Bax and his comrades, Paul Corder, Roland Bocquet, and Archie Rowan-Hamilton, the 1906 trip and another in 1907 were as much about glorying in their freedom and sowing wild oats as they were about musical study. Scott-Sutherland points out a passage from *Farewell My Youth* in which Bax poetically describes an encounter with “a tall, calm-eyed Scandinavian girl,” in which he evokes the gloomily romantic Bohemian forest filled with trolls and kobolds and perhaps even the Baba-Yaga herself, and tells of being ferried across the river by one so silent he could have been Charon himself. This descriptive phrasing, as Scott-Sutherland suggests, gets to the heart of Bax's music, for it is imbued with a mystical pantheism that represents the strongest emotional encounters of Bax’s life.

Next on Bax’s list of destinations was Norway, which he apparently visited with his mother late in 1906. Both Arnold and Clifford developed an interest in and enthusiasm for Scandinavian and Finnish literature. Their introduction to this literature was probably through a family friend named Arne von Erpecum. It is to von Erpecum that the choral work *Fatherland* is dedicated. Arnold made the literal translation of the Swedish poems of Johan Ludvig Runeberg, and then Clifford worked this translation into a more poetic English text. The work was completed in March of 1907. As we consider the

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41 Foreman, p. 42.
42 Scott-Sutherland, p. 14.
43 Graham Parlett’s chronology of Bax’s life suggests that this trip may have occurred a year earlier, but no definitive dates are known.
44 Foreman, p. 45.
path of Bax’s influences, it is worth noting that, in a letter published in The Irish Statesman on November 11, 1926, Bax writes in regard to a proposed Irish national anthem that the original “Vårt land” is “unquestionably the most moving national poem ever composed.”\textsuperscript{45}

This northern influence eventually found a specific voice in the music of Jean Sibelius, to whom national poems were certainly familiar. Bax first met Sibelius in 1909 at a concert event of the “Music Club,” presided over by the noted critic of the Star, Alfred Kalisch. The “club,” officially known as the Musical League, was founded in 1908 with the backing of Edward Elgar, Frederick Delius, Granville Bantock, William G. McNaught, and Henry Wood, and was “a dressy concert-cum-supper affair” whose members were mostly of the wealthy social circles of London, and while Bax was not actually a member, he was often called upon to substitute as a pianist for performances. As reported in The Times, the aims of the League were to hold annual festivals “of the utmost attainable perfection,” and to devote the programs of these festivals to either new or unfamiliar music by either English or foreign composers.\textsuperscript{46} It was through the “Music Club” as Bax called it that he was also able to meet Debussy, D’Indy, and Schoenberg.\textsuperscript{47} At first, the influence of Sibelius was minimal, and was perhaps only manifested in Bax’s overall interests in fantasy, legend, and literature. Certainly, the nationalistic aspects of the Finnish composer’s music played at least some small role in Bax’s developing

\textsuperscript{45} Parlett, p. 65.\textsuperscript{46} Foreman, p. 64.\textsuperscript{47} Bax, p. 56.
fascination with Irish and Celtic themes. By the mid 1920s, however, Bax had become far more consciously aware of Sibelius’s technique and style.

*Fatherland* was performed on one of the first concerts of the Musical Society in Liverpool on September 25, 1909. The Welsh conductor Harry Evans led the choral and orchestral forces before an audience that appears to have been a “who’s who” of British musicians. This performance did much to establish Bax in the minds of many of the leading musical figures throughout England. One of the most important of these was Henry Wood.

While Wood and Bax probably met through their connections to the newly forming Musical League, the conductor had already been aware of the young composer for some time. Shortly after Bax’s visit to Elgar in 1901, and despite the fact that he had said little to Bax to encourage him professionally, Elgar made a point of speaking of him to Wood. By the time that the “Music Club” was established and developing programs, Wood had invited Bax to compose an orchestral work for the 1910 Promenade Concerts.\(^48\) That work became the tone poem *In the Faery Hills*.

*In the Faery Hills* was completed on June 28\(^{th}\), 1909, and was inspired by Bax’s trip to Ireland in the early part of that year. It is the only one of the early tone poems to be published. Bax wrote an extensive program note for the first performance, under Wood with the Queen’s Hall Orchestra, for the Promenade Concert of August 30, 1910. He tells us that the work “attempts to suggest the revelries of the ‘Hidden People’ in the inmost deeps of the hollow hills of

\(^{48}\) Scott-Sutherland, p. 36.
Ireland." There is also mention of W.B. Yeats’s poem, “The Wanderings of Oisin,” from which he took inspiration. This is further explained in a letter to Anne Crowley, in which he explains, “I got this mood under Mount Brandon with all W.B.’s magic about me, and I know there is no piece quite like it – no credit to me of course because I was possessed by Kerry’s self.”

The Celtic influence was not exclusive to Bax, of course. It was shared by a number of composers of his generation, including Rutland Boughton, Sir Granville Bantock, Josef Holbrooke, and George Lloyd. What was common for these men of music were the mists and the mystic, the legends of gods and fairies and magic, all of it a kind of rejection of modern industrial society.

Wood was very generous in his comments on the work. He speaks in his autobiography of the sixteenth season of the Promenades, saying, “I produced Arnold Bax’s Opus One this season. It was a tone poem called In the Faery Hills.” Then, after explaining the program from Bax’s notes, he goes on to say, “I like Bax in this mood. I feel it is the true Bax – that dear, kind man of the shy smile, I have known so well for so many years. He is really unpretentious – but then great men are.”

In 1909, Bax met Loubya Nicolyevna Korolenko, a twenty-one year old Ukrainian girl of some wealth and of very cosmopolitan upbringing. Loubya’s father had been a general with the Cossacks, and had become insane after the loss of much of his fortune in the revolution of 1905. Her mother eventually had

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49 Foreman, p. 60.
50 Parlett, p. 79.
the ex-general committed to a private asylum in Kiev, and shortly after embarked on a nomadic life for nearly five years, prompted by Loubya’s banishment from Russia for alleged complicity in the democratic movement among the students of Kiev.53 Upon reaching adulthood, Loubya separated from her mother and moved to London.

Bax speaks of Loubya in generous yet haunted phrases. He prepares readers for this section by suggesting that they have passed the “uninterrupted sunshine” of his prior text, and that they now “don your cloaks and hunt up your umbrellas and strongest boots, for heavy weather awaits us before the sun again breaks through.”54 He sees his 1910 trip to Russia as a tragedy, a “disastrous and humiliating adventure, but one that I have never regretted, since it brought many an enlightening experience which I might otherwise have missed.”55 Bax’s account of Loubya tells us that she was both beautiful and manipulative. He calls her “a golden Roussalka with ice-blue eyes!” Able to recognize at the time that she was unhappy, he only saw the histrionics and playacting later. “I loved her bewilderingly,” he tells us.

While Bax was away in Connemara with his sister Evelyn in the spring of 1910, Loubya decided that she needed to go home to Russia at once. It was Loubya’s housemate, an Italian girl named Fiametta, who had become devoted to her Ukrainian friend, who wired Bax to give him the news. Leaving Evelyn with very little money, Bax rushed back to London and, without a goodbye to his parents, accompanied the two women on their journey to Russia and

53 Bax, p. 64.
54 Ibid., p. 63.
55 Ibid., p. 64.
eventually to the Ukraine. It was on this journey that Bax learned Loubya’s true nature.

The group arrived in St. Petersburg on the evening of Easter Day. Bax describes the bells thundering and jangling from every church in the city, and a flood of people in cars and droshkys, all headed toward St. Isak’s Cathedral. After hearing the Mass at the smaller and less crowded Kazan Cathedral, Arnold, Loubya, and Fiammetta took rooms in a hotel. It was only a few days later when Loubya announced that she was too well known in the city for Bax to remain in the same hotel with her, lest people talk. She sent him to another hotel on the other side of the city, and then promptly “entered into a rather dubious affair . . . with an officer in her father’s old regiment,” whom she attempted to pass off as an uncle. Further, she renewed through correspondence an old relationship with a fellow student from her Kiev days. Bax quotes Fiametta, who “sorrowfully observed, ‘It seems as if she was making use of us in England, just allowing us to love her because there was no one else to give her admiration!’” Bax allowed events to play out, and in fact pretended to be comfortable with the situation when he saw Loubya.

Eventually, the three travelers left St. Petersburg and made their way through Moscow and then to Kiev, and finally to Loubya’s family home in nearby Lubny. It was now May, and both Arnold and Fiammetta were given apartments in the guesthouse, again secluding them from their host. A piano was rented and Bax worked regularly at composition. It was during this time that Bax composed what, after some revision seven years later, became known

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56 Ibid., p. 69.
as his First Piano Sonata.\textsuperscript{57} A number of coloristic effects can be found in this work, specifically in the lower registers, as is typical in Russian music.

For Bax, the whole affair ended with Loubya’s betrothal party, at which time she became officially engaged to the former student from Kiev. Staying for the ceremony, Bax found that he could endure no more, and left both Loubya and Fiammetta two days later for the return trip to London. It was the last he ever saw of his “golden Roussalka.”

The influence of his time in Russia and the Ukraine was valuable to Bax the composer, but we also see growth in Bax’s alter ego. “Loubya kept Fiammetta very much at her beck and call, and many solitary days followed for me. To while away the hours Dermot O’Byrne came to the fore, and to avenge the chagrin of his fellow-self wrote a tale of ancient Ireland, wherein the vanity of women met with a nemesis of peculiar savagery,” he tells us of his time in St. Petersburg.\textsuperscript{58} From such a statement we can see real evidence of the duality in Bax’s personality, and it is time to explore the other side of that duality in greater depth.

Who was Dermot O’Byrne? How did Bax select this name as a pseudonym or alter ego? He did not directly address these questions, though he did discuss the name at various points in his autobiography.

“I worked very hard at the Irish language and steeped myself in history and saga, folk-tale and fairy-lore,” he explains, mentioning that George Russell had commented favorably on his “completely Gaelicized mind.” He goes on to say that, “By degrees a second personality came to birth within me, that

\textsuperscript{57} Foreman, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{58} Bax, p. 69.
Dermot O’Byrne, who later on was to turn author and find his books accepted by Dublin publishers.” 59 And later still, Bax proclaims that:

All this I owed in the first place to Yeats, for his was the key that opened the gate of Celtic wonderland to my wide-eyed youth, and his the finger that pointed to the magic mountain whence I was to dig all that may be of value in my own art. Neither does my debt to the man end there, for his poetry has always meant more to me than all the music of the centuries, and at his death it was as though ‘The Hawk’s Well’ (of his own vision), which once in a hundred years plashed up the waters of eternal youth, had dried up for evermore. All the days of my life I bless his name. 60

Despite all this, Bax still provides no answers as to how the name was derived or why he chose it. We find no answers in the writings of Clifford Bax, nor in that of any of the women in Arnold Bax’s life. Instead, it is left to Lewis Foreman to pronounce the origin of the pseudonym Dermot O’Byrne. Foreman tells us of how the composer fell under the spell of the great Irish poet, just as Bax himself had declared. He further explains that Bax was writing almost as soon as he went to Ireland, modeling his style not only on the early poetry of Yeats and William Sharp and later George Russell, but also on the local speech of the peasant people he grew to know in the far west. 61

There are letters from very early in Bax’s first trip to Ireland in which he began to create his alter ego. He wrote to a young girlfriend in late 1903 or early 1904 from the Glencolumcille Hotel in County Donegal, speaking in flowery terms of the Irish landscape and people, concluding the passage by asking, “What of Irish Dermid and his homeland... I wonder if I should seem the same through the peat smoke and blue mists of Eire. This is the real Dermid at any

59 Ibid., p. 47.
60 Ibid., p. 48.
61 Foreman, p. 375.
rate and the English edition is only a reprint somewhat soiled and very much foxed.” Foreman quotes this passage from an undated letter in the collection of Colin Scott-Sutherland. By June of 1905, Bax had evolved the persona so that the name Dermod McDermott was appearing as the signature to poetry very much in the style of Yeats. Three years later, he contributed two poems signed “Diarmid” to his brother Clifford’s journal, *Transactions of the Theosophical Art-Circle*. Finally in 1909, we see the name Dermot O’Byrne for the first time with a collection of poems called “Seaform and Firelight.”

Foreman suggests that the name “Dermot O’Byrne” may well have been inspired by place-names in the district near his beloved Glencolumcille. He points to Rathlin Óbirne Island just off the coast of Malin Beg, along with the funeral mounds for Diarmuid and Grainne, which can be found nearby. These locations lie on the far-western shore of northwestern Ireland. It seems impossible to find a theory that contradicts Foreman on this matter. If the source of the name comes up at all, and in truth it rarely does, Foreman is either directly quoted or his suggestion is adopted by the writer as if it were fact.

Foreman’s argument is logical. Bax spent considerable time in the region, and deeply loved everything about it. The theory takes into account the cultural and historical information that a young and impressionable writer would have found appealing. There is a problem, though. Foreman’s theory does not get to the heart of this particular writer. It addresses the obvious potential influences, but it fails to consider the one overriding influence, the one we have already

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62 Ibid., p. 22.
63 Ibid., p. 375.
seen Bax thank in *Farewell, My Youth*. Foreman has forgotten about the influence of Yeats.

In 1893, Yeats published a collection of short stories, myths, and legends titled “The Celtic Twilight.” It was Yeats’s claim that many of the stories found in this collection were told to him by “one Paddy Flynn, a little bright-eyed old man, who lived in a leaky and one-roomed cabin in the village of Ballisodare, which is, he was want to say, ‘the most gentle’ – whereby he meant faery – ‘place in the whole of County Sligo.’” It will be important to see the willingness of Yeats to enter into the fantasy realm as something akin to Bax’s own identification with a life of fantasy.

Yeats lists among his stories in the collection one titled “The Three O’Byrnes and the Evil Faeries.” The tale takes up no more than a page and a half within the whole of “The Celtic Twilight,” and is one of the shorter of the stories found in the collection. The account states that, once upon a time, there existed something more than the Earth we know, something called the “dim Kingdom.” In this otherworldly kingdom, there existed more love, more dancing, and more treasure than could ever be found upon the commonly known Earth. With that as his opening, Yeats tells us of a traveler who witnesses a haggard and unkempt old fellow digging hole after hole around a rath known as Cashel Nore. Asking a nearby peasant who this fellow might be, the traveler was told that this was “the third O’Byrne.” The legend that followed explained that, back in pagan times, a great treasure had been buried around the rath, with a number of evil faeries set to guard it. Someday, the legend stated, the treasure

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was meant to be found by and belong to the family of the O'Byrnes. Before that
day, though, three O'Byrnes must find the treasure and die. Two had already
done so in horrific, fantastical ways that are much better appreciated when
read within the context of Yeats' s poem. For the purposes of this study, it will
serve the reader simply to remember that they were evil faeries. The traveler in
the tale now watches the third O'Byrne as he digs, knowing that he will also die
upon finding the treasure, but that the spell will be broken and his family will
be made rich forever, as they had been in pagan times.65

Earlier in the same collection, we find another tale titled “Miraculous
Creatures.” It describes the “wizard creatures” of the realm of Arthur and
similar legends—the white stag and the evil pig. These concepts are important
as we search for the source of Bax’s pseudonym, even though they are only
briefly mentioned in the context of the tale, because the evil pig was known for
having slain Diarmuid, yet another variation of the name we’ve seen evolving
into Dermot. The actual tale of Diarmuid is not told within Yeats’s collection,
but it would have been easy enough for an inquisitive Bax to discover that story
elsewhere. A name associated with legend and fantasy, especially were he to
have already landed upon it in some general way, certainly would have
delighted him.

There exists still more evidence for a Yeatsian inspiration for the name,
evidence again provided by Lewis Foreman. For this, it is necessary to look
again at the highly influential meeting of Bax and Elgar in 1901. Foreman
states that a motive used by Bax in the tone poem In the Faery Hills had

65 Ibid., p. 86-87.
originally come from incidental music that Elgar was working on around the
time of that meeting. The work was called *Grania and Diarmid*, and was for a
play written by Yeats and George Moore.66 These are, of course, the same
Diarmuid and Grainne that Foreman mentions in his theory of the Dermot
O’Byrne pseudonym in connection with burial mounds.

One more shred of evidence in the case for Yeats as Bax’s source can
also be taken from Foreman’s text. In the latter months of 1908, Bax was
working on an extended orchestral piece – a tone poem – and had progressed
very quickly through the composition and scoring. Thomas Beecham had even
programmed the work for a concert the following April. The piece was called *Into
the Twilight* after the Yeats poem of the same name.67 The poem, perhaps not so
coincidentally, closes “The Celtic Twilight.” It seems very unlikely that Bax
would have been unfamiliar with the O’Byrne story from earlier in the same
collection.

The timeline of events established by this theory seems to make sense.
Yeats published “The Celtic Twilight” in 1893. We know that Bax met Elgar in
1901, around the time when Elgar was composing his incidental music for
Yeats’s play. The following year was when Bax found the Yeats poem “The
Wanderings of Oisin,” after which he has said that, “the Celt within me stood
revealed.” He made his first trip to Ireland in 1903 and was there for more than
a year, using the first variation of “Dermot” in letters by the latter part of that
year. Finally, we can see that the name continued to evolve for him, through his
work on the Yeats-based tone poem in 1908, until, in 1909, he was using the

66 Foreman, p. 61.
67 Ibid., p. 56.
full name Dermot O’Byrne. The following year saw this pseudonym come to the fore as he sought an escape from his broken heart while in St. Petersburg and then in Lubny.

We know that Bax was almost compulsive in his reading. He appreciated fantasy and even in later life was, in his own words, “a tireless hunter of dreams.” Bax regularly saw his life in terms of fantasy and escape, and tales such as those found in “The Celtic Twilight,” rooted in an area to which he found himself escaping more and more regularly over the course of his life, are quite suited to his nature. Whether this theory can be proven as fact or not, the substantial amount of circumstantial evidence deserves more consideration than Foreman gives it in determining that Dermot O’Byrne “may well have been” inspired by place names near Glencolumcille.

While considering Yeats and his influence upon Bax, it is interesting to examine the similarities and contrasts of these two men. There is, of course, the obvious interest in Celtic tradition, though for Yeats this was a natural thing and for Bax something he discovered almost at adulthood. Both men became universalized, Bax in his music and Yeats in his poetry, when they moved away from purely Celtic themes. Both had beautiful, if eccentric, women in their lives who proved to be the “femme fatales” for their inspiration.68 On the other hand, Bax was far less a public figure than Yeats, who served as a senator in the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1928. Bax was much more private. He never took

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68 Pirie, “More Than a Brazen Romantic,” p. 34.
students in composition, and he generally stayed away from performing on the piano once he truly began to establish himself as a composer.69

Back in London in the summer of 1910, the events of his Russian adventure seemed like a bizarre dream. He had come home in emotional agony, having suffered the mortification of personally witnessing the betrothal of the girl he had so idolized. Still afflicted with the unhappiness of his unfulfilled longings, he attempted to comfort himself with the notion that the experience would profit him artistically.70 The return to his home at Ivy Bank in the West End of London, which in the past had always been a refuge for Bax, instead had provided more upheaval. While he’d been away, the family had decided to sell the estate, due mostly to structural problems. They did not move to 7 Cavendish Square until February of 1911, but the ensuing months were hectic and unsettled, especially for a young man in need of comforting and consistency. Further still, his very good friend Godwin Baynes had become engaged, and later in the year his brother Clifford impulsively married, as well.71 Arnold found his normal patterns of life considerably disturbed by these changes.

Throwing himself into his work, Bax spent time on the First Piano Sonata and an early version of the First Violin Sonata. Further, there was the preparation and inspection of parts for Woods’ presentation of In the Faery Hills. All of this activity, however, proved insufficient in easing his troubled

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69 Beechey, p. 348.
70 Scott-Sutherland, p. 28.
71 Foreman, p. 73.
heart. Deprived of the brother with whom he had shared all his thoughts for so much of his life, he began to look elsewhere.

Shortly before his departure for Russia, Bax had met a young girl whom he now saw as quite the opposite of Loubya. The daughter of the esteemed Spanish concert pianist Carlos Sobrino and his German wife, who were among the Bax family’s circle of friends, Elsa – or Elsita, as she liked to be called – became the focus of Arnold’s attention. She was dark, attractive, warm-hearted, and of a generous nature, which very much attracted him. They had even begun a friendship before he went to Russia, with Elsa singing some of Arnold’s songs. Bax turned to her for sympathy and understanding, which she happily provided. Elsa spent Christmas of 1910 with the Bax family, during which time they became engaged. Marriage followed quickly, in part due to the pending move from Ivy Bank, with the ceremony taking place on January 28, 1911, at the Marylebone Registry Office. Arnold’s father provided a house for the couple in Chester Terrace, Regents Park, following them into the city in February.

It did not take long for the joys of domestic bliss to fade for Bax. The escapist aspect of his personality, which had earlier manifested in his interest in Celtic fantasy and then in the establishment of his pseudonym, now caused a wanderlust that saw the family move to Rathgar, on the outskirts of Dublin, before the end of 1911. Conveniently, their new home in a rented villa was near to George Russell. Two children were born during this time in Rathgar, Dermot Colum on January 11, 1912, and Maeve Astrid on January 11, 1913,

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72 Scott-Sutherland, p. 30.
73 Foreman, p. 83.
74 Scott-Sutherland, p. 31.
exactly one year apart. In spite of visits by Clifford and the friendship of Dublin neighbors, Bax remained restless, and in late 1913 moved the family back to England, first to a house in Station Road, Marlowe, and then in November of 1915 to another new residence in Riversleigh.

Obviously, many things were changing in the period around 1914. It was on August 4 of that year that Great Britain entered World War I. Bax spent the first few days of the war in Cornwall, where he stayed on holiday with Bevis Ellis. The matter of enlistment was discussed at length, and Bax describes the morning that he discovered Ellis’s departure for the recruiting office, “without a word of farewell.” As Bax tells it, the “last time I saw him he was wearing the red and gold tabs of a staff officer,” and finally, he describes what was certainly a heart-wrenching event. “In the middle of the war I received a signed photograph of him from his sister. There was no letter of explanation, but I guessed the worst. He had been killed by an explosion in the trenches somewhere in France, and no trace of his body was ever found.”

Other friendships suffered because of the war, as well. Arthur Alexander left England in late July to return to New Zealand. This particularly upset Bax, as he had placed Alexander in high regard both as a friend and as a musical companion. The pair had often played piano duets together, something that Bax gave up after Alexander’s departure “because nobody will do after yourself for that form.” Godwin Baynes seems to have had a far more passionate attitude toward the war, joining the RAMC and becoming a major. He and Bax drifted

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75 Bax, p. 94.
76 Ibid.
77 Foreman, p. 124.
apart over the course of the war, as Bax remained uninterested in the conflict. It was only after the war was over that Clifford Bax was able to bring the two former friends back together again.\textsuperscript{78}

While he did consider enlisting, Bax instead chose to concentrate on his creative work, and also maintained an active social life. Into that life came a young woman who was to influence him through the rest of his years. Her name was Harriet Cohen (1895-1967).

The first account we have from Bax on the meeting of Cohen is taken from his autobiography. In the midst of describing the premiere of his Christmas Eve on the Mountains at Queen’s Hall, the Royal Academy of Music, he writes “Good heavens! The girl I met at the picnic in the Dublin Mountains last spring. Yes, of course, she told me she was a piano student at the R.A.M. But it is strange to see this elfin child here, and for a moment I forget my surroundings....”\textsuperscript{79} Later, he tells of her rapt attention to his music, writing, “Out of the corner of my eye I notice that the little black-haired student is leaning forward, her lips parted a little... I think she wants to make me look at her, to call upon me to notice her interest in my work.”\textsuperscript{80} Harriet’s own account is similar, though she apparently didn’t know that Arnold had recognized her from a previous meeting. “Arnold Bax told me that I must have been about fifteen when he first set eyes on me in the concert hall of the Academy. He said I was too busy making faces at members of the orchestra to notice when he came in with Mr. Corder.” She further writes that Corder had told her of Bax asking

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 125.
\textsuperscript{79} Bax, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp. 85-86.
in regard to her, and that he had recommended her to play his new piano works.⁸¹ All of this would have taken place on March 4th, 1913.

As an aside, it might be worth noting that the events of the evening were not universally positive. The actual performance seems not to have been a great success. Bax describes seeing some of the newspaper critics, telling the reader, “In the stalls I detect Robinson (of the Wire) in animated conversation behind the back of his hand with one of the directors... Near at hand I am aware of Stockton (of the Daily Yell) regarding me with a mildly injured expression, and observe Hansard a few seats away at the back scrawl something on the back of his programme and show it to another newspaper man at his side, who nods grimly with compressed lips.”⁸² H.C. Colles, from The Times, was not terribly kind in his review, either. He commented that Bax must have “returned from his wandering on the mountains and got to his music-paper before his thought was sufficiently cleared.”⁸³

By the summer of 1913, Cohen had become part of the circle of friends that included the Baxes, Corders, Antoniettis, and Farjeons. She seems to have believed that it was not until January of 1915, though, that Bax genuinely paid her any attention. “I think the first time Arnold took any real notice of me was when I appeared at the Corders at a tea party early one January wearing a

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⁸² Bax, pp. 87-88.
single daffodil as my only decoration. That meeting resulted in the piano piece ‘The Maiden with the Daffodil.’ A little poem came with it.”  

It was the practice in this circle of friends that everyone received a nickname. Corder suggested that Harriet be known as Natasha, but Bax objected strongly to this name. It had been his pet name for the Ukrainian girl, Loubya, and this wound had obviously not yet healed completely. Instead, Bax recommended the name “Tania,” and it was that name by which she was known to intimate friends and family for the rest of her life. Another result of this naming was that it placed Cohen within Bax’s inner circle, and so she replaced Myra Hess as the primary recipient and occasional dedicatee of all of his piano works.

Bax never enlisted for service during the war, and as he was not conscripted, he outwardly maintained a fairly normal life. By 1916, his interest in Cohen was out in the open, but Elsa appeared unwilling to accept or realize the seriousness of the situation. With a traditional view that marriage was sacred and that nothing could break so holy a promise, she continued to live as if there was nothing wrong. Indeed, she felt that Bax had once acted passionately toward her, and his change of behavior was simply a circumstance of his moody personality.

1916 proved to be an important year to Bax. Having met and sympathized with some of the most important Irish writers of the time, it seemed to Molly Colum that Bax should meet Padraig Pearse. Pearse (1879-1916) is known as the preeminent champion of his day for the restoration of the

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84 Cohen, p. 30.
85 Foreman, p. 138.
Gaelic language and its rich cultural history to the Irish people. He was co-author of the proclamation for the Provisional Government of the Republic of Ireland, which he read from the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin. As Bax tells us in his autobiography, Molly Colum arranged for the two to meet at a small gathering. Pearse was generally not a partygoer, and so it was considered a substantial success that he agreed to attend. Bax charmed him by speaking in detail about Pearse’s native Connemara, which he had visited several times. As Pearse’s attention was turned elsewhere at one point, Colum informed Bax that, “Pearse wants to die for Ireland, you know. It has been the ideal of his whole life.”

Bax writes that Pearse told Colum at the end of the evening that, “I think your friend Arnold Bax may be one of us. I should like to see more of him.” The Easter Uprising took place shortly after this meeting, however, and Pearse, along with the six other signatories of the proclamation were executed for their efforts to subvert the British Government and establish a free Ireland. Recalling his discovery of the Uprising, Bax says that he murmured to himself, “I know that Pearse is in this!”

To this point, Bax had been immature in matters of his personal life, even though he was now in his thirties with a wife and two children. Even the Great War had failed to bring him out of his prolonged adolescence. Lewis Foreman writes that this immaturity is the key to much of Bax’s best music, all written in this general time period. The death of Padraig Pearse acted as a catalyst on Bax’s creative inspiration, and he wrote a number of musical and

86 Bax, p. 105.
87 Ibid., p. 106.
literary works while consumed by the emotion of the incident. The most famous of these works is a poem, under the name Dermot O’Byrne, of course, called *A Dublin Ballad*. The poem, banned by the British censor, was Bax’s attempt to demonstrate himself as a master of rhetoric while also working out his own intense emotions.\(^{88}\) Foreman quotes an illustrative passage:

> “O write it up above your hearth
> And troll it out to sun and moon,
> To all true Irishmen on earth
> Arrest and death come later or soon.”

Cohen tells of this work and of Yeats’s reaction to it, claiming that, “W.B. Yeats, speaking of the poem... said that it was by far the finest poem to come out of the 1916 Rebellion.”\(^{89}\) Bax seems to have lost some of his feeling for poetry on the subject of Ireland in later years. He turned toward music for such expression, and even in that tended to reject the notion of being a Celtic-influenced composer. “’The Garden of Fand’ is the last of my Irish music,” Cohen quotes him as having said in the midst of a complaint that the critics always spoke of a Celtic Twilight in their discussions of his music. This may have been a matter of the composer protesting too much, however. He apparently had no misgivings in recounting his youthful ramblings through rural Ireland, his love of the Celtic culture, and his “completely Gaelicised mind” in the midst of a BBC broadcast in his later years. This event, taking place on May 6\(^{th}\), 1949, was part of a radio broadcast series entitled “British Composers.” Bax presented a disarmingly honest and self-effacing portrait of himself, explaining, among other things, how his wanderings through Ireland

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\(^{88}\) Foreman, pp. 138-139.
\(^{89}\) Cohen, p. 37.
had purged the “alien elements” of the central European Wagner and Strauss, allowing him to write “using figures of a definitely Celtic curve.”

We also have the short score of an orchestral tone poem titled *In Memoriam – Pádraig Pearse*, which was never published. Other, less inflammatory works followed the August 1916 completion of this piece. They included the 1917 *Symphonic Variations* and two chamber works titled *In Memoriam (An Irish Elegy)* and *Elegiac Trio*. A number of smaller works also show the marks of the composer’s grief. Though Bax had not known Pearse well at all, the effects of the tragedy were long lasting. Music from *In Memoriam – Pádraig Pearse* can be found incorporated into the 1948 score for David Lean’s quintessentially English film *Oliver Twist*. Pearse became a symbol of the nightmare Bax experienced in sympathy with his Gaelic friends.

Harriet Cohen remained Bax’s distraction from the events of the real world, the “adolescent dream” that relieved his suffering during the time of the Great War. While it is true that Bax was a non-combatant, he did indeed suffer because of the war. He lost cricketing companion A.J. Waugh in 1915. John Eden, a friend who had once been his father’s gardener, was killed in 1916. Also lost that year were Bevis Ellis, Edward Thomas and George Butterworth, and boyhood friend Lynn Hartley died in 1918. Balfour Gardiner enlisted in 1916, and both Vaughan Williams and Holst went to France. Even Clifford Bax became involved in the war as a censor. From all of this, Bax looked to Cohen, rather than his wife, for comfort. By 1917, she had taken precedence over

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everyone and everything in his life. There were no social or financial pains for Bax, and in the end, he spent the war years as he spent all of his life, doing exactly as he wanted to do.\textsuperscript{92}

The first major orchestral work of Bax’s to which Harriet Cohen is attached is the \textit{Symphonic Variations} for piano and orchestra, composed in the latter part of 1916 and completed in short score by February of the following year. The full score is undated, though Bax penciled in a note at the foot of page 170 that, “Maroon announces signing of Armistice 11 A.M. Nov. 11\textsuperscript{th} 1918.” A line to a note in the piano part indicates what he was writing as the announcement was made.\textsuperscript{93} The piece is in six movements, all of which bear a descriptive title, and in it Bax worked through both general feelings toward love and war, and more specific feelings for Ireland and Cohen. The short score contains a dedication, “To Miss Harriet Cohen,” while the full score has nothing in Bax’s hand. “For Harriet Cohen” appears in her hand on the full score manuscript and then again in the copyist’s version of the score.

The \textit{Symphonic Variations} is not a work without problems. Perhaps chief among them is Bax’s own abilities as a pianist. He seems to have conceived the piece, as he did much of his early piano music, without regard for technical difficulty or for the limitations of the pianists for whom the music was written. Cohen gave the premiere with Henry Wood and the Queen’s Hall Orchestra at Queen’s Hall on November 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1920. The pianist reports great success, saying in a letter to Colin Scott-Sutherland from 1962 that, “There was a mighty success at the concert: I think we had about twelve recalls. All the composers,\textsuperscript{92, 93}

\textsuperscript{92} Foreman, pp. 141-142.
\textsuperscript{93} Parlett, p. 136.
young and old, were there.\textsuperscript{94} From a concert at the Promenade on October 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1922, Arnold Bennett reported in his diary that Cohen “gave an astonishing performance [of this work] and was recalled seven times. Such an ovation I have never before seen at a Prom.”\textsuperscript{95} Yet Bax had been persuaded to make a number of cuts in the score between the premiere and the Proms Concert, as the critics were not so universally pleased by the performance, and there remain questions as to Cohen’s ability to carry off the technically difficult first variation. Further, Bax gave Cohen exclusive performance rights to the piece, which certainly contributed to its neglect over time. Yet another problem, one thought to be insurmountable for years, existed. The Germans bombed Cohen’s home in the Blitz, and what was thought to be the only existing score was partially destroyed. It was not until the early 1960s that a complete set of parts was discovered, and the publishers Chappell & Co. were able to reconstruct the lost section of the score.\textsuperscript{96}

Shortly after the composition of the \textit{Symphonic Variations}, Bax moved his family again, this time out of London into the country. From Beaconsfield, he wrote to Arthur Alexander a letter attempting to explain his feelings for Cohen, stating of their affair that, “It is the most important thing that has ever happened to me and made an unthinkable difference to life. For otherwise I should have stayed in Ireland most certainly, and whilst avoiding the war might have been mixed up in the rebellion. In fact, the whole of life has been altered..."

\textsuperscript{94} Scott-Sutherland, p. 50.  
\textsuperscript{95} Parlett, p. 137.  
\textsuperscript{96} Foreman, p. 145.
by this wonderful stray creature from the faery hills.” Alexander, like most of Bax’s friends, seems to have treated the affair with discretion and understanding.

Bax and Cohen spent more than six weeks together at Tintagel in North Cornwall in August and September of 1917. While there, he was able to escape thoughts of the decision he faced in regard to his wife and children versus Harriet. It was a very happy time for the couple, and an inspirational one for Bax both as a composer and as a poet. As Arnold Bax, he wrote the orchestral tone poem *Tintagel* during this vacation, and as Dermot O’Byrne he penned the poem “Tintagel Castle.” A thorough examination of this period, and of both works, will occur in the following chapters of this text. It is important here to consider, though, that the success Bax saw with *Tintagel* and with the works that followed directly after lies in marked contrast to the results the trip had on his personal life. By March of 1918, Arnold and Elsa had reached their final break. Charlotte Bax was devastated by the couple’s separation, and Harriet was completely unwelcome at Cavendish Square, where Elsa went with the children.

In June of 1918, Alfred Bax died, creating more chaos and stress in Arnold’s life. He eventually settled at 155 Fellows Road in Hampstead, where he was to reside until the onset of World War II. He began an extended project of orchestrating or revising recent works, including *Red Autumn*, *The Happy Forest*, *the Symphonic Variations*, and *Tintagel*, along with the two Violin

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97 Ibid., p. 148.
Sonatas and the First Piano Sonata. March of 1919 saw Bax and Cohen visiting Dublin, Queenstown and Rathgar, where they remained through most of April. A highlight of the trip was the time spent at the home of Maud Gonne in the company of George Russell and W. B. Yeats. There is a letter from Cohen to Arthur Alexander describing this part of the trip. In it, she writes, “... I’m afraid I’ve become an abject worshipper of Yeats’ poetry.”

Complications in Bax’s life involving women continued. By now, Harriet Cohen was a champion of his piano works, but she was not alone in this duty. Myra Hess remained very involved in performances of Bax’s music, and the composer found himself forced to define the territory of each pianist’s claim on his works. Certain pieces became available only to Myra, and others only to Harriet. This was not the only problem, however. Not long after the situation with the pianists was resolved, if indeed it was resolved, Bax found his old restlessness returning. In the early 1920s, he met Mary Gleaves, an Englishwoman 20 years his junior. For Bax, she had the benefit of not coming from the musical world, something suddenly important to him, and she also provided a nurturing mother figure, proving to be unerringly loyal and stable.

Foreman and others have observed that Bax sought in women a mixture of child-like innocence and wanton sexuality. He also seems to have looked to recreate his indulgent mother, and in Mary Gleaves he found a woman who would be his hearth and retreat from the demands of his public life. Bax continued his affair with Cohen, who remained unaware of Gleaves until 1948.

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98 Ibid., p. 163.
99 Ibid., p. 166.
100 Barns, np.
The artistic atmosphere changed at the end of World War I. Many composers, among them Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and certainly Bax, found that the audience that had been theirs for years was now looking to younger men with new ideas and new freedom of thought. Bax found also that his fondness for Dublin, with many of his friends either dead or moved away, had waned, and his spring visit in 1919 was his last until the troubles there ended in 1923. London captured his attention once again, and he returned to the city with Cohen, who was by this time known as his interpreter as well as his constant companion.

There is no doubt that Cohen possessed a strong personality with infectious enthusiasm. She tended to draw to her a diverse, interesting, and none too small society of individuals with whom Bax came to be involved. An autograph book, signed by those personalities as they attended musical gatherings at her home at Wyndham Place, includes the names George Bernard Shaw, Edmund Dulac, Constant Lambert, George Enesco, Arthur Rubinstein, John Ireland, and Zoltán Kodály, among many others.101 Widely respected both at home and abroad as a champion of British music, she received praise from such notables as Kodály, Janáček, Sibelius, and Bartók. As a highly receptive artist, Bax was influenced to one degree or another by each of these individuals, but it was an altogether different source from which the composer ultimately drew the inspiration to move to the next stage of his career.

At one of Cohen’s musical gatherings, or “serenades,” as she called them, Bax heard a recital by the Tudor Singers in which they performed William Scott-Sutherland, p. 55.
Byrd’s Five-part Mass. The emotional austerity, combined with the spirituality and ornate writing attracted Bax at once, as the melding of these elements seemed to provide for him the perfect sense of post-war expression. His already contrapuntal compositional style easily incorporated this new inspiration, and he launched into a series of choral works, the most important being the motet for unaccompanied double chorus *Mater Ora Filium*.\(^{102}\)

Bax had established himself as a composer with the premiere of *In the Faery Hills*, but the Symphonic Variations had confused his audience and his critics. Only a small number of piano works and songs were available through the publishers Ascherberg, Augener, and J. & W. Chester, and the composer’s characteristic resistance toward actively seeking performances complicated this fact. Still, by early in 1922, *The Garden of Fand, November Woods*, the Piano Quintet, the first String Quartet, and *Mater Ora Filium* all appeared in the catalogue of Murdoch Murdoch & Co.\(^{103}\) Several other works, including *Tintagel*, had received successful public performances, but Bax’s recognition was being hindered by the perceived complexity of his music, and by the sheer diversity of style found in those works. It was perhaps with this in mind that the Murdochs sponsored a program devoted exclusively to Bax’s music at Queen’s Hall on November 13, 1922.

As Lewis Foreman points out in his description of the concert, programs devoted entirely to the work of a living composer, and moreover one still under forty years of age, are unusual.\(^{104}\) The concert put on by the Murdochs was a

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\(^{102}\) Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., p. 60.

\(^{104}\) Foreman, p. 195.
lavish affair, mixing songs and solo piano works with orchestral music. Many of those previously associated with Bax performances were present, including Harriet Cohen, Lionel Tertis, and Eugene Goossens. The evening began with *The Garden of Fand*, which was followed by the songs “The Market Girl,” “I heard a Piper piping,” and “Green grow the Rashes, O” sung by John Coates with Bax accompanying. Cohen next played the Second Piano Sonata, and was followed by the Oriana Madrigal Society, who performed *Mater Ora Filium*. Tertis was soloist in the Phantasy for Viola Solo and Orchestra, and Coates and Bax returned for a set called *Four Traditional Songs of France*. Cohen next played three solo works, “A Hill Tune,” “Lullaby,” and “Burlesque,” before the Oriana group came back for a pair of carols, “Of a Rose I Sing” and “Now is the time of Christymas.” The program concluded with the orchestral arrangement of Bax’s piano work, *Mediterranean*. While this three-hour extravaganza served to display Bax’s many talents in their best light, it also, unfortunately, left the critics as bewildered as they had been previously as to exactly where the composer stood musically. Where was the proponent of the Celtic Twilight? Why was this composer of lush tone poems writing austere choral music? Was he a chamber composer or a symphonic storyteller? It seems that there were few critics who considered that Bax could be all of the above, and yet this concert still provided the momentum for Bax to become a leading, perhaps the leading composer of the day in England.

During this same period, Bax was beginning another facet of his compositional life as he undertook the writing of his First Symphony (1921-22).

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105 Ibid., p. 196. (Foreman presents a reproduction of the program using the entire page.)
Again, the public and the critics were confused, as this was an orchestral work unlike anything he had previously produced. This symphony is taut, sparing, and superbly, if rather gauntly, fashioned. The contrast between it and the lushly romantic recent tone poems, even the desolation of *November Woods*, is tremendous.\textsuperscript{106} After the gala performance at Queen’s Hall, concertgoers were filled with expectations for this new symphony. New British symphonies were very much of interest to the listening public at this time, and the shock of this premiere has been compared to that felt more than a decade later when Vaughan Williams’s Fourth Symphony was first performed.\textsuperscript{107} Receiving its first performance on December 4, 1922, with Albert Coates conducting, it followed only eleven months after Vaughan Williams’s *Pastoral Symphony* and was also of the same year as Bliss’s *Colour Symphony*.

Bax composed seven symphonies between 1921 and 1939, the set eventually standing as the main body of his musical output. Their reception and popularity during that period, and then their subsequent total neglect for two generations, is one of the curious mysteries of modern musical life in Great Britain and in lands where British music is considered of any consequence.\textsuperscript{108} The first three symphonies form a thematically linked group. The First is brutal and curt, while the Second is vast and tragic. Conflict ends, at least temporarily, in the almost divine peace of the Third Symphony. After this, the Fourth is an outburst of unburdened gaiety, and is followed by the beautiful and heroic Fifth. The Sixth is a head-on collision between beauty and brutality,

\textsuperscript{106} Pirie, “More Than a Brazen Romantic,” p. 34.
\textsuperscript{107} Foreman, p. 198.
\textsuperscript{108} Beechey, p. 359.
while all emotion seems to be spent before reaching the serene Seventh Symphony, his final work in this genre.\textsuperscript{109}

The interest that Bax had in the music of Sibelius grew throughout the 1920s, though it did not make itself known in any obvious way in his own scores until the next decade. There are letters from Bax to Cecil Gray and to Philip Heseltine in which he requests copies of the Finnish composer’s Fourth Symphony.\textsuperscript{110} This is notable in that the Fourth shares many of the qualities of Bax’s own First Symphony, with its more concise, austere, almost expressionistic nature. One wonders whether Bax had in mind to confirm his own musical direction by finding the same in a well-known composer whom he admired and respected. In any case, it took some time for Bax to work Sibelius into his compositional system, as his style through the end of the 1920s still owed more to the Russians than to the Finnish master.

Bax and Cohen, along with Balfour Gardiner, went to Stockholm at the end of June, 1932, just three months after the premiere of Bax’s Fourth Symphony in San Francisco in March of that year. Gardiner left the couple as they went on to Helsinki, where Bax for a second time was able to meet with Sibelius. Cohen describes the obvious pleasure Bax had in wandering the streets of Helsinki, which “rather brought to mind the turrets and towers of Scotland.”\textsuperscript{111} They decided to take a trip into the country to nearby Jarvenpaa, as Sibelius was unable to meet them in Helsinki for a few days. “Arnold and I had the gayest meeting with Sibelius at an outside restaurant sitting in the sun

\textsuperscript{109} Pirie, “The Unfashionable Generation,” p. 62.  
\textsuperscript{110} Foreman, p. 207.  
\textsuperscript{111} Cohen, p. 206.
where I took their photographs, together and separately. We laughed and ate and drank, and the two composers, who liked each other on sight, got on famously. I remember noting how their talk veered round continually to history – a subject in which they were both interested.” Other conversations that day included literature, art, and world politics, as the three moved from the restaurant to the Hotel Kemp, another of Sibelius’s regular haunts.\textsuperscript{112} Among the musicians discussed, Sibelius spoke of meeting Brahms, whom he thought was uninterested in young composers, and Mahler, whom he did not like at all. Both Bax and Sibelius spent considerable time on Beethoven, whom Sibelius said he loved and revered above all other composers.\textsuperscript{113}

Despite moments like this, Bax and Cohen were having increasing difficulty with their relationship. Always the more outgoing personality, Cohen appears to have attempted to dominate Bax, becoming possessive of his music, trying to organize his artistic life, and even attempting to forbid him to write for certain instruments. Most notable in the events of this conflict was Cohen’s insistence that the \textit{Symphonic Variations} not be published, but instead be held by her alone for her exclusive use. Bax complied, effectively contributing to the failure of his own work through lack of exposure, and almost contributing to the destruction of the only existing score when Cohen’s house was bombed in 1941.\textsuperscript{114}

Cohen’s health, never the most robust, began to deteriorate in the midst of their personal problems. She went to Switzerland to seek a cure for

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 207.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{114} Foreman, p. 206.
tuberculosis. The situation between Bax and Cohen grew so stressful for the composer that he at least considered suicide. Her autobiography makes no mention of Bax being with her, but it is from there that he wrote to his brother Clifford explaining his feelings. “Fundamentally I appreciate Tania as much as I ever did, but I cannot consent to being absorbed and consumed into the idea of a sick and egocentric mind,” he says at one point. He goes on, stating that, “I don’t see how I am going to escape from this coil – apart from shuffling off the mortal ditto (which is not my particular form of vanity and self-advertisement). I think I have rather a morbid sense of responsibility to other people... And yet I feel vaguely that I might have done something moderately good in art, if I had been really free – free from any kind of morbidity of conscience or responsibility.”115 Writing once again after Clifford’s response, Bax tells his brother at one point that, “… Tania is really very ill and a good deal worse than when we left England. But naturally she tears herself to tatters in these mad and sometimes frenzied glooms into which she falls. One has to steer the conversation all day long and one never knows what the next quarter of an hour may bring forth.”116

Professionally, Bax continued to find success, despite his reluctance to accept it. He received honorary doctorates from Oxford in 1934 and Durham in 1935 and around this same time he was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Gold Medal. The highest in this series of honors occurred on June 11, 1937, when Bax was knighted at Buckingham Palace. Yet he had felt for some time that his ability to communicate with the listener had diminished, and that

115 Ibid., pp. 219-220.
116 Ibid., p. 220.
it would soon lapse completely.\textsuperscript{117} As for the knighthood itself, Bax was apparently both surprised and quite reluctant to accept. His initial reaction was to refuse, making the excuses that he liked peace and quiet, that he hated being sought after, and that being known as Sir Arnold Bax would make it impossible for him to travel Europe “on the cheap.”\textsuperscript{118}

Eventually, Bax was convinced to accept the honor, his friends suggesting that it would mean recognition not only for him but also for Irish music in general. This was not the only part his friends had played in securing the knighthood. It appears that a concerted effort of string pulling had much to do with the honor. This effort was led in large part by violinist May Harrison, a family friend long associated with Bax’s violin music. In keeping with the difficulties between Bax and Cohen, however, it is interesting to see that Cohen devotes only one brief sentence to Bax’s knighthood. “Later in the year he was knighted,”\textsuperscript{119} was the extent of her discussion of the matter, despite the fact that she would have been present for the ceremony.

Throughout the 1930s, it became Bax’s habit to sketch his works in London, where he would sometimes stay with Cohen and other times take rooms at various hotels or hostelries, and then score the music elsewhere, most commonly in Morar, Inverness-shire, Scotland. These trips to Morar usually occurred soon after Christmas, as Bax was sure to spend the holiday with his mother and the family circle before departing.\textsuperscript{120} The annual pilgrimage to the west coast of Scotland by train along the west-coast line, also regularly included

\textsuperscript{117} Scott-Sutherland, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{118} Foreman, p. 307.
\textsuperscript{119} Cohen, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{120} Foreman, p. 290.
thecompanionshipofMaryGleaves. At Morar, avillageofjustafewhouses, aservice station, therailwaystation, and the Station Hotel, (now the Morar Hotel), Bax would relax, explore the countryside, and orchestrate his works away from the stress of his social and professional obligations.121While staying in the upstairs back bedroom No. 11, Bax could look directly out over the Atlantic, enjoying a view of whitesands on the edges of an almost fully enclosed bay leading out to the ocean towards Rhim and Eigg.122 It was also here where thecomposerwrotethehisautobiography, *FarewellMyYouth*, in 1940 and 1941, a time when his inspiration to compose was so slight that he produced no works of any consequence.

In the early years of World War II, Sir Henry Walford Davies died, vacating the post of Master of the King’s Musick. Much like the position of Poet Laureate, this station entailed few actual duties. Bax accepted the post on February 3, 1942, perhaps in part due to his appreciation of another former Master, that being Elgar. Still, even the minor responsibilities of the position, even as he earnestly endeavored to fulfill them, were uncomfortable for the composer. With much the same attitude as with the offer of knighthood, Bax complained of disliking publicity and the necessity of adhering to timetables. Ceremonial occasions made him self-conscious and nervous.123 While the honor brought several new commissions, it was also not without its critics, as many in the English musical world had expected Ralph Vaughan Williams to be awarded the post. Bax was quite hurt that the musical establishment at the RCM

122 Ibid., p. 71.
123 Scott-Sutherland, pp. 181-182.
seemed to resent his receiving the honor, even though such notables as Adrian Boult, John Ireland, and even Vaughan Williams had written letters of congratulations.\textsuperscript{124} Again, it seems that Harriet Cohen thought little of Bax’s recognition, as the only mention of it in her autobiography comes in relation to a work for piano and small orchestra called \textit{Morning Song} that he composed in celebration of the twenty-first birthday of Princess Elizabeth. The point of the passage has more to do with Cohen performing the work than with Bax as Master of the King’s Musick composing it.\textsuperscript{125}

From 1940 until his death, Bax lived in an apartment at the White Horse Hotel in Storrington, Sussex. The outward appearance of the White Horse was much like that of the Station Hotel in Morar, and it is likely that Bax considered that part of the charm of the place. To escape minor discomforts associated with lumbago and gout (something his brother Clifford suffered, as well), he traveled several times after the end of World War II to the warmer climate of Greece and the Mediterranean. Twice each year, he visited Ireland, where he acted as external examiner at the University of Cork and the National University of Ireland in Dublin. From 1946 to 1949, he was further involved in the fortunes of young Irish composers, lecturing through the Department of Education’s summer schools in music.\textsuperscript{126} He wrote a final work for Cohen, a Concerto for Left Hand, as she had damaged her right hand in a domestic accident. The work, and Cohen’s performances, were met with the same enthusiasm as had been given the \textit{Winter Legends} and the Symphonic

\textsuperscript{124} Foreman, p. 324.  
\textsuperscript{125} Cohen, p. 301.  
\textsuperscript{126} Scott-Sutherland, p. 185.
Variations, but now it was Bax’s health that was failing, and he cared less and less for composing and for hearing performances of his music.

In September of 1953, Bax was back in Dublin for the fall examinations. He confided to his host, a Dr. Larchet, that he felt tired and unwell, and that he would be unable to take part in any social gatherings. On September 29, Aloys Fleischman joined Bax and the recently arrived Cohen for a concert of Bax’s works scheduled to coincide with the National University of Ireland’s examinations. The principal work was the new Left Hand Concerto with Cohen as soloist. The final work was *The Garden of Fand*, which became the last piece of music the composer was ever to hear. Bax and Fleischman went on to Cork without Cohen, whom a chill had prevented from traveling. After the examinations there had concluded, Bax had a day-long outing in the country, a routine event on these trips upon which he insisted and enjoyed immensely. He spent part of the day looking out from the Old Head of Kinsale toward the sea, seemingly content and happy. Late in the day, though, he complained of being cold, and was quickly taken back to his room at the Fleischman’s home where he died of a pulmonary embolism shortly after 9:30 p.m. on October 3, 1953. He was interred at St. Finbarr’s Cemetery, Cork, on October 6. Most of his belongings were left to Cohen, who in turn donated a large number of items to Cork University under the condition that a memorial room be established as a proper tribute. Vaughan Williams opened the room on October 15, 1955.\(^{127}\) A series of anniversary recitals and lectures was established to take place on or around the same date, with an endowment from the Bax family. When Bax’s

\(^{127}\) Ibid., p. 189.
will was published, it was revealed that the remains of his estate were unexpectedly small, at £11,935 gross, but only £1,627 net. The money was divided between Cohen and Gleaves, while his musical legacy was left to his executors and trustees. Cohen was so angry about the will that her protests caused a seventeen-year delay in concluding all aspects of the settlement, but she did fight extremely hard at times for continued recognition of Bax the composer, and it cannot be said that she ever stopped loving him, despite her anger.

In the end, it can easily be seen that Bax had touched the hearts of many. Memorial descriptions attest to his charm and loyalty and keen wit, his shyness and generosity, his intelligence and sardonic humor, his creativity and musicianship. He was certainly not a man loved by everyone, but one deeply loved by those inclined to know and appreciate him.

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128 Foreman, pp. 360-361.
Photo courtesy of Jonathan Butler, of the English Heritage Photo Library.

Figure 2. The ruins of the castle at Tintagel spanning the shore, the isthmus, and the shore-side edge of the island
CHAPTER II

TINTAGEL: HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

The ruins of Tintagel Castle stand today on the rugged and wind-swept northern coast of Cornwall, having become a well-known tourist trap in the last seventy years or so. Tourism, based almost exclusively on the popularity of its legendary one-time resident and lord, is today in fact the main industry of the village, where until the 1920s the economy was built on agriculture and quarrying. One can visit the castle during the day, with the exception of holidays, year round. Staying even into the early evening hours is permitted during the summer months. The site is considered by many to be among the most romantic in all of Cornwall, with its dramatic views of the castle overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Considerable erosion has taken place over time, and the once proud structure is now split into two distinct sections. These consist of a landward side comprising the remains of the upper and lower wards perched precariously on the edge of the crumbling cliff, and the inner ward situated on a narrow ridge linking the island to the mainland.

Though little is known for certain of the history of the castle, Tintagel is most famous for its associations with the legendary King Arthur. The Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in the 12th century, tells of the palace belonging to Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, whose wife, Ygerna, had aroused the passions of King Uther Pendragon. In the ensuing dispute, Uther laid siege to the castle. In the voice of one of Uther’s soldiers, Geoffrey states that, “The castle is built high above the sea, which surrounds it on all sides, and there is
no other way in except that offered by a narrow isthmus of rock.”¹ Unable to breach the walls, Uther enlisted the assistance of the magician Merlin, who cast a spell making Uther appear as Gorlois. Thus, Uther slipped into the castle unopposed and was able to seduce Ygerna. The son born of this night was to become the young King Arthur.

Shortly after Geoffrey, Chrétien de Troyes, a poet of northern France who worked under the patronage of Marie, Countess of Champagne, from approximately 1160 to 1180, also wrote of Tintagel as an important location in Arthur’s life. According to Chrétien, Tintagel was one of the castles at which Arthur held court.² In the fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory retold the tale of Arthur, expanding greatly on the collected writings of past authors, and again naming Tintagel as the king’s birthplace and reasserting the importance of the site.

It is, of course, Malory’s telling of the tales of Arthur and his knights that is most commonly known to enthusiasts of the legends. More can be found involving Tintagel in the works of Malory than merely its status as the place of conception of the future King Arthur. In The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones, the first story is called “Isode the Fair.” This tale establishes Tristram as the nephew to King Marke, Lord of Cornwall and royal resident of Tintagel Castle. Tristram comes to defend his uncle’s kingdom from attack by Sir Marhalte of Ireland, and the two noblemen battle in single combat, during which Tristram is poisoned, but fights on to victory. In gratitude, the young princess Isode nurses

the knight back to health, and the two fall in love. King Marke thinks Tristram to be the greatest knight he has known, and Isode is commonly thought of as “the fairest lady and maydyn of the worlde.”

In the mid-19th century, Alfred Tennyson, the English Poet Laureate regarded by many as the chief representative of the Victorian Age of poetry, took up the subject of Arthur, using Malory as his main source material. He dealt with the subject first in the narrative poem the “Lady of Shalott” of 1832, and then in the later poems “Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere” and the “Morte d’Arthur” of 1842. His comprehensive narrative, *Idylls of the King*, comes from 1869, only four years after Richard Wagner’s music drama, *Tristan und Isolde*, which was premiered on June 10, 1865 in Munich.

Wagner’s tale differs from that of Malory’s. Influenced by the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Karl Ritter, Wagner has the couple meet on a voyage from Ireland to Cornwall, during which time Isolde develops feelings of both anger and love for Tristan. The second act takes place at King Marke’s royal fortress in Cornwall, where the couple has fallen in love after imbibing a potion both believe to be an elixir of death, which instead turns out to be an elixir of love. The location of these events is not specifically named in Wagner’s work, but any Englishman even passingly familiar with the legends of Arthur and his knights would have known Tintagel as the spot on which Marke’s fortress supposedly stood.

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The name of the island, and thus the castle, has come under considerable scrutiny. Much of the confusion comes from questions of exactly what language was used to name the place. Some scholars have assumed Norman French, though more recent agreement has it in the natural Cornish once spoken in the region. The first part of the name would originally have been *din* (alternately occurring as *tin*), which held dual meanings of *fortress* and *natural stronghold, or place resembling a fortress* in Cornish. The second part of the name seems to be the Cornish word *tagell* – pieced together from Welsh and Breton sources – meaning *choke* or *constriction*. That leaves the complete word Tintagel to translate as “Fortress of the Constriction,” an apt description of the geography of this location, with the thin neck leading to the island just offshore.⁵

Archaeological excavation has unearthed a stone bearing a sixth-century inscription resembling the name Arthur at the site of Tintagel Castle. This supports other findings by Ralegh Radford in the 1930s, including numerous pieces of imported pottery from the Mediterranean, which suggest a large military stronghold having existed on the island at that time.⁶ Little else exists today from that stronghold, however, and the castle remains we can see at this time come from later construction. Prince Richard, Earl of Cornwall, built the majority of Tintagel Castle in the 1230s. It is believed, though, that this castle was constructed over an earlier keep built by Earl Reginald in the mid-1100s. Interestingly, Reginald was brother to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s patron, Robert,

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⁶ Ibid., p. 93.
Earl of Gloucester. This leaves open to debate the possibility that Geoffrey included Tintagel in his history simply to win Royal favor. Modern opinion seems to suggest that it is more likely that Reginald built the castle to claim the prestige garnered from Geoffrey’s book. It is, of course, Richard’s castle of which we have standing remains today.

How interesting it is that Geoffrey, in the 12th century, was able to determine the importance of the site and give Arthur a place of beginning worthy of him, despite there being no castle in existence at the time of his writing. There was, in fact, no real evidence of the importance of the spot in the fifth and sixth centuries at the time of Geoffrey’s writing, and none existed until the early part of the twentieth century. Even if there is then nothing to imply the residency of Gorlois and Ygerna, we can be sure today that the stronghold at Tintagel was home to a fair-sized population, potentially home for at least part of the year to a king.

Thus we understand the potential for inspiration to be found on the site. When Bax and his mistress, Harriet Cohen, went to spend six weeks in the village of Tintagel in the late summer of 1917, the legends had been fully developed and were known to all who visited. Bax, still enamored of legend and fantasy and feeling the need of escape from his domestic responsibilities and troubles, would have been well aware of the story of Arthur, and had probably read at least Tennyson’s version, and likely the earlier work of Malory.

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8 Bax set Tennyson’s “The Splendour Falls” for voice and piano in 1917, suggesting that he could reasonably be expected to have read *Idylls of the King* at some point before his trip to Cornwall in September of that year.
Moreover, as a student of the works of Wagner, he would have had an even
greater romantic attachment to the castle and the surrounding area. While the
castle became the symbolic backdrop of his time there with Harriet, it is not too
large a leap to suggest that he might have recognized the irony of staging his
affair at the site of the famous, magically-arranged affair of Uther and Ygerna,
and he most certainly would have appreciated the romance of the story of
Tristan and Isolde, with ties both literary and musical. Tintagel became for Bax
the inspiration not only for a symphonic poem, but also for a one-page verse
poem written as Dermot O’Byrne.

The time spent in North Cornwall was an escape not only for Bax, but for
Cohen, as well. Unfortunately, part of that escape appears to have been from
the truth. Cohen led both friends and historians to believe that she and Bax
had made the trip to Tintagel together, and that they had spent the entire six
weeks that way. She specifically tells of how one week of the vacation together
was passed in the town of Trevose, just a few miles away from Tintagel. There
they stayed with a Mrs. Reynolds, who apparently was sympathetic to the
couple’s plight. Cohen wrote to Arthur Alexander, sad for their impending
return to London, and telling of how it had “been so free here” in Cornwall. She
describes Mrs. Reynolds, stating that, “she understands about us – and loathes
the stultifying, poisonous conventions by which people live their lives.”9 Letters
from Bax to Alexander also suggested that the two had traveled together
without others.

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From the newly-published third edition of Lewis Foreman’s biography on the composer, we learn that there is more to the story than previously thought. In 1999, Cohen’s collection of her own and Bax’s letters was made available for research by the British Library. Cohen went to Tintagel alone for a holiday for the last two weeks of August 1917. She proceeded to barrage Bax with letters in an attempt to get him to join her. On September 6, Bax arrived at Tintagel, having brought his wife and children, as well as a few family friends, with him, and the lovers continued to communicate largely by letter. Bax and Cohen’s time together was thus mostly made up of stolen moments and carefully scheduled meetings on every second day or so.

For his part, the composition of Tintagel was for Bax an opportunity to revel in his own passions as much as it was an evocation of the land and seascape of the legendary spot. As he composed the tone-poem, Bax (as Dermot O’Byrne) also wrote a short verse poem entitled “Tintagel Castle.” He sent this poem to Cohen with one of his letters as the two continued to write back and forth over the time spent in Cornwall. Here can be found some of the more intimate emotions he must have felt for Cohen at this time. It is important to note, however, that Bax left little direct commentary on the vacation. Outside of the newly-released letters in the Cohen collection, there are only the brief remarks made in the letters to Alexander. This is particularly unusual considering Bax’s usual habit of putting highly revealing thoughts onto paper to share with his dearest friends.

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Tintagel was not Bax’s first foray into the legends of Arthur, of Arthur’s knight Tristan, and of Tristan’s love for Isolde. Before Tintagel came another tone-poem, The Garden of Fand. In this work, we find many of the same elements of inspiration and content as in the slightly later composition, so it is important to examine this work first.

The Garden of Fand was composed in 1913 in Dublin, but not orchestrated until the end of 1915, with completion of that task occurring in London in January or February of 1916. Parlett cites passages in two letters relevant to this point. In October of 1915, Bax wrote to Arthur Alexander, saying, “I am now going gently crazy in an attempt to orchestrate the ‘Garden of Fand’.” Later, he wrote to Anne Crowley that, “I can’t remember any work connected with it at all except the orchestration... I remember feeling how almost uncanny it was; I did it partly in Dublin and partly in London but there was no break in the continuity.”¹¹ For Bax, this work was an unusual struggle. It was standard practice for him to compose orchestral works with the orchestration fully in mind as he wrote the short scores, thus rendering the orchestration mere busywork. In Fand, however, he achieved a significant advancement in his technique, and his struggle seems the obvious reason for the delay between composition and orchestration.¹²

As we see in Tintagel, The Garden of Fand was conceived at a height of emotional passion. He describes in a letter to a friend that he “wept in his Dublin room” as he composed the theme for the central section. Foreman points

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out that a grown man of thirty years does not weep at the composition of a
tune, no matter how beautiful, unless there is an extra-musical association. In
Bax’s case, that association was most certainly female. Surely a common
inspiration resulting in a similarly evocative creation deserves a certain level of
recognition. As Fand marks what can be called the climax of the composer’s
first maturity, we have it to consider as both a foreshadowing and as a model of
many aspects of what we will find in Tintagel just a brief time later.

Thus far, we have found the superficial connection between the two
scores of their setting, Tintagel being placed at the castle and overlooking the
sea, and Fand actually being the sea beyond the castle and shore. We have
further illustrated the emotionally romantic inspiration that a woman (very
likely Harriet Cohen in both cases) provided the composer. A more concrete
connection still may be found in the mystical, pantheistic leanings of Bax’s
personal philosophy. Bax believed strongly in the juxtaposed and conflicting
aspects of the forces of Nature. This conflict of elements brings to his scores
pages of jagged torment that ultimately dissolve into more pages of tranquil
loveliness. There was no stronger mystical affinity for Bax in this pantheism
than with the sea. The sea was constantly the subject of a strange fascination
for Bax, and he often vacationed in places near the water. Pages of his
notebooks are covered with oceanographic data, noted in meticulous detail. We
will discover the importance of the sea to the score of Tintagel shortly, but as we

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13 Ibid., p. 110.
The Garden of Fand, the most important thing we can know is that the sea is Fand’s magic garden.\textsuperscript{15}

The program note Bax assigned to \textit{Fand} reads as follows...

The Garden of Fand is the sea. The ancient Saga called ‘The sick-bed of Cuchulain’ tells how that hero (the Achilles of the Gael) was lured away from the world of deeds and battles by the Lady Fand, daughter of Manannan, lord of the ocean; and how in the time of his country’s direst need he forgot all but the enchantments of an immortal woman. The tale goes on to relate the Cuchulain’s wife, Emer, pursued him to that wonder-land and pleaded with the goddess for her husband’s return. Then, with one of those touches of modern romanticism which are continually occurring in the Irish pagan tales, the Saga ends with Fand’s pitying renunciation of her human love, and we read that Manannan shook his ‘Cloak of Forgetfulness’ between Cuchulain and Fand, that the memory of each might be utterly blotted out from the mind of the other.

This tone-poem has no special relation to the events of the above legend. In the earlier portion of the work the composer seeks to create the atmosphere of an enchanted Atlantic completely calm beneath the spell of the Other World. Upon its surface floats a small ship adventuring towards the sunset from the shores of Eirinn, as St. Brendan and the sons of O’Corra are said to have sailed in later times. The little craft is borne on beneath a sky of pearl and amethyst until on the crest of an immense slowly surging wave it is tossed on to the shore of Fand’s miraculous island. Here is unhuman revelry unceasing between the ends of time, and the voyagers are caught away, resisting, into the maze of the dance. A pause comes, and Fand sings her song of immortal love enchaining the hearts of her hearers for ever. The dancing and feasting begin again, and, finally, the sea rising suddenly overwhelms the whole island, the immortals riding in rapture on the green and golden waves, and laughing carelessly amidst the foam at the fate of the over-rash mortals lost in the depths. Twilight falls, the sea subsides, and Fand’s garden fades out of sight.\textsuperscript{16}

Peter Pirie notes that Julius Harrison first put forth the notion that Bax’s music was “non-sensuous,” and suggests that this could not be further from the truth. He claims that several other writers have followed this description without reasonable consideration, piously regurgitating what seems to be a thoughtful review by Harrison. Speaking of \textit{The Garden of Fand}, Pirie states that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] Ibid.
\item[16] Parlett, p. 119.
\end{footnotes}
the piece is “not only the most sensuously written orchestral music by an
Englishman, it is explicitly erotic.” He goes on, noting that, “the title should be
enough for any Freudian, but when we consider that the garden of Fand is also
the sea, that Fand lured Cuchalain from war to ‘the arms of an immortal
woman,’ and that the poem itself describes the seduction of sailors by Fand’s
women, who are then sunk in the midst of the sea,” the idea of the music
lacking a sensuous quality, “becomes almost ridiculous.”17

Bax claimed that this work was the last of his Irish music, though critics
and analysts disagreed. Certainly this tale of Irish sailors and their fatal
meeting with the supernatural was of Celtic origin. It would seem obvious,
though, that Bax had not completely outgrown his Irish influences, as the story
of Tristan and Isolde has the young knight retrieving the fair maiden from
Ireland at its very heart, an aspect of which the composer would have been fully
aware.

*The Garden of Fand* was premiered on October 29, 1920, at Orchestra
Hall in Chicago by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Frederick Stock
conducting. The British premiere was with the British Symphony Orchestra at
Kingsway Hall, Adrian Boult conducting, on December 11 of the same year. In a
short interview with Eamonn Andrews broadcast on Irish radio in 1947, Bax
cited this work as his favorite of his own compositions, and it was the last piece
of his own music that he heard, as *Fand* was used to close a concert in Dublin
just four days before the composer’s death.18

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18 Parlett, p. 120.
The score to *The Garden of Fand* might be seen as the first fully crystallized example of a mature Bax orchestral work. We find here not only the very full scoring, but also the contrapuntal elaborations on what is otherwise a harmonically conceived work. The music is presented in three or four separate bands of ideas and orchestral colors, each moving against the others. Within each of these broad bands of sound there are further examples of contrapuntal movement, the overall effect being kaleidoscopic. Finally, if any section is rehearsed individually, it will exhibit a remarkable musical sense on its own.\(^{19}\)

In *Fand*, Bax builds and grows his piece not through forward momentum or even through the development of themes, but instead by successive layers of color and texture. This will soon be seen again in *Tintagel*.

The connections so far cited between *The Garden of Fand* and *Tintagel* are not the only links between the works, as there was another premiere relevant to the discussion. After the great success of Frederick Ashton’s first ballet with the New York City Ballet (*Illuminations*) in 1950, the company immediately attempted to arrange for the distinguished British choreographer to return for a second collaboration. Commitments with the Sadler’s Wells Ballet prevented such a return for two years, but this time was spent in part determining what story would be told. Ashton wanted to create a modern treatment of the tale of Tristan and Isolde.

Ashton and costume designer Cecil Beaton went to Tintagel to observe the ruined castle, and Ashton decided that he wanted to use a score from Arnold Bax. Originally, this was to be a little-known work called *Iseult at* 

\(^{19}\) Foreman, p. 113.
Tintagel, which had been written in 1915. Ultimately, it was decided that this music was too short to fit Ashton’s requirements, and Bax suggested an alternative. That work was The Garden of Fand.\textsuperscript{20} The ballet, though, was called Picnic at Tintagel. The premiere with the New York City Ballet took place at the New York Center on February 28, 1952. In the New York Herald Tribune, Walter Terry said that, “Picnic at Tintagel – musically, pictorially, choreographically, dramatically,” was a “theatre piece of which the New York City Ballet may be justly proud.” The same troupe traveled to the Edinburgh Festival in August of that year, where the New York Times reported that the ballet was, “swift, exciting and dramatic, and is likely to occupy a permanent place in British ballet.”\textsuperscript{21}

The ballet recalls the story of Tristan and Isolde, but it is set in 1916, the year The Garden of Fand was completed. The place is, of course, Tintagel. The first scene introduces the castle’s caretaker, and then a group of tourists arriving in what is called a motoring party. Two of the tourists are man and wife. Another man is apparently the wife’s lover. As the married couple leaves to tour the castle, their servants lay out the blankets and baskets for the picnic. A bit later, through some magic of the caretaker involving a bottle of wine, the picnickers are transformed into the characters of the old legend of King Mark, Tristan, and Isolde, with the husband being King Mark, the second man being Tristan, and the wife taking the role of Isolde. In the second scene, as in the legend, our transformed King Mark discovers the infidelity of his wife and

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
trusted friend, but as the two men duel with swords, Isolde is stabbed accidentally, and then Tristan is mortally wounded. The third scene returns to the more modern time, with the lovers about to drink the same wine that had transformed them previously. The husband pushes his friend away from his wife, now knowing of their affair. As the stage darkens, the caretaker comes forward holding the gleaming swords of Tristan’s mortal combat for Isolde. The curtain falls to the same music that had begun the ballet, suggesting that all this might happen again to other lovers.\textsuperscript{22}

Bax has been described as an artist of extreme nervous sensibility, whose day-to-day life irritated him, made him frantic, quick, touchy, perverse, and even intricately malicious in his power of inventing refinement after refinement of exquisite tonal tension. Yet, beneath the almost agonizingly nervous appeal of his restless music, it is said that he has a deep, satisfying supply of intellectual awareness, a combination of characteristics much like that of Berlioz.\textsuperscript{23} The Celtic tradition became the vehicle by which Bax contained his emotional urges, perhaps allowing him to be detached enough so that his musical genius could maintain its form. Thus we see the two sides – the duality – of that genius: the inquiring, vigorous, intellectual power, and the emotional intensity held within the Gaelic tradition.\textsuperscript{24} Phrasing this description a bit more poetically after his observation of Bax, Julian Herbage wrote, “... that sudden vision gave me a clue to the duality of Bax’s personality – the worldly

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 59-62.  
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Bax, shrewd observer and witty companion, and the unworldly Bax, whose spirit seems enshrined in some Irish legend.\textsuperscript{25}

In the tone poem \textit{Tintagel}, these two forces are perfectly melded, as the theme is one that contains just the right elements for their expression. Perhaps it was inevitable that Bax brought to the work not only the natural beauty of the setting, and even the legendary notions of King Arthur, but also the tale of Tristan and Isolde. Tintagel was, after all, the place where their love was wrecked. One might also make the claim that Tintagel was the place where Bax’s marriage was wrecked, as well. Surely, Bax knew that the six weeks spent there with Cohen would end his marriage, even if he struggled with that truth for several months after his return to London. \textit{Tintagel} becomes, then, a dual story, the more obvious one of nature with the sea crashing against the shore around the castle, and the less obvious inferences to the immortal lovers. As Bax musically tells the tale, nature wins out, while the passions of love are left to resignation and defeat.\textsuperscript{26}

Bax did not share all of this with his audience. What we get in his program note for the piece is the descriptive prose of a talented poet. The program published with the score reads as follows:

Though detailing no definite programme this work is intended to evoke a tone-picture of the castle-crowned cliff of Tintagel, and more particularly the wide distances of the Atlantic as seen from the cliffs of Cornwall on a sunny but not windless summer day. In the middle section of the piece it may be imagined that with the increasing tumult of the sea arise memories of the historical and legendary association of the place, especially those connected with King Arthur, King Mark, and Tristram


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
and Iseult. Regarding the last named, it will be noticed that at the climax of the more literary division of the work there is a brief reference to one of the subjects in the first act of “Tristram.”

In a lengthier version of the above that Bax wrote for a performance at the 1922 Leeds Festival, he tells us that this work is “only in the broadest sense programme music.” He goes on to provide more description:

The music opens, after a few introductory bars, with a theme given out on the brass which may be taken as representing the ruined castle, now so ancient and weather-worn as almost to seem an emanation of the rock upon which it was built. This subject is worked to a broad diatonic climax, and is followed by a long melody for strings which may suggest the serene and almost limitless spaces of the ocean. After a while a more restless mood begins to assert itself as though the sea were rising, bringing with a new sense of stress thoughts of many passionate and tragic incidents in the tales of King Arthur and King Mark and others among the men and women of their time. A wailing chromatic figure is heard and gradually dominates the music until it finally assumes a shape which will recall to mind one of the subjects of the first Act of “Tristan and Isolde” … Soon after this there is a great climax suddenly subsiding, followed by a passage which will perhaps convey the impression of immense waves slowly gathering force until they smash themselves upon the impregnable rocks. The theme of the sea is heard again, and the piece ends as it began with a picture of the castle still proudly fronting the sun and wind of centuries.

The quotation from Wagner’s *Tristan* is what is commonly called the “sick Tristan” motive. In the miniature score of *Tintagel*, it can be found two bars before rehearsal letter “H,” on page 18, approximately five and one half minutes into the piece. The motive occurs first in the solo oboe and solo violin, with the direction “plaintive and wistful” written in the score. It can be heard again most obviously where the tempo changes to *Allegro con brio* on page 30, eight bars after rehearsal letter “M.” The dynamic marking here is *ff*, marking the entry of

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28 Foreman, p. 150.
29 Ibid.
the motive as particularly important. The motive can then be heard, sometimes embellished or otherwise varied, throughout the middle section of the work. The closing bars of Wagner’s Tristan seem to be the inspiration for the key choice of B major in “sick Tristan’s” first appearance, and Bax’s music also recalls passages in Das Ring der Nibelungen, particularly from Act III of Siegfried, and from Götterdämmerung.30

Overtly romantic, Tintagel has a subtly atmospheric charm aptly fulfilling the intentions Bax stated in his program note. The work as a whole is comprised of three sections. The first of these sections is majestic and grandiose, proclaiming two main themes, each with a number of subsidiary ideas, which will return in the gloriously varied closing section. Between these comes a rhapsodic middle section of highly elemental feeling.

Peter Pirie writes that Tintagel “reveals in embryo Bax’s most characteristic mode of construction,” which he says is “very close to that of the serialists.”31 The main subject emerges in the flutes and violins with a marking of “cantabile” after 33 bars of what Pirie calls “the most vivid sea music ever written.” The main elements of this theme are an anacrusis or “upbeat”, a fifth, and a triplet. All of these are derived from the atmospheric music of the opening bars. The rest of the work is then constructed from these simple elements, a process Bax used in much of his later composing, where it is often the case that all the elements of a work derive from each other or from a single theme.32

31 Pirie, p. 34.
32 Ibid.
Bax demonstrates his mastery of orchestral color in the opening bars of *Tintagel*. Shimmering strings undulate as the woodwinds trill, creating the sense of breakers striking incessantly against the rocks below the castle, while the harp provides flecks of sunlight glint off the swelling waves. One can even hear a gull, as portrayed by a single flute, circling and diving in the breeze. A majestic phrase in the brass, growing out of smaller motives, wells quickly to generate a powerful climax. The horns launch a gloriously nautical first main subject, a melody built from the component parts of the introductory motives. The entire process of moving from the opening bars to the first theme proceeds organically. Surges from deep in the bass rise and fall, as beyond the orchestration, Bax has found another tool in his portrayal of the sea. The music shifts and builds in dynamics, only to drop off and begin again, much as one would experience the shifting of the waves. This is music from a man who knows the sea, at least as an intimate observer. Is the listener on the water looking up at the castle, though, or is he on the stretch of grass above the ruins, looking out on the sea with the castle behind him? It is difficult to say for sure.

The second theme of this opening section is comprised of material similar to that of the first theme, but it is used in a much different way. Starting very quietly, the melody has a kind of lilt to it that is folk-like in nature. This theme, one of the more expansive orchestral themes in Bax's repertoire, is surely the “love theme” of this work. We find the theme first in the violins and flutes, distinctive with its triplets and wide melodic leaps. From first hearing through
the rest of the piece, the theme or elements derived directly from it can be found again and again.

A distinct change is felt in the middle section. The under-rhythm begins to loom larger, the wind rises, and a storm sweeps through the orchestra. “The Atlantic, a sinister personality, lifts up its head like Poseidon, and stares hostilely at the impregnable rock whereon the castle stands.”\(^3\)\(^3\) It is also in this middle section, though, that the magical moment of Tristan’s arrival occurs. His music is intermixed with the music of the storm throughout the section, and the ocean theme lets loose to bring the music crashing into the final section.

Over rocking woodwinds, the brass intone the welling phrase of the opening theme. Urgency builds as the first subject is re-examined, this time over huge Atlantic rollers rather than playful waves. The second subject emerges from those invigorating waves, resplendent in a resounding climax filled with blazing horns, followed once again by the first subject, equally brilliant in its trumpeted glory. Finally, the high energy of the moment abates, and the brass gives us a few final chords, pressing upward in a final few gusts against the shoreline.

Pirie was not the only analyst to observe the serialist tendencies in Bax’s work. Colin Scott-Sutherland mentions the technique several times in his analytical biography of the composer. “The *Tintagel* melody – a kind of variation process built upon a cell-like phrase of the first two bars – and the austerely beautiful central movement of the Seventh Symphony’s Theme and Variations,

\(^3\)\(^3\) Church, p. 189.
are other examples,” he tells the reader at one point.\textsuperscript{34} He goes on in his general analysis of Bax’s technique, stating, “The broad lines of Bax’s melodies, many of which, like the principle melody of \textit{Tintagel}, exist embryonically in phrases or cell-like groups from which the span of the tune is evolved by a subtle process of incessant variation, are basically related to the procedures of folk music.”\textsuperscript{35}

The suggestion that Bax found his technique in folk music is interesting. His melodies often sound against counter-melodies with modal inflections, the harmonic implications of which Bax had long since assimilated. Particularly prominent are the sharped fourth scale degree of the Lydian and the flatted seventh degree of the Mixolydian modes. He combined these with chromatic decoration in most of his mature works in a way that seems to have been influenced further by his time spent studying and performing Tudor music. A kind of major/minor ambivalence developed from that study that might even be connected to his personal makeup of duality.\textsuperscript{36}

The tendency of the composer toward modal inflections, towards specific ornamental decorations (often intended to prolong a cadence or progression to allow the listener to dwell on the beauty of the passage), toward clinging to or revolving around a central note in the melody, all point toward a Gaelic/Celtic folk influence. A case might also be made, though, that these style traits might come from Bax’s early exposure to ecclesiastical music going back as far as plainchant. It is interesting to consider this in light of the divided influences of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Scott-Sutherland, p. 83.
\item[35] Ibid.
\item[36] Ibid., p. 84.
\end{footnotes}
Bax’s youth. It could be that duality was so much a part of his being that he naturally shifted back and forth from Catholic influences to Celtic ones.

Duality becomes more and more clearly a part of Bax’s musical personality. Frank Howes notes that, “besides the luxuriance and the romance there is to be discerned in Bax’s music, especially that composed in his early maturity, an element of severe struggle. Something seems to have happened to him to tear him in half and sear his soul…” Thus we can see that even those unfamiliar with his personal history find the same sense of duality as do those more familiar with the composer’s background. Howes concludes his remarks, suggesting that, “almost all of his music composed up to the age of fifty gives the impression of being the product of a mind at war with itself.”

Another aspect of duality that requires comment here is the juxtaposition of Bax’s essentially simple and diatonic thematic material, and his exceedingly complex and richly wrought harmonic textures. Bax did not struggle at self-expression. Indeed, he seems to have attained an almost fatal ease in this. For Bax, the struggle was in expressing himself so that the performer can clearly interpret his thoughts to the listener. The highly individual combination of melody and harmonic texture in much of Bax’s music can make understanding his forms, as clean as they may be, a difficult, double task. One must be able to appreciate the structure while absorbing the color and harmony, and in the works of Bax, when the performance is not highly balanced this task is often

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too much for many listeners. The music is immediately classed as incoherent, noisy, or over-scored.\textsuperscript{38}

Norman Demuth comments on this aspect of Bax’s orchestral music, as well, nothing that with the wealth of detail contained in a Bax score, the main material stands out only if the conductor meticulously observes the indicated dynamics. He goes on, saying that, “the listener must be prepared to concentrate. Once attention has flagged, even momentarily, it is impossible to pick up the thread.” Demuth states that Bax’s music is not mere sound to be bathed in, as one might with an Impressionist work, and that the themes are one of Bax’s chief concerns and that they should at all times be obvious through the weaving of the musical textures. He notes that, “this closely knit colour has drawn the reproach upon him that his music is ‘thick.’ This is not so; it may be dense, but it is not impenetrable. The wood is clearly distinct from the trees.”\textsuperscript{39}

Bax began to simplify his music in response to such criticism. The first signs of this deliberate modification of his style can be found in \textit{The Garden of Fand}. Further, he helped that work to succeed by disclosing a definite literary program. This is a development that he continued to employ to even greater success in \textit{Tintagel}.

An appreciation of much of Bax’s work depends on one’s understanding of his use of a literary program. Bax is said to have once confessed that for him, the problem of composition consisted of the translation of ideas and

\textsuperscript{38} Herbage, p. 114.

impressions into the language of music. The word ‘translation’ should be the focus of that statement, as it explains the fact that, while much of Bax’s music is conceived with a ‘program’ in mind, the composer insists that when he has achieved a translation of his ideas and sensations into sound, the result should be listened to as pure music. Thus, works like *Fand* and *Tintagel* are not essays in impressionism in music, like Debussy’s *La Mer*. Nor are they evocations like Delius’s *Summer on the River*. Demuth claims further that they form the direct antithesis of the tone poems of Strauss, in that they are not pretentious. “Bax is not concerned with vital problems. His constant care is to paint a picture and take his time over it.” Perhaps they are more programmatic mood evocations, reactions to both literary and sensual sources.

The inspiration for *Tintagel*, just as in *The Garden of Fand*, is the sea. In this case, though, we hear a far more vigorous evocation, the most successful of several early such portraits. Bax paints *Tintagel* in broader strokes, with less concern over specific details and more interest in showing the whole picture. It is a success both of attitude and technique. In this work, Bax realizes the potential inherent in the juxtaposition of slow and fast moving ostinati in complimentary and contrasting colors, a technique he had almost hit on in his very first tone poem, *Cathaleen-ni-Hoolihan*. It took him almost fifteen more years before he could perfect the technique in *Tintagel*. Foreman sees it as particularly important to note the sense of sheer physical elation and strain that the difficult and often exultant horn parts provide the overall sound. “In

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40 Herbage, p. 115.
41 Demuth, p. 159.
42 Foreman, p. 151.
fact it is the horns that give us the clue to the passionate and personal nature of both *Tintagel* and its successor *November Woods.*

A Bax characteristic exploited to great effect in this portrayal of the sea is the constant changing of textures. Usually executed with beautiful results in Bax's works, this technique pays greater dividends in his sea-oriented music. In *Tintagel*, the shifting textures are like Nature itself, with the buffeting rise and fall of the waves, the swirling breezes, the constantly changing view of the shoreline, and then the view from the shore out over the water. The end result of this technique is a kind of textural counterpoint, and combined with the colors of the orchestration, it makes for an enormously exhilarating effect.

The influences of Wagner and Debussy are obvious in Bax's technique of writing sea music. Still, there are many original aspects to the writing. One can hear Bax's familiarity, based on close observation and many years of enjoyment, with the sound of the waters he was depicting. Foreman cites similarities between the sea music of Bax's *Tintagel* and that of other neo-Wagnerians, specifically Chausson's *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*, with their conjunction of seascape and sexual imagery. Taking these similarities further, both Foreman and Christopher Palmer comment that Delius's *Sea Drift* should be included in the discussion, and that it is likely more than mere coincidence that the four men, Wagner, Debussy, Delius, and Bax, all should be drawn to the same sea image in their music. "We should remember that the chromatic language of *Tristan* was first forged to articulate feelings of sexual desire and passion, and

43 Ibid.

44 Pirie, p. 36.
that the shared characteristic of these four great sea-poets in music was the strength of their sexuality. None could be fettered in the usual way to conjugal and family fidelity or responsibility.” He goes on to point out that, “the sea has always had a Freudian symbolic import.”

In the restless music of works like *Tintagel*, there is an almost agonizing nervous appeal. Yet underneath that restlessness is a profound and satisfying supply of intellectual awareness. Perhaps that agitation and nervousness is even a lie, for few men were more contemplative and detached than Bax.

“There,” Richard Church suggests, “is the secret of his power over the listener. To be able to wring the last drop of feeling out of a theme or a situation the creative artist must stand apart from his subject; he must ‘remember in tranquility,’ and that tranquility can be obtained only by the discipline of hard thought and fearlessness in the welcoming of new experience.”

With these various aspects of his art understood a bit more clearly, let us return to the concept of melody. It has been observed by Scott-Sutherland and others that in many of Bax’s melodies, there is a “droop” – a downward curve of resignation – but that this downward turn is followed with a gesture of defiance in the final phrase, an upward surge, as if it were seeking a way beyond the events of the moment. This goal, certainly reached in *Tintagel* and in many of Bax’s larger works, is a serenity that all but great art is left wanting.

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46 Church, p. 189.

47 Scott-Sutherland, p. 83.
In *Tintagel*, the “droop” is evident in the primary melody, which sets the tone for the entire work. At the end of both the first and second phrases of the main melody, (found on page 11 of the miniature score, beginning with the pickup to the sixth bar after rehearsal letter C), a decorative twist of triplets ends with a downward step, before a third phrase lifts us back up again. One might hear this only as a proper depiction of the sea unless a study of other Bax works was made, revealing the propensity of the composer for such characteristic melodic turns. Certainly, the “sick Tristan” motive is another “drooping” theme, and it might give one cause to wonder whether the rest of the music was engineered with like characteristics so that its appearance seems organic, or whether its nature simply led itself to fortunate inclusion. Regardless, these two motivic units provide much of the melodic stimulus for a piece in which sensations of dipping and rising and being cast about play an important role.

The overall formal plan of ABA is one that Bax used in most of his tone poems and single-movement works. *The Garden of Fand* would be an exception to this rule, but that is because the program the composer had in mind loosely governs the structure of the work. Looking just a bit deeper at Bax’s methodology, we can see that the B sections of the ABA forms generally appear with dynamic markings of $ff$ or $fff$, and usually in augmentation. Though not in *Tintagel* or works of that time, in later pieces Bax even melds the B with the final A, creating a kind of doubled union, a duality reflective of so much of his personality.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 90.
One can expect that the final section of this ternary form as used by Bax will provide an opportunity for the secondary theme to rise up triumphantly in the penultimate climax. In *Tintagel*, it does indeed perform as expected before the primary theme returns for a final time, establishing itself with one last climax. Indeed, had this work been written twenty years later, or perhaps even ten, it is likely that the two themes would have been combined as described in the previous paragraph.

When properly played, the sound of a Bax composition is as distinctive and recognizable as that of a work by Debussy or Ravel, and equally as individual. Despite his melodic gifts, he always refrained from thickening the melodic line, as might someone like Puccini in moments of high drama or tension. Even in his early works, and in the most exuberant passages of those works, he developed and maintained a fondness for individual orchestral color. His themes do not rely on heavy doubling of parts, and over the years an almost pointillist style of scoring appeared.\(^{49}\) This becomes the end result of the modification process begun with *The Garden of Fand* and *Tintagel*, as Bax responded to criticisms of over-scoring in his first few orchestral works. If this point is ignored, as it is by some conductors, the results are usually muddy and turgid. In a work like *Tintagel*, which in point of fact is one of the most successful of Bax’s scores, what should be aimed at is anything from an iridescent shimmer to a steely glitter. From this blanket of sound should

emerge accented, but not overly accented, phrases and lines carrying the burden of the musical argument at any given moment.\textsuperscript{50}

In the music of Bax, classical string tone is rarely used as an orchestral basis. He preferred to spread the strings widely, in\textit{ divisi}, or to deploy them in a texture of pointillistic light, usually laced with the sharp colors of high woodwinds, or he would allow them to soar in octaves paired with flutes in octaves in swooping patterns as the brass and lower woodwinds created rhythmic patterns underneath.\textsuperscript{51}

The brass writing in\textit{Tintagel} is particularly brilliant and effective. Throughout the introduction to this work, the brass play an important role, and it is in the horns at the pickup to bar 17 that we hear the culmination of the introductory motives. The music soars with the nobility and vigor of the sea in a passage that horn players anywhere would find rewarding without being excessively difficult. Arthur Butterworth has commented on performing\textit{Tintagel}, saying that it, “never posed any difficulties” and adding that, “technically it did not seem particularly demanding; exhilarating certainly, but never daunting.”\textsuperscript{52} Butterworth explores Bax’s writing for brass further, posing the question of why the composer never wrote anything for brass band. The answer, he supposes, is sociological. Bax’s upper class circle would never have

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Scott-Sutherland, p. 87.
allowed him to even think of the brass band of those days as worthy of consideration. Today, that situation might be different.\textsuperscript{53}

Bax’s orchestration must be thought of as no less important a part of his invention than components such as melody, harmony, and rhythm. Though many composers sketch their ideas in short score and then orchestrate later, it is often the case that the transformation from short to full score involves the occasional hesitancy as decisions are made between one instrument and another. In the works of Bax, there is none of that indecision. The orchestration is determined as exactly as the shape and nature of the material.\textsuperscript{54} Although he made use of the piano in the intermediate stage of the process of composition, the colors of his inspiration were a part of the original conception. The idea germinated and was conceived wholly in the tone colors of its instrumentation. Bax’s virtuosity narrowed the gap for him between inspiration and realization. The orchestration is not only vivid, but purposeful. He claimed that the “idea” of a piece sprang, fully clad in instrumental color, from his mind.\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Tintagel} proves a perfect example of this claim, as the orchestration of the piece occurred more than a year after the completion of the short score.

Bax asks for large orchestral forces, which he uses in the same virtuosic fashion as Richard Strauss, but with quite different and subtler results. Though he does not employ any especially odd or unusual instruments, he uses all the resources of the modern orchestra to evoke the varied moods of the sea in both \textit{The Garden of Fand} and \textit{Tintagel}. His effects are drawn more from a cunning

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{55} Scott-Sutherland, p. 86.
\end{flushright}
use of opposing register and tone color than from the addition of a specialized instrument or instruments.\textsuperscript{56} Lewis Foreman points to another great post-Romantic when commenting on the orchestration of the tone poems, noting that it is, “typically lavish, but the full tutti is rarely employed, and, like Mahler, Bax is an expert in the weaving of exquisite detail into the tapestry of the whole.”\textsuperscript{57}

The orchestra for \textit{Tintagel} is, as already mentioned, large but not overly so. The score calls for a woodwind section of three flutes and a piccolo, two oboes and an English horn, two clarinets in A and a bass clarinet also in A, two bassoons and a contra-bassoon. The brass consists of four horns, three trumpets in C, three trombones and a tuba. Percussion in this work is comprised of timpani, glockenspiel, bass drum and cymbal. A standard string section of first and second violins, violas, cellos and string basses completes the ensemble.

The short score of \textit{Tintagel} was completed in October of 1917. On it, the title has been written in with a pencil, perhaps suggesting that it was added after the work had been completed. The orchestration of the full score was finished in January of 1919. On the manuscript of the full score, Bax wrote the dedication, “For Darling Tania / with love / from / Arnold.” Again, this appears in pencil on a free front-end page. In the printed score, the dedication is altered, reading simply, “To Miss Harriet Cohen.”\textsuperscript{58} Both manuscripts of the short and full score are held at the Royal Academy of Music, the short score stored in an acid-free pocket and the full score bound in crimson cloth with the title and the

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 87.  
\textsuperscript{57} Foreman, pp. 152-153.  
\textsuperscript{58} Parlett, p. 139.
composer’s name in gold lettering on the spine.\textsuperscript{59} Publication of the full score by Murdoch Murdoch and Company was in 1923, with the miniature score published in 1943.

Dan Godfrey and the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra\textsuperscript{60} premiered \textit{Tintagel} on October 20, 1921, at Winter Gardens, Bournemouth. The work lasts approximately 15 minutes in performance, and is one of the shortest of Bax’s tone poems. Although the audience warmly received it, Foreman quotes at least one unnamed local critic who found it very difficult:

> It would appear, to the uninitiated, to be nothing but a rolling mass of sound, in which only a few passages, most particularly chromatic ones, are emphasized, while the most important melodies are mainly given out by the brass, and a solo violin appears in one place... This design is, of course, quite compatible with the subject, a sunlit sea, but the opening figure, which stands for the castle, or perhaps the cliffs, is of little consequence, and adds nothing of variety to the music. Mr. Bax has chosen a very difficult scene to paint, and his picture contains no variety, nothing but sea, and therefore strikes one as being incomplete.\textsuperscript{61}

Godfrey, on the other hand, must have been impressed by the piece, as he repeated it during the Festival of British Music that he promoted the following spring at Bournemouth.

In February of 1930, \textit{Tintagel} and the orchestrated version of a piano work called \textit{Mediterranean} (1922) became the first of Bax’s orchestral works to find their way to recording when HMV issued them on two 78-rpm records. Eugène Goossens conducted both works, each of which had been recorded in Queen’s Hall in May of 1928. Lewis Foreman points out the importance of this

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Known since 1954 as the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.
\textsuperscript{61} Foreman, p. 188.
to the overall appreciation of Bax's music, noting that in the 1930s, “the systematic recording of Sibelius’s music was one of the underlying impulses behind the craze for the composer at that time.”62 Foreman later quotes a paragraph from a critic named Compton Mackenzie writing for *The Gramophone* in March 1930, who said:

> I believe that in some very early number of *The Gramophone* I shall be found to have written in a disparaging way of *Tintagel*, for I heard it some six or seven years ago in Queen’s Hall, and then fancied the title a mere excuse to make an unintelligible noise. I had not heard *Tintagel* again until I put it on my gramophone this week, and lo! Instead of finding it an unintelligible noise I find it to be one of the most genuinely poetic expressions of the sea’s moods that I have ever heard. The lesson is obvious. I need not stress it.63

Comparatively speaking, the recording industry has been kind to *Tintagel*. While it had to wait another twenty-five years from the time of Goossens’ first recording to the next such session, the work now has a total of thirteen performances on record or disc from which to choose. Critics such as Andrew Achenbach often point to the 1967 to 1972 compilation by Adrian Boult and the London Philharmonic Orchestra of *The Garden of Fand, Tintagel*, and *November Woods* on the Lyrita label as among the most notable achievements in Bax recording.64 Others will point to John Barbirolli’s 1965 version with the London Symphony Orchestra on EMI as the definitive recording of the piece. Among the more recent recordings of *Tintagel*, Bryden Thomson’s effort with the Ulster Orchestra on Chandos generally receives due praise, as does Vernon

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62 Ibid., p. 270.
63 Ibid., p. 271. (Foreman does not identify this man as the same reviewer he quoted from the premiere, but it seems obvious that they are one and the same.)
Handley’s version with the BBC Philharmonic, also on Chandos. Handley and Thomson have the added distinction of being the only conductors to date to record the complete cycle of Bax symphonies, along with several of the tone poems.

Performances have also been greater in quantity with *Tintagel* than with other of Bax’s large-scale works, probably owing to the accessibility of the work compared to others in terms of form, language, and the popularity of the programmatic associations. Still, notoriety has not come easily. See for example Joseph Holbrooke’s chapter on Bax in his 1925 account of contemporary British composers, and you will find that, while the author lists Bax’s “outstanding works,” and later, “the complete list of his works, all of which have been performed,” in neither instance can we find mention of *Tintagel* at all. Indeed, the work receives no comment at all in Holbrooke’s essay, though the book was considered an authoritative source in its time.

*Tintagel* has been popular enough in Great Britain and Ireland, but performances in continental Europe have been few and far between. Even in the United States, which is generally a bit more sympathetic to British music, performances in the years after the premiere were minimal. Goossens brought the score with him to Rochester in 1929, just four years after the 1925 American premiere with Damrosch and the New York Symphony. Dobrowen gave a reading in 1931 in San Francisco, while Cameron led performances with Seattle in 1933 and 1936. In 1940, Autori played it in Buffalo, and

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66 Ibid., p. 57.
Koussevitzky gave the Boston premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1945. Finally, Barbirolli played *Tintagel* with the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1962.\(^{67}\)

As a final note in regard to Bax’s history with *Tintagel*, it is interesting to know that the location itself apparently held more for the composer than just the remembrance of his affair with Harriet Cohen. He returned in 1940, a summer in which he was unable to travel to Ireland, and this time his traveling companion was Mary Gleaves. One might conclude from this that Tintagel was a place for Bax associated with youth and love. Still, duality creeps into his life. While at Tintagel, Bax encountered Marjorie McTavish, an old friend of Paul Corder’s, whom Bax had not seen in many years.

“I went to the hotel bar to have a drink and there was Arnold and we greeted each other with joy,” McTavish recalled. “We went out for a walk and I asked about Harriet.” “It’s so nice to hear someone talk about Harriet who is kind in their remembrance of her,” remarked Bax. “I got the impression,” added McTavish, “that Arnold was drinking too much.”\(^{68}\) If this were true, it most certainly was not due to anything connected to Mary Gleaves. There is no account, however, of Bax ever returning to Tintagel after this trip.

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\(^{68}\) Foreman, p. 322.
Figure 3. *Arnold Bax and Harriet Cohen, c. 1917*
CHAPTER III
THE POEM “TINTAGEL CASTLE”

“Darling will you keep these simple little verses? I thought of them this morning and cried over them as I have never over anything since I grew up.”¹

Thus, Arnold Bax introduced his poem “Tintagel Castle” to his lover, Harriet Cohen. He wrote the verses in the second week of September, 1917, while he was staying at St. Merryn, just to the south along the coast of Cornwall from Tintagel. The situation was far from ideal for the two of them. Cohen had been at Tintagel since the middle of August after spending time there the previous summer, and had written letter after letter in an effort to convince Bax to meet her there. When he finally relented and journeyed to Cornwall, it was with his wife, children, and a small group of close family friends, certainly not what Cohen had had in mind or what Bax would have preferred.

Letters from both Bax and Cohen to Arthur Alexander were, until 1999, the only source of information about the couple’s time at Tintagel. Why did these letters suggest that the pair had spent six weeks together there? We can only speculate, but perhaps an answer comes from our knowledge of Bax’s personality, particularly his highly developed disposition toward duality. Obviously, it had been Cohen’s intention that the two spend the time together alone and as a couple. Bax, though, had not yet come to the conclusion that he must end his marriage to Elsa. He did, however, fantasize about the kind of

escape his affair with Cohen suggested. Perhaps the letters to Arthur Alexander were in part an exaggeration to maintain his fantasy, and in part a means of soothing Cohen’s feelings of disappointment over his bringing the entire family with him.

Foreman quotes information recounted in the 2006 master’s thesis of Thomas Elneas, “An Anglo-Irish Composer: New Perspectives on the Creative Achievements of Sir Arnold Bax.” Elnaes suggests that Bax and Cohen were able to meet secretly every second day or so for a few hours at a time, and that Bax had begun making excuses to wander off to see her almost from the day of his arrival in Cornwall. Still, the mood between the two was cast in sadness. Quoting again from the letters in the Cohen collection, Foreman tells us that Bax wrote to Cohen on the day after his arrival. “I am sleeping out in a house some distance from the cottage where the others are – and thank goodness for this, for I get night and dawn undisturbed in which to write to you when things become impossible,” he told her. “Last night was wretched and I tossed about and longing and longing and got up entirely miserable and wondering how I am going through with it.”

We have seen incidents from earlier in his life in which Bax is able to use a situation of personal misery to create highly expressive art. With the demands of his failing marriage weighing heavily upon him, and the perceived freedom of his affair with Cohen tantalizingly just beyond his reach, he could not have been much more miserable. Fully aware of the legendary associations of

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2 The Norwegian musicologist Thomas Elneas received his degree from the University of Dublin, Trinity College.
3 Foreman, p. 159.
4 Ibid.
Tintagel, Bax found himself walking the cliffs and beaches not with his lover, but with his wife, children, and family friends. Finding a path from misery to fantasy, he seems to have somehow transposed his position from that of commentator upon the tragic legends to more of a participant in them, adding his own frustrations to the stories he already knew.

Cohen, too, knew and appreciated the Arthurian legends. She wrote to Bax while she vacationed at Tintagel the year prior, already thinking of the romantic associations of the place. On August 8, 1916, she wrote, “Oh my beloved, if you could be here with me how entirely happy I should be,” and later in the same letter, “I feel transcended tonight. I have brought my beloved Morte d’Arthur down with me for of all the places this is the best to read it in. This land of Tristan.” The location and the legends associated with it obviously held a similar fascination for Cohen as they did for Bax.

A year later, in a letter written on August 18, 1917 – the night before Cohen departed for Tintagel – she wrote to Bax, “My darling, I cannot bear it. I think I have never realised until tonight—fully—how deeply I love you. ...It is so dreadful to think I shall not see you for another fortnight (and more). Must I go? Think, it will be a long time before you hold me in your arms, and have you had enough of kisses yet?” Arriving at Lincoln House, Treven (just south of Tintagel) on August 21, she immediately wrote another letter to Bax, saying, “Darling, I am longing for a letter from you. I still don’t think I can bear it although this place is as heavenly as ever,” and later in the same letter, “I am

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6 Ibid., p. 120.
afraid that all my letters will be full of this dreadful longing that I can’t conceal.”

The following day, Cohen sent a post card further establishing both her feelings and also the romantic connections that both lovers were to share with the legendary tales of Tintagel. Accompanying a picture of the site, she wrote, “Lancelot and Guinevere spent many a day on these grassy slopes.”

By now, the couple had grown used to using their professional relationship as an excuse to spend time together. As Cohen had become the champion of Bax’s piano music, it was not outwardly unusual that they would meet regularly for consultations or rehearsals. The stress of being separated for more than two weeks at this point in their relationship was obviously difficult for both of them. The time leading up to the trip to Cornwall as well as the time spent there appears to have been very important in both of their lives. It seems unusual that Cohen chooses not to mention her consecutive summers at Tintagel. It is also noteworthy that she leaves out any mention of her love for Malory’s tales in her memoirs. Was this something considered too private to share? Of course, by the time of her writing the book, her affair with Bax long over, she may simply have no longer seen the Arthurian tales as important enough to mention.

A number of questions arise as we begin to consider the poem. How exactly did Bax express his sadness? Does the poem express the same mood and feeling as the tone poem? Did Bax consider the poem a completely personal expression between himself and Cohen, and if he did, was it merely the ending of his marriage that made it acceptable for him to publish the piece just a few

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7 Ibid., p. 121.
8 Ibid.
years later? Can we expect to find yet another example of the duality of Bax in comparing this work and the orchestral piece, the poetry of O’Byrne vs. the musicality of Bax? Let us examine the text of these verses and begin the process of considering these questions.

Tintagel Castle

While these old walls were crumbling,
Fair countless maids and men
Have cried and kissed and whispered,
And never come again.
We two know all their story,
Though all heroic glory
Fall from this old sea-warden,
Slain by a pedant pen.

Though Iseult’s arms and bosom
Were shadowy as her shame,
And dusty brains have proven
That Arthur’s but a name,
We have a certain token
How hearts of old were broken;
And English, Celt or Norman,
Love hurt them still the same.

They stared out even as we do
Across the silken tide,
And sought in sundown splendours
The dream their world denied;
And Dick and Meg have parted
In Cornwall broken-hearted
Ten thousand time, though Tristram
Had never sinned and died.

Strain closer yet, my lovely,
Till all your breast’s aglow,
Nor think how new sad ages
Will never care to know
If your white body’s beauty
Were thrall to Love or Duty,
Or how I burned and hungered
Long centuries ago.9

Bax published “Tintagel Castle” anonymously in 1923, in a collection of twenty-seven pieces entitled *Love Poems of a Musician*. This was the last collection of poetry that Bax published. His earlier sets included the twenty-three poems of *Seafoam and Firelight* from 1909, and the nine pieces in *A Dublin Ballad and other poems* of 1918. Two unpublished collections containing eighty-five and twenty-five poems, respectively, also date from before *Love Poems of a Musician*. More recently, Lewis Foreman edited a collection of fifty poems under the title *Dermot O’Byrne: Selected Poems of Arnold Bax* in 1979, and finally Colin Scott-Sutherland provided what is believed to be a comprehensive collection in his 2001 *Ideala: The Love Letters and Poems of Arnold Bax*. “Tintagel Castle” may be found in both of these editions.

What should we make of the fact that Bax published *Love Poems of a Musician*, and thus “Tintagel Castle,” anonymously, rather than as Dermot O’Byrne? It is possible that this decision was made in connection with Bax’s shift away from writing, made around this time as he began to compose symphonies. As Cohen tells us, Bax explained his departure from the realm of poetry some years after the fact, telling her that he “felt that with the writing of the symphonies the creative ability for poetry that his love for Ireland engendered had diminished. These powers, he felt, were now entirely ‘canalised’ into music.”

No mention is made as to whether Cohen agreed with this notion, or whether she had encouraged Bax in either direction. Seemingly, despite their close relationship, Cohen left Bax to his decision on the matter.

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This possible explanation does not suggest, however, any lack of pride in the poems. As Foreman tells us, Bax thought highly of the works, but was unsure as to how they would be critically received. He quotes a letter written by Bax to Æ (George William Russell, 1867-1935) on November 9, 1924\(^\text{11}\) in which he expresses his uncertainty. “I have been intending for months – indeed for years – to send you this little book, but an innate shyness has hindered me from doing so. (I regard myself as an absolute amateur in the literary sense.) But you may possibly feel sympathetic to the mood, if not to the expression, of one or two of these verses,” Bax writes. “… If you think any of them worthy of publication in the ‘Statesman’\(^\text{12}\) (which has an extraordinary high standard of poetry, I think) I shall feel very honoured.” Later in the same letter, Bax writes, “By the way this little book is only a privately printed affair. It was to have appeared in the ordinary way, but finally I decided against this course.” Then finally, after closing and signing his name, Bax adds, “If you think anything in this collection is worthy of reprinting in the ‘Statesman’ please do so over my old name ‘Dermot O’Byrne.’ But don’t feel you have to do so, please.”\(^\text{13}\) Perhaps the anonymous publishing of the collection had more to do with his uncertain feelings towards his writing at this stage than with any other reasons.

Bax had met Æ in 1911, soon after he had married and set up house in Rathgar, a residential district of Dublin. Clifford Bax had known Æ for years by then, and once Arnold was settled in, Clifford came to visit. A visit to the home of the poet was quickly arranged, and thus Bax’s friendship with Russell was

\(^{11}\) Foreman notes that the year is not included on the letter, and that it could be one year on either side of the date given.  

\(^{12}\) This refers to *The Irish Statesman*, which Russell edited from September, 1923 to April, 1930.  

\(^{13}\) Bax, ed. Foreman, p. 13.
established. Bax tells of how he had always revered Russell’s work spiritually, but had hardly admired it, “for ‘Æ’s’ technical skill in verse was little better than that conspicuously lacking in his painting. He had small rhythmical invention and weak lines were inclined to mar even his loveliest poems.” This description is interesting in that it not only demonstrates Bax’s knowledge and appreciation of poetry writing, but also shows him willing to criticize one of the greats of his time, someone he respected and admired. It seems to speak of a confidence he did not have in his own poetry writing twenty years earlier.

Regardless of the manner of publication, the poem provides an interesting window into Bax’s psyche, and thus, his thought processes as a composer. We know now that Bax was highly influenced by the poetry of Yeats, and that he was a voracious reader of a wide range of literature. We know that he developed an affinity for fantasy and the faerie realms. We can point to his love of Ireland and of the sea. The real question to be answered in this chapter will be whether we can determine if these multiple influences, acting in conjunction with a single inspiration, provided Bax with one direction for artistic release, or two. How deeply was the duality previously examined a part of his life at the height of his creative powers? Let us start with a comparative overview of the works, and then delve deeper into them.

The poem begins with the crumbling walls of the castle, while the tone poem begins by invoking the sea. Right from the openings, these two works give us differing perspectives. In the poem, Bax proceeds to suggest the romances, both past and present, associated with Tintagel. In the tone poem, however, the

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romance is more a matter of man and nature. We can see the author directing the reader’s thoughts to the intimate, while the composer guides his listener to more publicly perceived ideas. Bax the poet makes his words personal with the line “We two know all their story,” but Bax the composer opens up an all-inclusive view of the castle and the sea.

The middle stanzas of the poem invoke Tristan, Isolde, and Arthur, giving the words the weight of noble legend and myth. In the tone poem, Bax again calls to mind the legend of Tristan and Isolde, this time through a quotation from the music of Wagner’s opera, and further calls on the idea of Arthur with a general sense of nobility throughout the middle section of the piece. The middle section of the poem explores sadness and broken hearts, both in the characters of legend and in the poet and reader. In the tone poem, the sadness is mined for even greater emotion, as the tumult of the sea brings out stress and violence. Surely, the legends and the emotions brought forth by them are central and key to the construction of both works.

The four stanzas of the poem contain soft, lamenting climaxes, while the tone poem divides in its ABA structure into three sectional climaxes, each full of power and drive. In the end, both works create a sense of coming full circle, bringing the reader or the listener back to the point of the journey’s beginning. Thus, we have two works with similar forms, but with differing perspectives, and differing routes of journey.

Critics have generally judged Bax’s poetry more harshly than they have his music, though it must be pointed out that both Russell and Yeats praised his writing. In reviewing Lewis Foreman’s collection of selected poems, a critic
writing for *The Musical Times* said, “He could pen either words or music with considerable facility, but there is no question of his two talents showing equal potential; his music is throughout more ambitious and original than his poetry, drama, and short stories.” He adds, though, “Nevertheless, the poems occasionally make arresting statements.”¹⁵

As pointed out above, there is a definite sadness brought out in the words of the poem. Lines such as “We have a certain token / How hearts of old were broken; / And English, Celt, or Norman, / Love hurt them still the same.” are without doubt “arresting.” Are they original, though? The critic from *The Musical Times* suggests that most of the early poems (ranging from 1905 to 1919) are “over-written” and “cluttered with the secondhand lumber of early Yeats.”¹⁶ More importantly, do these lines hold up against the weight of the tone poem? Do they even appear to be from the same artist? Writing again in general comparison rather than specifically on the present works, Frank Howes seems to suggest that there is reason to consider this question – reason we have already considered. “Besides the luxuriance and the romance there is to be discerned in Bax’s music, especially that composed in his early maturity, an element of severe struggle,” he notes. “Something seems to have happened to him to tear him in half and sear his soul... Almost all his music composed up to the age of fifty gives the impression of being the product of a mind at war with itself.”¹⁷

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¹⁶ Ibid., p. 781.  
Howes goes further, first pointing to theories that psychological conflict can be a contributing factor to great art, and then raising the question of whether Bax’s inherent musical inhibitions (which he claims keep the composer from being fully articulate) combined with his fascination for Yeats’ poetry to create “a case of the jealousy of the Muses.” Without using the term, Howes is addressing the same duality seen throughout our examination of Bax, and he makes the pointed observation that by embodying the Celtic twilight, the Celtic fringe, and the Celtic humor he found in Ireland, Bax was able to escape the conflict of his everyday life. The inference is that what may have been good for his emotional state was not good for his ability as a poet. If nothing else, Howes makes the case that “literary work in no way diminished Bax’s output nor blunted his technique, but the divided aims of his extraordinary life may be in the last resort the cause of [his] lack of stamina.” Now, expecting the tone poem to carry more weight than the poem not just because of its size, but because of the general observations of critics and musicologists, we can begin a more in depth comparison of the works.

In the first stanza of the poem, which we have determined to be suggestive of past and present romance, many of the words are somber and melancholy. The “old walls” of Tintagel Castle are “crumbling.” While true, this information is certainly not uplifting or celebratory. Bax writes of the many men and women who have “cried” here and who have “never come again,” their hearts apparently broken or somehow unable to withstand the emotion of the place. Even the nobility and renown of the legends, “all heroic glory,” is

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18 Ibid., p. 216.
19 Ibid.
dismissed. It “falls from this old sea warden, slain by a pedant pen.” Bax seemingly knows that he is adding to the long line of literary distress connected with Tintagel. This stanza is about the death of love rather than the celebration of it. The castle grounds are a tragic place more than a heroic or a romantic one.

The “first stanza”—the introduction—of the tone poem is dramatically different. Bax was thoroughly attached to the sea conceptually, and the exuberance with which he opens this music is evidence of his strong love for such settings. From the flitting and diving of the gulls to the undulating of the waves, and eventually to the crashing of those waves against the rocky shore, Bax in this introduction is a man in love with nature. Even the castle itself, while being “ancient and weather-worn,” is still a dramatic and even imposing edifice. Bax tells us in his program note that the castle is portrayed in this introduction by the horns, instruments commonly associated with nobility, grandeur, and drama. It may be that he perceived such a scene symbolically as an expression of his love for Cohen, but it is far different, far more positive in mood than what we find in the poem.

Several writers, including Lewis Foreman and Christopher Palmer, have suggested that the opening of *Tintagel*, with the sea frothing and splashing and the horns calling out boisterously, is replete with Freudian sexuality. One wonders if this is truly the case. If the tone poem and the poem come from the same inspiration, can we fairly label this music as sexual? To do so seems to further confirm the notion of Bax’s duality. The conditions under which both
were written, under the stress of the couple’s vacation together but not
together, do not suggest such a simple answer.

Examining his overall inclination to the mystical and the pantheistic can
give us more evidence for a less Freudian view of Bax’s opening to Tintagel. As
Colin Scott-Sutherland tells us, Bax’s strongest mystical affinity was with the
sea.\(^\text{20}\) It held a fascination for him unlike anything else in his life, and as has
been noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, he stood in rapt
contemplation, watching the sun set over the Atlantic beyond the Old Head of
Kinsale in County Cork, just hours before his death. Scott-Sutherland goes on,
stating that that final sunset “was for him the very stuff of his imagination.”\(^\text{21}\) In
fact, one can find pages in his notebooks that are covered with oceanographic
data, all meticulously noted.

The sea is often used as a symbol, and can be found portrayed as either
a giver or taker of life. Its dual nature was something attractive to Bax perhaps
on some psychological level. It also is a common feature of Celtic myth and
legend, and it is possible that the sea reinforced Bax’s affinity for the Celtic
realm.\(^\text{22}\) Further, Bax claimed that the wind and the sea and the stones of the
shoreline all had their own inner voices, and it may indeed be that he found
those voices to have a Celtic accent.\(^\text{23}\) All of this would have made any portrayal
of the sea less a sensual picture and more a mystical portrayal for the
composer.

\(^\text{21}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{22}\) Elneas, p. 79.
\(^\text{23}\) Ibid., p. 81.
Of the tone poem itself, Julian Herbage states that *Tintagel* “epitomizes Bax’s reaction to nature and legend, the first of which, to the composer’s poetic imagination, so often evokes the second.”\(^{24}\) As Herbage explains, the scene is the castle-crowned cliff, with the vast distances of the ocean capped by a summer’s sky. From this natural scene, Bax draws forth the imagery of the legends of King Arthur and King Mark, and of Tristan and Isolde. “Impression and emotion have been translated into music,” Herbage concludes.\(^{25}\)

Moving on to the second stanza of the poem, we find a hint of sensuality in the mention of Iseult’s bosom. Bax turns quickly away from that thought, though, decrying her shame. He shifts further away, drawing the picture of old scholars and archeologists who with their “dusty brains” have concluded that King Arthur was not real. Yet he returns to some sense of romance, referring to the “hearts of old” that have been broken by love, no matter whether they were “English, Celt or Norman.” This stanza seems to carry considerable emotional conflict, not all of it obvious.

Clearly, Bax is expressing his concern that his own heart could be broken like so many before him. In this stanza, we see him almost literally circling around love, touching it but then running away, only to come back again despite his fear. “Iseult’s arms and bosom” were full of shame for her own misguided love, but it seems certain that Bax wants to be engulfed in the arms and bosom of his own Iseult. This, of course, is Harriet. He almost manages to change the subject, fleeing into his consideration of Arthur, but then he returns, pointing to a “certain token” of all those broken hearts he is afraid to join, despite the fact that he is most obviously vulnerable to a similar fate.

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\(^{25}\) Ibid.
In the tone poem, we might analyze the introductions of the two main subjects as our second stanza. It is substantially different in character from the second stanza of the poem, though. The initial theme is a long, meandering melody in the violins that Bax tells us represents “the almost limitless spaces of the ocean.” It is quiet and serene, with only the occasional hint of dissonance to foreshadow later developments. Even when the second theme comes in, the “sick Tristan” motive that is meant to remind us of King Arthur, King Mark, and both Tristan and Isolde, it comes in quietly, with only some minor thoughts of stress. The whole middle of the tone poem carries a sense of English nobility, seemingly inferring these mythic names, calmly bringing them forth in tone much as they are in word in the middle stanzas of the poem. It is not until these themes go through their development, in what we might consider the music’s third stanza, that we find real turbulence and tumult.

We find quite the opposite occurrence in the poem. The third stanza is perhaps the most calm and sedate of the four. The tone is set as the author describes staring out “across the silken tide.” He tells us of how past lovers, just as the lovers now, sought their dreams in “sundown splendours.” Melancholy as this stanza may be, there is a beauty here, a serenity that is distinct compared to the other stanzas.

The final stanza bursts out almost like the fourth movement of a symphony with a great deal of energy and excitement rather than the repeated “A” of an “ABA”-form tone poem. Bax tells his love to “strain closer yet,” with passionate abandon, and wants her to forget what future generations will think of their union. He has finally shaken off the darkness and depression of the first
three stanzas, proclaiming that in “new sad ages,” no one will care about their love “long centuries ago.” Finally, Bax is willing to damn the social niceties of the proper English gentleman’s life that he is expected to lead and fall into the revelries of his fantasy love. He has shown us that the two legendary lovers were able to prevail, as their love became the love of everyman. That love, in the poem, returns again and again, in this case in the form of Bax and Cohen.

Even though he seems to end the poem having come full circle, the mood is decidedly different from the opening. In the tone poem, however, there is much more a sense of ending where we started. While the accompaniment is a bit more complex, it is essentially the same, and the work’s main theme comes in more full-bodied and dramatic, but otherwise only changed by its combination with the castle theme from the introduction. Bax has brought back the same nobility and grandeur with which he began the work. As he tells us, “the piece ends as it began with a picture of the castle still proudly fronting the sun and wind of centuries.”

We may alter this examination slightly to comply with the more musically theoretical style of analysis. As was determined in Chapter Two of this work, and confirmed by Colin Scott-Sutherland, Tintagel fits into the standard Baxian model of single-movement works that are cast, “almost without exception,” in a modified version of ternary ABA form. Looking at the two works this way, we can see the tone poem dividing into an A section of Introduction and exposition.

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27 Scott-Sutherland, p. 90
of the two primary themes, a B section of the development of those themes, and
the returning A section being the modified version of the Introduction combined
with the first main theme. The poem will follow suit, with the first stanza acting
as A, the second and third stanzas as B, and the final stanza in the fashion of
modified A. This loose analysis of the fourth stanza of the poem may be justified
given that the energy with which the verse begins does make way for one final
hint of melancholy at the very end.

Thus, if we return now to a formal/mood overview of these two works, we
can see a poem that begins with expressions of melancholy, moving on to a
conflict of emotions before finding a sense of calm, and finally an energetic and
ironically positive conclusion. In the tone poem, the material of the introduction
is energetic and boisterous, leading into a serenely beautiful presentation of the
two main themes. The development of those themes brings us to tension and
conflict, which is glorious resolved in a return of the introduction combined
with the first main theme. The paths taken in these two works are quite
different, as are the impressions left by each of them. One might wonder if they
were indeed written by the same artist.

Colin Scott-Sutherland points to this in a general observation of Bax as
composer and as poet:

The duality of Bax/O’Byrne is the outward indication of a deeper
dichotomy within Bax’s creative personality. Dermot O’Byrne was a cloak
for Celtic aspects of his being that required direct expression. Deeply
involved in the resurgence of Irish art, this literary alter ego was a
channel for Bax’s affection for both country and people. It was a
localization of the Celtic impulse in the immediacy of words. And though
it bred its own conflicts (between himself and the English censor in the
matter of *A Dublin Ballad*), the music shows with greater clarity that the dichotomy is a much deeper division in his nature.\(^{28}\)

One might ask if it is fair to address the associations of work written specifically as Dermot O’Byrne to a poem published anonymously, but written initially by Bax only for the eyes of his lover. The answer comes in understanding that, as Scott-Sutherland has explained, O’Byrne was a cloak for Bax. It was more than a pseudonym; it was a means of escape. That said, the affair between Bax and Cohen was also a means of escape for the composer. “Tintagel Castle” is in every important way a poem by O’Byrne.

There are other points of difference, if not opposition, to be found between the music of Bax – particularly his Irish-influenced music of the first two decades of the twentieth century – and the poetry of O’Byrne. Scott-Sutherland notes the extravagant imagery that is a predominant characteristic of O’Byrne’s writing. He says that Bax assimilated the idioms of Irish music, such as the modally ornamented melodic lines, the poignant cadences, and the repeated notes of the beginnings and ends of phrases, into his own style much more quickly and naturally than O’Byrne was able to incorporate the extravagances and encrustations of the Irish literary movement.\(^{29}\) Thus, the music is far subtler than the poetry. Again, as Scott-Sutherland puts it, “Bax absorbed from Ireland something more fundamental and in the end more important than simple folk modality or an archaic pleasure in tales and

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., pp. 72-73.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 22.
legends. For it was in Ireland that he first began to probe, perhaps unconsciously, into those forces that motivated him as a creative artist.”

As we have learned, one of the other great inspirations or motivators for Bax was the sea. Images of the sea can be found in much of O’Byrne’s poetry. Oddly enough, though, the sea is barely even mentioned in “Tintagel Castle.” Other than noting that the castle was an old sea warden, the only line suggestive of the sea at all is “They stared out even as we do / Across the silken tide.” Yet the sea is without question the most distinctive element in the tone poem Tintagel. On the surface, this seems quite a compelling argument against any true similarity between the two works, especially in light of Scott-Sutherland’s critique of O’Byrne’s lesser subtlety in writing versus Bax’s greater skill in composition. It might be possible to counter this argument, however, by feeling the words below the surface. The entire poem has a sway, perhaps an Irish lilt, to it that feels a bit like waves. One might call to mind John Masefield’s “Sea-Fever” as an example of the same lilting text, though of course that poem specifically points to exactly what Bax/O’Byrne seems to neglect. Certainly, there is room for subjective interpretation on this point.

One more avenue for consideration between Bax the composer and O’Byrne the poet is the aspect of rhythm. As the poet O’Byrne, Bax was conscious of the intricacies of rhythm in his text, just as he was conscious of the differences between the rhythm of speech and instrumental rhythm as a composer. The natural rhythm of English music, and to a large degree English poetic speech, tends to be lyrical and rhapsodic. Violent rhythmic gestures may

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30 Ibid., p. 23.
be imposed from outside this lyricism, representing bursts of unaccustomed energy, the force of which is quickly spent so that the a lapse back to the more rhapsodic flow can naturally occur once the emotional outburst has passed. As Scott-Sutherland says, “Bax’s rhythmic drive is virile and masculine, strongly asserted in four-square patterns. Its strength is earthy, often granitic, pounded out in heavy ostinato and pedal point.”31 He goes on to describe the complex nature of Bax’s instrumental rhythms, noting the combination of melodic rhythm and fundamental rhythm that the composer employs with considerable skill in most of his mature music.

If we realize that Bax was conscious of rhythm in several ways, including the effects of the rhythm of his own poetry, then it is not a great leap to seek out still more avenues of comparison. Lawrence Kramer begins the preface to his text on music and poetry by quoting a passage from Bax’s favorite writer, William Butler Yeats:

Though the great song return no more
There’s keen delight in what we have:
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave.
[Yeats, “The Nineteenth Century and After”]32

Kramer says that he has “stolen” Yeats’s title for its singling out of the era since 1800 that developed a new view of music and poetry as arts that are deeply interrelated, endowed with common sources and common ends. He tells us that “figures as diverse as Arnold and Nietzsche treated the work of artists like Beethoven, Wordsworth, Byron, and Wagner as elements in a large cultural

31 Ibid., p. 89.
act of human self-definition, and that they did not share our modern scholarly reluctance to interpret poetry, music, philosophy, and politics in the same breath.\textsuperscript{33} Kramer goes on to explain that his book grew out of the realization that the way he read certain poems was intimately bound with the way that he heard certain pieces of music, and that, while music and poetry had often been linked, it was usually done in a vague and unsatisfying way. There is, though, a method by which music and poetry can be linked in examination and analysis that has proven much more satisfying to some scholars. We can turn to the study of ekphrasis to help us find more perspective on Bax's two works of art.

According to Jean H. Hagstrum, “men who cherish more than one of the arts have often made comparisons between them.”\textsuperscript{34} It has been most common in such comparisons to study the similarities and differences between a poetic work and a work of art such as a painting or a sculpture. These two arts have even come to be known as “the sister arts.” Historians, philosophers, and critics have, for centuries, examined the aesthetic bounties of connected graphic and poetic works, often with the goal of establishing superiority of one over the other. This struggle between the arts, or more accurately, among those who comment upon the arts, has generally become centered on the investigation of ekphrasis. Simply defined, as by James A. W. Heffernan, ekphrasis is the literary representation of visual art.\textsuperscript{35}

The implication of this definition seems to be that the visual image exists first, and the literary work follows. Reading further into Heffernan’s definition, though, we find that his definition is meant to imply something more general. In his later discussion on the distinguishing of ekphrasis as a stylistic mode, he tells us that we must understand that “ekphrasis uses one medium of representation to represent another” before we can recognize its usage.\(^{36}\) James A. Winn points to musically-oriented ekphrasis when he tells us that music and poetry, while having become utterly different enterprises coming together only in such “impure” collaborations as opera, share origins and histories that make them more legitimate “sisters” than the commonly paired painting and poetry.\(^{37}\) Now we know that the potential exists for ekphrasis in music. Experts such as Calvin S. Brown and Siglind Bruhn have written about a musical form of ekphrasis, drawing distinctions between it and the more common program music. Not often are we provided examples of two “sister arts” focused on the same subject by the same artist, thus establishing ekphrasis, or at least the potential for it, in an entirely different way. The tone poem *Tintagel* and the verse poem “Tintagel Castle” provide such a case.

As the concept of ekphrasis in either its most common or its musical form is likely new to many readers, it would be best to begin with a brief exploration of the idea and how it might apply to the work in question. Hagstrum notes that Simonides called painting mute poetry, and then tells us that he has found cases where the mute statue was given a voice, and the silent

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 4.

form [of a painting] was endowed with the power of speech. He calls this effect “ekphrastic.”38 Heffernan explains his personal fascination with ekphrasis, stating that it evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language. He further suggests that this “struggle” is often “powerfully gendered,” with the voice of male speech attempting to control the female image.39 Finally, Heffernan claims that his definition of ekphrasis allows us to distinguish it from two other more commonly considered means of mingling literature and the visual arts, these being pictorialism and iconicity. As he sees them, both of these types aim chiefly to represent natural objects and artifacts rather than works of representational art.40 To conclude, in borrowing from Heffernan’s introduction to ekphrasis, it might be appropriate to note this remark: “When we understand that ekphrasis uses one medium of representation to represent another, we can begin to see what makes ekphrasis a distinguishable mode and what binds together all ekphrastic literature from the age of Homer to our own.”41 Surely, this one sentence opens the door to consideration of other types of ekphrasis, so if we keep these broad concepts in mind, we can move now to the more specialized notion of musical ekphrasis.

Brown begins his examination of the comparison of music and literature by establishing a general sense of the fine arts. He names painting, sculpture, and architecture as arts that must be seen, while music and literature are intended to be heard, and thus more closely related. Following this train of thought, Brown explains that these two arts are alike in that their development

38 Hagstrum, p. 23.
39 Heffernan, p. 1.
40 Ibid., p. 3.
41 Ibid., p. 4.
is through time, hence the requirement of a good memory for their comprehension. He also notes their major difference, that music is “an art of sound in and for itself,” with no relationship to anything outside the composition, while literature is an art employing sounds “to which external significance has been arbitrarily attached.”

Concluding his initial remarks, Brown states that “the composer has at his command a far greater variety of sounds than the poet, and far greater freedom in his arrangement and combination of them, but as a rule his sounds convey nothing which is not part of the audible world.” By contrast, though, the poet “invariably deals with sounds which do convey something beyond themselves, and this fact, while greatly limiting his achievements in the realm of pure sound, opens up to him other possibilities which are closed to the composer.”

Bruhn refers specifically to musical ekphrasis, and points to the later years of the nineteenth century as the origin point of such a phenomenon. He specifically cites Heffernan, and defines musical ekphrasis as “the musical representation of verbal or visual representation.” Early in his text, Bruhn sets out to define the difference between the musical equivalent of ekphrasis and what we generally know as “program music.” He states that the two genres belong to the same overall species, owing to characteristics such as both being comprised of purely instrumental music with the purpose of referential, narrative, or pictorial scheme, and that both have often been described as

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“illustrative” or “representative” music. As for differences, he begins with broad statements, explaining that program music “narrates or paints, suggests or represents scenes or stories (and, by extension, events or characters) that may or may not exist out there but enter the music from the composer’s own mind.” (Bruhn provides the emphasis here.) Meanwhile, musical ekphrasis “narrates or paints a fictional reality created by an artist other than the composer of the music: by a painter or a poet.” He goes on to state that musical ekphrasis “usually relates not only to the content of the poetically or pictorially conveyed fictional reality, but also to the form and style of representation in which this content was cast in its primary medium.”

In the comparison of Arnold Bax’s tone poem *Tintagel* and his verse poem “Tintagel Castle,” if we are to consider the concept of ekphrasis, several new questions arise. For instance, are we to consider *Tintagel* ekphrastic, or is the work simply programmatic? If it is a product of ekphrasis, can we relate it directly to “Tintagel Castle?” Is it possible for an ekphrastic composition to be connected with more than one previously existing work of literature? For that matter, is it possible that *Tintagel* might instead be connected ekphrastically to one or more other art types, such as architecture or painting? We can now explore these quandaries to discover which, if any, add to our understanding of the works in question.

We know that Bax wrote his poem to Cohen in the early part of September 1917, while he was at Tintagel. The short score for the tone poem is

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p. 29.
47 Ibid.
dated October of that year and was apparently composed wholly in London.48 Once the short score was composed, though, he moved on to begin writing his next tone poem, *November Woods*. It was not until January 1919 that he completed the full orchestral score. As the poem preceded the tone poem by at least a month, there exists at least the opportunity for the latter to have been an ekphrastic response to the former.

Is *Tintagel* a work of program music, or is it ekphrastic? Let us again turn to the definition of each of these terms. Calvin S. Brown sets out on his quest for a definition of “program music” by telling us that, even once all possible allowances have been made in comparison to absolute music, “the programmatists will readily admit that the suggestions given by music *without the aid of words* are, at best, indefinite. Experiments of various sorts bear out this conclusion.”49 Winn confirms this from the opposite perspective, marking the words of Liszt. “With a large audience,” we are told, “it will never listen to a symphony, quartet, or other composition of this order without outlining a program for itself during the performance, according to the grandiose, lively, impetuous, serenely soothing, or melancholy character of the music.”50 Brown’s point is that the pieces require some kind of written guide with which the listener needs to be familiar before he can interpret the music in connection with the program. From this broader point, he breaks the concept of program music down into two types: descriptive program music and narrative program music.

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49 Brown, pp. 236-237.
50 Winn, p. 274.
Descriptive program music, as Brown explains it, need not necessarily be derived from any kind of literary or other artistic source. He points to works such as Camille Saint-Saëns' *Le carnaval des animaux*, or Felix Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides Overture* as works derived directly from nature, and Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à ‘L’après-midi d’un faune’* as descriptive of a mood rather than of any specific story.

Narrative program music, by contrast, must incorporate descriptive effects and elements, while actions taken by the things described must also be portrayed. The composer of such a work needs a fairly elaborate program presented by non-musical means for the listener to properly interpret the music. Brown points to the example of Richard Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben* as illustrating his explanation.

Bruhn delves more deeply into the matter. He gives us essentially the same pair of items, though in his terminology they are called representation and narration. Representation encompasses the ideals of “depiction/reference,” and is made from a “natural relation” to the object of depiction. This can be achieved through resemblance, mimesis, or emulation – terms that denote that one aspect of the object (for example, its visual appearance from a particular angle) is artfully reproduced.\(^{51}\) He believes that representation by musical means may occur not only through mimicry, but also through sensual impressions of hues, shapes, and spatiality. Cultural and historical conventions play a part in depiction and reference as well.

\(^{51}\) Bruhn, p. 9.
Narration, by contrast, contains a temporal component that translates well from literature to music. The changing colors and textures of music convey changes of image or text. Most interestingly, though, Bruhn suggests that many of the cases of musical ekphrasis that he has studied contain one or the other of two hybrid modes: visual representations attempting to narrate, or verbal representations encapsulating the atemporal, the “frozen moment.”

Brown tells us that, in either case, the composer is choosing a method of composition in which he must admit that the music alone is not sufficient to convey the ideas or the program. One obvious question would be whether ekphrastic music can perform this function any better or any differently. The answer to that would seem to be that it cannot, as musical ekphrasis depends even more specifically on the listener’s knowledge of extra-musical material than does general program music. Thus, we are dealing in this examination with a matter of degree.

The question remains: Is *Tintagel* programmatic or ekphrastic? Bax’s tone poem has a program of sorts that was provided by the composer, but right away, he tells us in his notes that the work is only “in the broadest sense program music.” As noted in Chapter Two of this text, some experts such as Norman Demuth and Julian Herbage have described the piece as more of a “programmatic mood evocation.” This raises a further question, whether the work is truly a symphonic poem at all.

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52 Ibid., p. 20.
54 Parlett, p. 140. (This is from the 1922 Leeds Festival notes. The original note said much the same.)
Writing a few years before Bax composed *Tintagel*, Herbert Antcliffe discussed the nature of the symphonic poem (or tone poem) since Liszt. “Although in speaking of the symphonic poem of today, we usually think of Strauss and others of the same school, we must not forget that other composers of totally different ideas and ideals have used the term freely and with definite purpose.” Later, he explains that “one of the difficulties of saying what the symphonic poem is or is not, arises from the fact that, unlike most art forms, it is used as a means of freedom, and sometimes licence [sic], and not as a means of restraint.” He goes on to illustrate this point by describing the essentially classical structure of Strauss’s highly narrative tone poems, contrasting them against an unnamed work by Vincent d’Indy which he tells us is a series of variations written in reverse so that the theme, an unharmonized melody, comes at the end of the work to symbolize the gradual divestiture of a person who is compelled to give up a piece of his clothing at each gate of his journey to the nether regions. Clearly, Antcliffe’s feeling is that a symphonic poem may be almost anything a gifted composer says it is, so long as it makes sense with the description or narrative with which it is associated. R.W.S. Mendl weighed in on the discussion of what constitutes a symphonic poem twenty years after Antcliffe and drew essentially the same conclusion. In his discussion of the genre, he wrote that “By ascribing the term ‘symphonic poem’ to an orchestral composition based on any subject which also has an existence apart from music, we are employing a very wide definition, though it is hard to see how we

56 Ibid., p. 521.
can narrow it down without excluding such a work as Bax’s ‘November Woods’, which relates to no definite pictorial scene but is descriptive of any woods in late autumn, and yet is undoubtedly a symphonic poem.”57 His belief was that the wideness of such a definition admittedly includes music that is simply expressive of generalized emotions or scenic ideas, but that there is no reason why such compositions should be excluded from the definition of the genre. If we can agree that the work is a tone poem, and if we have also determined that it is a mood evocation, (descriptive rather than narrative), then we can begin to answer the real question of whether *Tintagel* is ekphrastic, and if so, whether its ekphrastic “sister” is Bax’s own verse poem “Tintagel Castle.”

As Elnaes notes in his study of *Tintagel* and the collected “Cohen papers,” Bax regarded his romance with Cohen as “the stuff of legend – like the works of Thomas Malory.”58 In light of the evidence Elnaes uncovered, and despite Lewis Foreman’s insistence to the contrary even after reading the same letters Elnaes read, the tone poem proves not to be a metaphoric celebration of the composer’s lusty endeavors, but instead a musical addition to the legends so personally meaningful to the two lovers. (Foreman states in the new, third edition of his biography that Bax was “hiding the actual genesis” of the work by providing the lengthy program that he wrote, continuing his line of thinking from his earlier editions.59) Further, it provided him another opportunity to bask in that element with which he was most comfortable – the sea. At this

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58 Elnaes, p. 134.
59 Foreman, p. 161.
point, it would seem that the ekphrastic connections between the two Bax works would be minimal, but there is more to consider.

There can be no doubt that, when writing the four verses of his poem to Cohen, Bax was drawing upon the literature and legends already explored in depth within this dissertation. From Geoffrey to Malory to Tennyson, Bax was well versed in the lore of Tintagel, the legends of Arthur and Mark, Tristan and Isolde. He had received picture postcards from Cohen that depicted the site, and she also knew and relished the legends, had read Malory, and romanticized in agreement with Bax their own place in the ongoing aura of Tintagel. He had seen the castle grounds and the scenic view as the Atlantic Ocean’s waves crashed upon the shore.

Bax did not provide us with any specific documentation of his inspiration for the tone poem. The dedication to Cohen tells us that she was in his mind as he composed the piece, but it does not tell us what drove him to compose. The trip to Tintagel had been frustrating at best, and certainly did not engender romantic celebration. This brings us back to the legends.

Every indication we have points to the notion that Bax saw himself and Cohen as following in the footsteps of Tristan and Isolde, denied their heroic, romantic love by circumstance and the conventions of the society in which they lived. Lines in Bax’s poem such as “They stared out even as we do / Across the silken tide, / And sought in sundown splendours / The dream their world denied” confirm this indication. Bax wrote his poem to extend the line from the legendary past to himself and Cohen and even beyond.
As we examine the various possible permutations of ekphrasis, let us now look at the issue from a different direction. Bax spent some of his time on the shore of Cornwall enjoying the view of the old castle itself. We can find examples of ekphrasis between the architecture of the castle and the poem. Bax begins by citing the old, crumbling walls of Tintagel, and then describes it as an old sea-warden. He comes back to the image, though, using the descriptive words “shadowy,” “dusty,” and “broken,” to further invoke the castle while simultaneously suggesting other ideas. The physical castle, the architecture, also influences the tone poem. Bax tells us in his program note that the brass theme first heard in the introduction “may be taken as representing the ruined castle.” Could it be argued that he is drawing from literary sources? It could, but when we take into account that he had just been to the site itself, it is more likely that the physical image of Tintagel had to have been at least a part of his overall inspiration.

There is another possibility for ekphrasis that has not been suggested to this point. Foreman tells us that in 1907 and 1908, the composer became interested in the work of a number of painters, and indeed Bax became known in Pre-Raphaelite circles in London.⁶⁰ One or two of Bax’s early songs were apparently, according to Foreman, suggested by Pre-Raphaelite paintings, though the biographer does not specify which paintings these may be.⁶¹ The most celebrated members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), and John

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⁶⁰ Foreman seems to be referring to a group of English painter, poets, and critics who called themselves the “Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.” The group was founded in 1848.

⁶¹ Foreman, pp. 64-65.
Everett Millais (1829-1896). If we assume the typical Baxian enthusiasm for taking in as much as possible (as he did in his reading), then it is not a great stretch to suggest that he was familiar with the work of the English Romantic landscape painter and watercolorist Joseph William Turner (1775-1851). Turner’s style was not in keeping with the clarity sought by the Pre-Raphaelites, but as his dedicated advocate John Ruskin had worked for years to forge connections between Turner and the Brotherhood\textsuperscript{62}, a young Bax picking and choosing his influences and inspirations and seeing the rise of French Impressionism may well have found the formerly popular painter appealing. Certainly, Bax could have been enchanted by any of the twenty-six drawings engraved by Turner for the two editions of Byron’s \textit{Works} published in 1825 and again in 1832-1834.\textsuperscript{63} Turner painted a set of watercolors that he titled “Tintagel Castle, Cornwall – 1815.”

One characteristic of Turner that Bax might have found personally interesting is that, like him, Turner was somewhat reluctant to be in the public eye. As Heffernan explains in contrasting Turner to Byron in his essay, “Turner hid himself. He never posed for a formal portrait in oils by anyone else; he resented any expression of curiosity about his private life; he conceived the imagination of the artist as a sanctum sanctorum.”\textsuperscript{64} It seems that Turner’s work, therefore, embodies the antithesis of romantic self-expression in an age where such promotion was expected. The shared characteristic of public

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 211.
reclusiveness, an artistic kinship on a personal level, is the sort of thing that might have drawn Bax to consider Turner’s work in greater depth.

It seems also that Bax and Turner held similar political views. Turner felt strongly about the various liberation movements in Europe during his time, according to the biographer Jack Lindsay.\textsuperscript{65} He had expressed his feelings for the cause of Greek independence in two paintings from 1816, \textit{The Temple of Jupiter Panellenius Restored} and \textit{View of the Temple of Jupiter Panellenius, In the Island of Aegina, with the Greek National Dance of the Romaika}\textsuperscript{66} much in the same way as Bax expressed his feelings regarding the independence of Ireland with poetry such as his \textit{A Dublin Ballad}, written one hundred years later.

One last similarity between the two men that might have drawn Bax to Turner was that, like Bax, Turner also wrote poetry, much of it shown with his paintings during his lifetime. His sketchbooks are full of verse, apparently written either at the beginnings of each day or at the endings of his drawing sessions. “He seeks above all to express his sense of the charm and variety of nature,” according to Lindsay.\textsuperscript{67} There are other poems expressing a sense of frustration and discontent over personal affairs, making statements in verse that he could not in prose. As nature was at the heart of Bax’s own artistic interests, and love was certainly in his mind in his early years, it is easy to see how he could have become intrigued with the work of a man with whom he had several notable characteristics in common.


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 141.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 104.
The “Tintagel” paintings emphasize the sea and the island more than the castle structure. Obviously, the sea crashing upon the rocks in one painting would have captured the composer’s imagination. It is difficult to see anything in them that would have specifically influenced Bax’s poem, but the possibility of an effect upon the music is there. This remains speculation, however, as there appears to be no specific evidence connecting Bax to Turner’s paintings.

We return finally to the question of whether Bax reacted ekphrastically to his own “Tintagel Castle” in the composition of the tone poem Tintagel. As previously demonstrated, there are some arguable similarities between the two works. There are also some differences. Despite its four verses, a generous analyst can see the poem as comprising an ABA structure, as found in the tone poem. It can be perceived as coming full circle as does the tone poem. The structure of the castle itself is depicted in both works, in the descriptive words of the text and in the rising, heroic theme in the brass music, though the sea is far more prominent in the tone poem than in the verse poem, where it is almost an afterthought. The poem is an intimate work, while the tone poem seems broadly depicted and all-inclusive. In mood, the love poem to Harriet Cohen is much more immediate, not quite despairing but certainly expressing the sadness, frustration, and longing Bax felt for her, while the tone poem evokes a far more positive view. This is likely the reason for the perception of the composition as the expression of Freudian lust as mentioned earlier. The tone poem was composed within a month of the writing of the poem. It was fresh in Bax’s mind, but then, so were all of the other possible influences, ekphrastic or otherwise.
If indeed Bax did take as inspiration for a musical work the words of one of his own poems, as it seems possible here, it would not be the only such occasion, nor the first. The poem “Nympholept” appeared at the end of 1912, around the same time as the piano work of the same name. (The orchestration was completed in 1915.) Further, Peter Thompson points to a short poem written in Cohen’s autograph book that represents a case of inspiration flowing in the opposite direction, as the poem “The Maiden With the Daffodil” is dated from October 1916, while the piano work (with a dedication to Cohen) comes from January of 1915.⁶⁸

Without any corroborating evidence from Bax or from those who knew him well, it cannot be said for certain that the poem in any way inspired or otherwise affected the tone poem. Obviously, the notion cannot be patently rejected, either. What can we deduce? It certainly appears to be reasonable to claim, as Lewis Foreman concludes, that the two arts embraced by Arnold Bax had both sources and imagery in common.⁶⁹ For now, it will have to be left as a possibility to be explored at a later date, should more information become available.

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⁶⁹ Foreman, p. 423.
Figure 4. Two of Turner’s paintings titled “Tintagel Castle, Cornwall 1815”
depicting both the dramatic and the more commonplace views of the site
CHAPTER IV  
*TINTAGEL* IN CONTEXT

Having put Arnold Bax and his tone poem *Tintagel* under the microscope in the previous chapters, now it is time to widen the view and attempt to place the composer and his work more broadly into the context of other music of the period. As noted by Gwilym Beechey, Bax was a contemporary of Bartók, Kodály, Stravinsky, Webern and Berg, along with the British composers Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bridge, and Ireland. With perhaps the exception of John Ireland, Bax remained throughout his lifetime the only unashamed romantic, a composer whose work was not often affected by the revival of music of the Renaissance and Baroque, nor by the new music of the early years of the twentieth century where dissonance became more and more a norm of expression for its own sake, and an essential part of many composers’ natural vocabulary.\(^1\) Bax felt most comfortable composing for the piano and for the orchestra. At the piano, his skills as both a sight-reader and score-reader, along with his seemingly boundless abilities as a player, allowed him to produce a number of fine piano works, including four sonatas, and a series of tone poems and seven symphonies, all exhibiting the luxuriant harmony for which he is known. Unfortunately, that luxuriance could at times be combined with a lack of discipline and purposeful concentration, taking away from the points of works where the themes and initial musical thoughts suggest greater results. In view of this, as Beechey puts it, it may well be that the works that most deserve

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recognition are the relatively short single-movement pieces for piano and for orchestra rather than the large-scale, multi-movement works “where sumptuousness of sound can tend to cloy, and where the thematic basis of a movement or a composition is not strong enough in character to warrant the length of treatment that it received.”

The Tone Poem in Context

Let us begin to place Bax’s *Tintagel* into some sort of historical context. There can be no creditable historical discussion of the symphonic poem or tone poem unless we begin with Franz Liszt. Liszt (1811-1886) composed twelve orchestral works to which he gave the name symphonic poem between the years 1850 and 1860, with a thirteenth written in 1882. Most of the works of Liszt are short when compared with those of Richard Strauss, and are in no way as minutely descriptive as are Strauss’s tone poems. Liszt’s pieces present the general ideas of the subjects indicated in the titles, rather than detailed narratives. Their derivation comes from the concert overtures of Mendelssohn and the *Coriolanus* Overture of Beethoven on the one hand, and from the programmatic symphonies of Spohr and Berlioz on the other hand, and their structures are quite varied, depending upon the subject matter. The symphonic poems of Liszt “seemed to offer a new point of departure, a reassurance to younger composers that it was possible to explore an expanding

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2 Ibid.
world of orchestral sounds in fresh shapes, with a new measure of liberation from the overpowering legacy of Beethoven.”

R.W.S. Mendl observed in his 1932 essay tracing the history of the symphonic poem that with the exception of *Les Préludes*, and perhaps *Mazeppa* and *Orpheus*, the symphonic poems of Liszt are not often heard in the concert hall. The same holds true today. Mendl believed that Liszt would have to suffer the same fate as pioneers in other spheres. He notes that the original Florentine creators of opera have had to pay “not unnaturally” for being the first in their field, being quickly overshadowed by Monteverdi and the great musical dramatists of successive generations. In comparison, he names Glinka as being the founder of Russian opera, which is far different from Italian, German, or French opera, and then explains that Glinka’s chief importance was in paving the way for Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Without even naming the Mannheim composers who actually popularized the form, he tells us of their neglect today in favor of the “father of the symphony,” Haydn. “Similarly, the symphonic poems of Liszt are valuable largely from the historical point of view,” he says. Mendl concludes his point with the suggestion that as historical relics, rather than due to their intrinsic merits, the Liszt tone poems are interesting to students of the art, and that these students might welcome more frequent opportunities to hear them. Of course, today’s recordings allow for such an opportunity, even if such recordings are not as numerous as they might be.

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6 Ibid.
Not every writer on Liszt’s contribution has been as kind as Mendl. In an article from 1936, G.D. Skelton noted of the composer and his symphonic poems that, “. . . his own works in that form are hardly sufficient justification for the overthrow of the formal structure of overture and symphony. It seems to me, as far as Liszt is concerned, that the invention of the symphonic poem was a sign of weakness rather than strength.” Skelton’s criticism centers on the belief that tone poems like Liszt’s *Hamlet* are utterly dependent upon the story, while works with similar subjects – Beethoven’s *Egmont* and Schumann’s *Manfred* overtures, each using more traditional symphonic forms, convey the state of mind of the subjects while the events of their stories are almost immaterial. While this evaluation may indeed be true, and while it is certainly reflective of many works referred to as symphonic poems, one has to wonder whether the criticism is valid. Liszt was not attempting to convey the same kind of musical message as Beethoven or Schumann. Should he be negatively criticized for having failed to do something that had not been his aim in the first place? Skelton goes even further in damning Liszt, stating, “Quite simply, Beethoven’s *Egmont* and Schumann’s *Manfred* are as truly music apart from Goethe and Byron as beside them. Liszt’s *Hamlet* is music only beside Shakespeare.”* This line of criticism will have further implications as we consider the composers of symphonic poems, both continental and of the British Isles, and we will see how the negative impact of this sort of vague misrepresentation can be found in the evaluation of the works of Arnold Bax.

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8 Ibid., p. 693.
The concept of the symphonic poem spread rapidly through Europe, fueled by the increasing development of nationalism. Smetana in Bohemia, Franck in France, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov in Russia are the most well known of the many composers who contributed to the developing art of the symphonic poem. Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884) wrote a cycle of six tone poems entitled Má vlast (“My Country”), of which Vltava (The Moldau) is regularly used as an example in music appreciation courses, while the others are far less frequently heard. The six works are Vyšehrad, The Moldau, Šarka, From Bohemia’s Woods and Fields, Tabor, and Blanik. These symphonic poems, each derived from the history and legends of Bohemia, are closely connected with his opera Libuše, and are described by the composer as a splendid medieval castle scene, the stately flow of the Moldau River, the triumph of an Amazon-like Bohemian maiden over her enemies, and the military exploits of the followers of Huss.\footnote{Plantinga, p. 350.} The pieces are not so minutely detailed as the tone poems of Richard Strauss, but are nevertheless definitely narrative in character.\footnote{Mendl, p. 450.}

It is common to hear that Smetana was the father of modern Czech music, but the fact that he brought the music of his country up from a mediocre level to one that now compares favorably with that of most other European countries tends to be glossed over.\footnote{John Clapham, “Smetana: A Century After,” The Musical Times, 125, No. 1694 (April, 1984): p. 204.} Even more so than did Glinka with Russian music, Smetana was able to establish what became accepted as a
distinctly Czech style of composition. Further, the three symphonic poems written during his Swedish period (ca: 1856-1862) are sufficiently early to give him a strong claim of being the first composer after Liszt to write this type of composition. He was first, too, in selecting a landscape or scenery as a subject for a symphonic poem. Despite all this, the efforts of Smetana were shown a considerable amount of indifference at the time. As John Clapham states, “a number of myopic critics, who should have known better, adopted a hostile attitude to him, picking on what they liked to think was ‘Wagnerism’ in his music and using this as a stick to beat him with.” This remark is interesting, in that it points more toward Smetana the opera composer than Smetana the creator of symphonic poems. Indeed, he was for the latter part of his life and for many years after his death known more as an opera conductor and composer. There was also strong prejudice against him in the Prague Theatre Association, which apparently stole from him and treated him very poorly. The situation was better with the general public, but with the exception of performances of The Bartered Bride, even the public was less than fully ready to support his other operas. History has been more kind to Smetana, and the focus of his reputation has changed since the time of his death. His obituary in The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular (which names him “Frederic” Smetana) points to his work as conductor at the Bohemian Opera House, and states that he wrote “many

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12 Smetana finished writing Richard III in July 1858. Wallenstein’s Camp comes from January 1859, and Hakon Jarl was completed in March 1861.

13 Clapham, p. 204.

14 Ibid., p. 201.
Bohemian operas and several important orchestral pieces.” The article goes on to name two of these orchestral works, “Mein Vaterland” (Má vlast), with which the writer seems unfamiliar, as he calls the work “a symphonic poem” (rather than a set of six such pieces) and “Vyschrad” (Vyšehrad), which is part of the aforementioned collection. These “two” orchestral pieces “have been performed at the Crystal Palace, where they met with little favor” the obituary tells us. “Otherwise, Smetana was not known in this country.” Fifty years later, Smetana (now called “Friedrich” by The Musical Times) was being cited for the “undiminished power and effect” of his work upon the imagination of the Czech people. Still, it is his operas, and particularly The Bartered Bride, that receive most of the attention of the writer, while the symphonic poems are mentioned secondarily, though the set of Má vlast was played in full during the concerts addressed in this writer’s article.

César Franck (1822-1890), the Belgian composer and organist who spent most of his career in Paris, further advanced the definition of what might be called a symphonic poem. He gave the name “Poème Symphonique” to works that we might rightfully hesitate to define as such. Works like Rédemption and Psyché, both including choruses singing texts, if called symphonic poems make it impossible to draw the line between themselves and cantatas or oratorios. Fortunately, we also have more traditionally accepted and more successful works in this form from Franck, including Les Eolides, Le Chasseur Maudit, and

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16 Ibid., p. 351.
18 Mendl, p. 450.
*Les Djinns*, though again, it should be noted that in the last of these three, the composer features the solo piano in a concerto-like manner. One might point to Strauss’s *Don Quixote* as another commonly accepted symphonic poem using the same soloist concept, as the cello and the viola take on the roles of the poem’s two main characters. It is interesting to note that some writers, including Julien Tiersot and Frederick H. Martens, have chosen to ignore the problem of the works including chorus by stating that Franck wrote three symphonic poems, without acknowledging *Rédemption* and *Psyché*. While this does help to clarify the examination of the symphonic poems, it discounts the determination of the composer and begs the question of who the final authority should be in such matters. Regardless, despite the powerful writing of *Le Chasseur Maudit* and the vivid imagination of *Les Djinns*, Franck is no more thought of primarily as a composer of symphonic poems than is Liszt or Smetana.

Next on the list of important composers of symphonic poems is Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). Here is a composer who was, more than those previously mentioned, suited particularly well to the medium of programmatic symphonic composition. Even his works in other orchestral forms, including the symphonies, are free in structure and frequently delve into the nature of program music; but in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Francesca da Rimini*, *The Tempest*, and *Hamlet*, he made notable contributions to the art of the symphonic poem. These works are especially significant in that, while containing many passages

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19 Ibid.
21 Mendl, p. 450.
of brilliant description, they aim far more toward the drawing of character than at specific narrative. Tchaikovsky’s musical portrait of Hamlet does not match the English Shakespearian notion of the prince, but it is nonetheless sure in its own Russian way. The loves of Romeo and Juliet and the feud of the Montagues and Capulets, as well as the tragic picture of Francesca, are most convincingly painted in sound. Throughout these works the rich orchestral colors are a striking and fully appropriate feature.\footnote{Ibid.}

It might be argued that Tchaikovsky did not refer to any of the above-mentioned works as symphonic poems. Obviously, Mendl feels otherwise. In the grand scheme of placing Arnold Bax and his \textit{Tintagel} in a historical context, this may be a minor point, but it is still one worth considering. Catherine Coppola, in her study of the Russian composer’s \textit{Francesca da Rimini}, makes a rarely considered point with regard to Tchaikovsky’s titles. “While ostensibly insignificant, deliberations over title reflect the concern of the composer to frame his or her work within the parameters of neighboring genres. For the fantasy, this concern often yields compound titles, such as Tchaikovsky’s formulations \textit{symphonic fantasy} and \textit{fantasy overture}.”\footnote{Catherine Coppola, “The Elusive Fantasy: Genre, Form, and Program in Tchaikovsky’s ‘Francesca da Rimini,’” \textit{19th-Century Music} 22, No. 2 (Autumn, 1998): p. 170.} Owing as much as they do to Liszt, with comparable aspects of both form and effect, it can easily be argued that the symphonic fantasy and perhaps even the fantasy overture are essentially the same in the hands of Tchaikovsky as would be the symphonic poem. What is most pertinent to this current examination, though, is that, just as with the composers previously mentioned, and despite
Tchaikovsky’s natural proclivity toward the genre, it is not the symphonic poem, symphonic fantasy, fantasy overture, or any other name one can place on the genre for which this composer is best known or most frequently credited.

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) provides us with both another link in the chain of development of the symphonic poem, but also with another aspect of its diverse nature. Though he composed in a variety of forms, Rimsky-Korsakov is best known in Western Europe and the United States for his brilliantly scored orchestral works, which culminated in the late 1880s with *Capriccio espagnole, Russian Easter Overture*, and *Scheherazade*.\(^{24}\) It could be argued, though, that his greatest contributions came from his eleven operas, the genre to which he devoted the last twenty years of his life, and for which he composed his most imaginative and original music. In their article commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the composer’s death, Leonid Sabaneev and S.W. Pring suggest the same, stating “Rimsky-Korsakov’s centre of gravity lies, in his operas... which constitute his immense contribution to the music of Russia and the world. Unfortunately, only a few of them are known outside of Russia.”\(^{25}\)

Russian musical thinkers and historians were aware, probably by the time of Rimsky-Korsakov’s death, that the French Impressionist school headed by Debussy and Ravel was little more than a continuation of the line of the Russian composer’s creative work, with many of his methods of writing

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\(^{24}\) Longyear, p. 223.

transmitted in whole to this group. One must also note, however, that the Russian composers of the late Romantic period, including Rimsky-Korsakov, had in fact been previously indebted to the French, as all the members of the “Mighty Handful” (Balakirev, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Cui) were in their time extremely dependant, from a creative point of view, on the work of Berlioz.

What makes Rimsky-Korsakov interesting in this discussion beyond having written his masterful suite *Scheherazade*, a work comprised of four separate tone poems in the guise of traditional symphonic forms, is the specific source of his inspiration. From very early in his compositional career, Rimsky-Korsakov fell in love with and chose for himself the world of the Russian legendary epos. As Sabaneev and Pring tell us, “he will pass forever into musical history as the great Russian teller of tales, the musical bard who immortalized the Russian legend in musical forms imbued with the national coloring suited to it.” His work sounds throughout with one characteristic idea – a profound and almost religious reverence for Nature. Again quoting Sabaneev and Pring, “he is precisely a poet of Nature.” Pantheism is integral to the mysticism of the Slavic people, and the idea of God-Nature is very near and closely related to general Russian sentiment. Rimsky-Korsakov used this sentiment as the expression of his nationalism, but it is interesting that Bax, who spent long months of his youth traveling in Russia, adopted a very similar reverence toward Nature.

26 Ibid., p. 403.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 404.
If we follow the path that Mendl lays out as the line of development of the symphonic poem, the next composer we should examine is Richard Wagner (1813-1883). While Wagner was not a composer of symphonic poems, he did influence them. As Mendl puts it, “The sway of Wagner was, indeed, so tremendous that for many years few could resist it – even those who disliked his works finding it impossible to escape from their overmastering domination.”

He goes on to cite the developments of orchestral technique and color, the vast range of instrumental subtleties from impressive power at one end of the spectrum to extraordinary delicacy at the other, which go well beyond even the contributions of Berlioz. Wagner opened up countless possibilities for musical character-drawing and description, and as Mendl sees it, “it may be doubted whether anything that his successors have produced has surpassed in vividness Wagner’s own achievements.”

The greater point that Mendl is making is that Wagner’s imagery gave composers the tools they needed to take the symphonic poem into the next century. “They prepared the way for the death-chamber in Tod und Verklärung, the strange adventures of Don Quixote, the battle uproar in Ein Heldenleben, the seascapes and sylvan glades and cloud-effects of Debussy, the exquisite nature studies of Delius, and the rolling waves in Arnold Bax’s Tintagel.”

Finally, Richard Strauss (1864-1949) is a composer who can be seen first and foremost for his accomplishments with the symphonic poem. Again, Mendl observed: “The sensational character of Strauss’s musical personality...
so dominated the close of the nineteenth century that it is scarcely surprising that his work should have been regarded as marking the zenith of the symphonic poem as an art-form."³² Peter Pirie tells us that the symphonic poems of Strauss, derived historically from Liszt, are broad in outline and form, and close to the German symphonic tradition. Not only can we hear the massively moving orchestral textures of Wagner (though these are tempered by the lucidity of Berlioz), but there exists the large formal procedures of Brahms, as well.³³ Without doubt, Strauss was a descriptive genius with an understanding of orchestral color and effects possessed by few others. His music is full of elaborate and complex orchestration, which is matched by the complexity of his programs. He is able to sustain the interest of the listener, without pause, for lengths of time equal to that of full symphonies of the Classical and early Romantic periods.

Yet other scholars see Strauss in a different light. In tracing the path from Wagner into the next century, Eric Salzman suggested that Strauss absorbed the chromaticism of Wagner into his own techniques without working to further develop it. As Salzman said, “Strauss developed few new techniques and, essentially, he found no new forms. His style up to and perhaps including Der Rosenkavalier (1909-1910) suggests not so much a development from as a thorough exploration of the implications of the Wagnerian revolution.”³⁴ Having marked the end of a style period in the music of Strauss with the naming of one opera, Salzman points to others to note that “It is impossible to deny the impact

³² Ibid.
of works like *Solome* (1903-1905) and *Elektra* (1906-1908) on the early
development of twentieth-century music, but it is difficult today to assess the
significance of that impact.” The important point here, it seems, is that
Salzman sees Strauss’s most important contributions coming not from his
symphonic poems, but from his operas.

Another author, Bryan R. Simms, describes Strauss once more in terms
of his contributions. He calls *Salome* “the prototype of German Expressionist
opera,” and later, he points to Strauss again as the forerunner of postwar
German neoclassicism with his opera *Der Rosenkavalier.* One must ask if a
composer can be seen as most prominent in one genre when his greatest
contributions to music seem to come from another.

Even Mendl, who as we have just seen called Strauss’s symphonic poems
the “zenith” of work in that genre, points to problems. “Yet it is, I suggest, a
mistake to regard Strauss as the consummation of the symphonic poem. He
marks the highest point hitherto reached by a certain type of work in that
genre, but for all its scope and variety his art is subject to certain limitations.”
For Mendl, those limitations include what he calls a “superficiency or
hollowness” in Strauss’s musical mentality, and the lack of a “poetic mind” from
a composer of tone poems. As Mendl puts it, Strauss’s language “is the
language of prose – a forceful, supple prose – and his so-called “tone-poems” are
not poems at all, but rather brilliant short stories, insofar as it is possible to

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35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., pp. 286-287.
38 Mendl, p. 453.
drawn an analogy between music and literature.” The point here is that Strauss left the door open for considerable advancement and overall development of the symphonic poem.

If the fault in Strauss is his lack of a “poetic mind,” then we must look next to a composer who had such a mind. We can find such a man in Claude Debussy (1862-1918). Though we cannot point to orchestral works that Debussy called symphonic poems, there are several that are heard as such by most listeners. These would include the Prélude à L’Après-midi d’un faune, the three movements of Images originally conceived as separate works, all for piano four-hands or for two pianos, the three movements of La Mer, and the three Nocturnes. Mendl asserts that the Nocturnes are “a group, possessing a single character in that they are the air-borne fancies of a musical poet,” while the bond between the three pieces that comprise La Mer “is obvious: they represent different aspects of the sea.” He goes on to suggest that the latter work “might almost be described as a miniature sea-symphony, except that the internal structure of each piece depends upon purely poetic considerations and not upon any symphonic tradition.” Salzman concurred with the assessment of Mendl, noting that Debussy’s innovations, even though they are in great measure expressed in his orchestral works, are based to some degree on the particular subtle inflections of the French language and French poetry. He observed the character and length of sound (as opposed to strong metrical and

39 Ibid., pp. 454-455.
40 Ibid., p. 459.
rhythmic accent), the fluid and non-symmetrical organization of the French meter, rhythm, accent, and phrase.41

In a review of the first appearance of Debussy in London, the critic begins by noting the warm welcome that the composer received, evidence of the “esteem in which he is held in this country.”42 Then, after describing a performance of Prélude à L’Après-midi d’un faune and the composer’s conducting thereof, he writes of his first hearing of La Mer:

“So novel are the effects which M. Debussy obtains from his wonderful scheme of orchestral colour, so elusive is the music, so formless, and yet in a way so graphic, that it is difficult to express an opinion upon a work of this kind after a first hearing. Such atmospheric strains, so unlike what one is accustomed to, must be listened to in a passive frame of mind, perchance in a darkened room. There can be no question as to the cleverness of the music or its poetic import; the only thing is to get one’s ears educated, so to speak, in order to appreciate its strange idiom.”43

Clearly, even on first hearing in a foreign country, the poetic nature of Debussy’s music was evident, and it is just as clear that this composer had advanced the genre with his new concepts of form and harmony. Perhaps no other Debussy work has so completely baffled musical analysts who have taken up the task of putting into words a comprehensible description of his compositional process, as has La Mer. As Oscar Thompson put it, program annotators, almost to a man, have foregone all but a literary and interpretive description of the three movements, on the basis that anything that might be written about the thematic and structural aspects of the work would probably remain unintelligible. “The difficulty seems to be that in going its own way,

41 Salzman, p. 20.
43 Ibid.
instead of following the traditional procedure of the symphony or the tone poem, it lacks those fixed points which can be recognized in the description of a symphony and to which can be related details of departure from, and well as conformity with, the familiar patterns." Concluding this line of thought, Salzman noted that Debussy was able to organize his new concepts of sound into new forms that retain their psychological validity and structural logic without depending on previously known conventions of tonality and structure.

Looking to comparisons with Arnold Bax, Debussy gives us something with which to work. The themes of his compositions are sometimes drawn from exotic regions of the world or from fantastic visions of the mind, but his most important subject, as with Smetana before him and as with Bax, is Nature. Simms notes that in an article written in 1903 for the journal *Musica*, Debussy wrote, “Music is a mysterious mathematical process whose elements are a part of Infinity. It is allied to the movement of the waters, to the play of curves described by the changing breezes. Nothing is more musical than a sunset!” Simms goes further, telling us that “Nature is not only a recurrent subject in Debussy’s instrumental works, it as also a metaphor for the true nature of music in general. Both are spontaneous, unconstrained, and asymmetrical.”

The English were not universally receptive to Strauss or Debussy. Despite the review from *The Musical Times* cited above, there were those who opposed Debussy, just as there were many who opposed Strauss. Peter Pirie

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45 Salzman, p. 21.
46 Simms, p. 191.
47 Ibid.
tells us that “the rise in Germany of Richard Strauss, with his brash and trenchant power, set a number of conservative musicians against him,” and that a search began for a champion of more traditional, conservative sensibilities.\textsuperscript{48} The time at which this opposition to Strauss occurred was just after the turn of the century, when Strauss was still mostly known for his symphonic poems. The great Hans Richter first championed Edward Elgar, and a number of other German conductors, including Julius Buths, Hans Haym, and Fritz Cassirer, took up the music of Frederick Delius. There is little doubt that these conductors made their decisions at least in part out of a reaction against Strauss. Unfortunately, their anti-progressive efforts gave the following generation a further reason to dismiss English music as essentially conservative. It also put Elgar and Delius at a distinct disadvantage when the true stature of Strauss was eventually realized. By the time of World War I, everything English was hated in Germany, a land still leading the western world with regard to the trends of serious art music.\textsuperscript{49}

Pirie moves on to Debussy, explaining that he was linked in the minds of Englishmen with Strauss as a fellow revolutionary. To most, he was far more radical. Debussy visited England several times between 1902 and 1914, to an overall mixed response. At a concert in London in 1908, which was conducted by the composer, Debussy received a welcome that delighted him. He was breaking down the English resistance to the culture of France. Progress of his music among the composers of England was much slower. Elgar warned

\textsuperscript{48} Pirie, p. 35.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
against him in a lecture to young composers in Birmingham in 1905. While the English might admire Debussy, they did not readily learn from him.\textsuperscript{50}

The line of symphonic poem composers continues on with one final important figure. Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) is one of the few great composers of symphonies who also wrote a number of successful symphonic poems. “In their own way his works are just as poetic as those of Delius and Debussy – as opposed to the sonorous prose narratives of Richard Strauss – but they are utterly different in character,” says Mendl.\textsuperscript{51} Continuing the comparison, Mendl pointed to the uncompromising strength, and even the occasional austerity, of Sibelius, which he contrasted to the bewitching delicacy and outward charm of Debussy and the British-born Frederick Delius, whom we shall examine later in this chapter. Concluding his poetic thought, Mendl says that Sibelius “seems to disdain the outward graces and to seek only the profound underlying truths of legend or nature, striving to illumine these by musical poetry.”\textsuperscript{52}

Perhaps the basis for Mendl’s claim comes from Sibelius’s use of the \textit{Kalevala}, the Finnish heroic poem and national epic, as inspiration for most of his programmatic works. The \textit{Kalevala} is closely associated with other Nordic myths such as the Icelandic \textit{Eddas} and the German \textit{Nibelungenlied}. Each emphasizes man’s closeness to nature, his heroic deeds, and his relationship with the gods.\textsuperscript{53} Sibelius incorporated the stories of the \textit{Kalevala} into his four \textit{Lemminkäinen Legends}, Op. 22, and the beautiful \textit{Pohjola’s Daughter}, Op. 49,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 36.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Mendl, p. 459.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Simms, p. 245.
\end{itemize}
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and other works, as well, after having first used them in his choral symphony *Kullervo.*

While Mendl asserts that Sibelius was a composer of the first rank, worthy of being placed within this current examination of the greats of the symphonic poem composers, others have viewed his career differently. John C. G. Waterhouse describes the spectrum of opinion on Sibelius as follows:

> During the chequered history of Sibelius criticism many conflicting possibilities have been suggested. Cecil Gray and Constant Lambert saw him as a composer likely to influence the whole future of music; others have seen him as a genius too “regional” and lacking in universality ever to have much following outside Scandinavia and the English-speaking world; some, like Aaron Copland, have regarded him as a mere survival of late 19th-century nationalism, whose work is foredoomed to “date” and sound anachronistic; others have admired him as an innovator whose asceticism and formal grip mark him as a quintessentially anti-romantic figure; but the fruits of his constructive methods were seen by P.H. Lang as “obesity... turgidity and redundance,” while a leading English critic once dismissed the Seventh Symphony as a “rag-bag of gimmicks.” Few composers have aroused such bewilderingly divergent reactions.\(^5^4\)

Walter Legge, the influential British record producer most known for his work with the EMI record label, points to the consideration that Sibelius received at home. He tells us that most nations deem titles and decorations as reward enough for great artistic achievement, and leave the unfortunate creative artist to make his living as best he can through teaching, or by the sale of, or royalties from, his works. The Finnish government, far more considerate of Sibelius, granted the composer a life pension that enabled him to live in

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comfort and seclusion at Järvenpää, where he was able to work as he desired, away from the distractions that his fame would normally have brought him.\(^5^5\)

Furthermore, Sibelius was not without his own opinions on the music of his time. He had little use for Stravinsky, admiring his early ballets but regarding his succession of stylistic changes as nothing more than a joke. For Sibelius, Schönberg was “an interesting theorist, a philosopher perhaps, but not a great composer.”\(^5^6\) We begin to see more of the mentality that Mendl seems to appreciate when we discover some of Sibelius’s assessments of his peers. “It is the most pretentious snobbery on the part of audiences to applaud the later Schönberg as they do,” the composer said to Legge in his interview. He went on to claim that not twenty musicians in the world would be able to follow the structure and inner logic of any (at that time) recent Schönberg score or even get the general idea of the composer’s meaning on one hearing in a concert setting. After sympathizing with the average concertgoer, Sibelius concluded, “Alban Berg is Schönberg’s best work.”\(^5^7\)

Sibelius had something to say about Bax, as well. Legge describes having taken the score of Bax’s Fifth Symphony, which is dedicated to Sibelius, to give to the Finnish composer. “He was already familiar with much of Bax’s work, and after reading through the new symphony he said: ‘Bax is one of the great men of our time; he has a fine musical mind, an original, personal style, a splendid independence, and, thank God, he can write a melody, and is not


\(^{5^6}\) Ibid.

\(^{5^7}\) Ibid., pp. 218-219.
ashamed to do so." Sibelius went on to wonder whether Bax knew how fortunate he was that his publishers brought out miniature scores of his works as soon as they were written, a circumstance he felt was uncommon for most other composers, including himself.

It is difficult to determine how best to see the greatest contribution of Sibelius. In Finland, where he is a national treasure, it seems that his nationalist symphonic poems are what listeners will point to first. In the rest of Europe and in America, his symphonies get a great deal of attention. With that in mind, we have progressed through our list of great composers of tone poems with only Debussy indisputably seen first as a composer of such works. Ironically, he never named any of his major compositions as symphonic poems or tone poems, and his direct line to Bax is hindered by the English resistance to the combination of progressiveness and French culture from which Debussy came.

The discussion to this point has centered on the historical progress of the symphonic poem and the composers thereof. Placing Arnold Bax and his tone poem *Tintagel* into the context of this progression of composers and their works, we must find more to attach him to the line than the dates of his composition and the genre of his work. It is important now to re-examine Bax’s influences and learn the degree to which they correspond with our line of composers and works.

As detailed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Bax attended the Royal Academy of Music starting in the year 1900. While its competitor, the Royal

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58 Ibid., p. 219.
College of Music, reflected the thoroughly conservative views of the Brahmsian Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, the Academy was freer and more oriented toward Wagner. Even the Royal College, though, exhibited occasional leanings toward Liszt, particularly in the music and attitudes of Sir C. Hubert H. Parry. Bax’s teacher at the Academy, though, was far more appreciative and experienced in the music of Liszt. Frederick Corder was the author of one of the first English-language studies of the composer. Further, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, principal of the Academy in Bax’s day, had known Liszt personally. Under Mackenzie, a noted performance of an arrangement for organ, strings and harp by Corder of Liszt’s *Orpheus* was given.\(^{59}\) Thus, Bax began his collegiate training well grounded in the music and ideas of Liszt.

Students at both the Academy and the College at this time also found themselves experiencing the music of the late nineteenth-century Russians. First Tchaikovsky and Glazounov, but soon also Rachmaninoff, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Scriabin can be found on the repertoire lists of the orchestras, chamber ensembles, and solo recitals at both schools.\(^{60}\) In Bax, this influence can be seen in the scores of his solo piano works of the period, but the handling of the orchestra works its way in later, as well.

Neither Smetana nor Franck seem to have had any direct influence upon Bax, though it could be argued that Smetana paved the way for Bax’s *Tintagel* and other tone poems with his selection of locations and scenery as the subjects of his works, and Franck may have added to Bax’s concepts of


\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 13.
orchestration with his use of the harp. The path from Liszt through the
Russians to Strauss and Debussy and even to Sibelius is clear, however.
Beechey assesses Bax’s tone poems, pointing to their debt to Liszt, Strauss, and
Sibelius. He makes a particular point of tracing the inspiration of the music for
_In the Faery Hills_ of 1909 to Sibelius, comparing it to the Finnish composer’s _En
Saga_ and _The Swan of Tuonela_. Foreman quotes a broadcast interview with
Bax in which the composer describes his introduction to the music of Strauss:

... Then in 1902 the music of Strauss poured into this country in
full flood. And what a to-do there was! Each work to arrive proved more
breath-taking and controversial than the last. Wagner had made music
the language of passion, and now in Richard the Second neurosis
became vocal. Ancient and pedantic ears were assaulted by novelties of
all kinds.

Edwin Evans gives us a brief glimpse into Bax’s knowledge of Strauss
and Debussy as he describes the complexity of Bax’s works. “As a student he
possessed an extraordinary proficiency which made light of every difficulty, and
when music like Debussy’s _Nocturnes_ and Strauss’s _Heldenleben_ were new, he
played them to his friends from the score at sight. He could read anything.” If
indeed Bax were sight-reading Debussy, it would have been late in his time at
the Royal Academy. As Pirie notes, the music of Debussy was barely known to
English musicians “until the new century had well begun.” He says specifically
“in 1904, Arnold Bax, progressive and alert, had not heard a note of his
music.” Later in his discussion on Debussy, Pirie tells us that “apart from a

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62 Foreman, p. 46.
63 Edwin Evans, “Modern British Composers II. Arnold Bax,” _The Musical Times_ 60, No. 913
(March, 1919), p. 103.
deliberate parody in *Mediterranean, The Garden of Fand* is Bax’s most impressionist work, but here Rachmaninov and Ravel also appear." Beechey also comments on *Fand* in relation to Debussy, saying that Bax’s work derives something from the French master, “for the use of the whole-tone scale and the many sensitive whisperings and flutterings from the woodwind recall passages in the *Nocturnes, La Mer, and Jeux.*

Still another Bax specialist, Colin Scott-Sutherland, comments on Bax’s influences, likening them to the eclectic tastes of his teacher, Corder. “Bax’s work shows an eclecticism that is astonishingly varied in its allusions. It owes much to Wagner, to Strauss, and to Liszt; something to Debussy, Dvorák, Grieg and the Russian nationals such as Borodin and Glazounov.” Continuing, he claims, “It has close affinities with Elgar, Sibelius, and Delius, and strong points of contact with Fauré, Dukas and even with César Franck.”

Finally, summarizing these assessments and taking them one step further, Norman Demuth tells us that “Bax’s approach to the orchestra forms the complete contrast with that style emanating from the Royal College of Music which turned out Vaughan Williams, Holst and Bliss, for under the aegis of Frederick Corder the Royal Academy of Music . . . was drawn to Wagner and Strauss. Bax, therefore,” he concludes, “does not score in the neo-classical manner of Brahms-cum-South Kensington and such music from that side of
Hyde Park in unthinkable. In his sense of colour Bax is able to compete with any European model, be it French or pre-revolutionary Russia.⁶₈

There can be no doubt, based on the observations of so many scholars, that Bax learned primarily from the same line of composers as the one Mendl draws in his study of the symphonic poem. From this, we can begin to establish the context of Bax and his work, but there are other factors to consider. We are ready now to examine Bax's place within the community of British composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**British Composers in Context**

As noted in the introductory paragraph of the first chapter of this dissertation, Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) was the first composer generally recognized in the British musical renaissance. His place in the music of England was something of a paradox for a long period of time, though. He was an isolated figure both in terms of world culture, and from the musical culture of Victorian England. Born in the tiny village of Broadheath, Worcester, he was the son of a country musician and piano tuner, a tradesman, in a very class-conscious period in the history of England. Most of his education came from the books in his father's music shop in Worcester, to which he added only a few professional violin lessons.⁶⁹ While the accepted pattern for English composers was to attend either the R.A.M. or the R.C.M.,⁷₀ Elgar enrolled in neither of them, never studied in Germany, and left school at the age of fifteen to work in

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⁷₀ These initials, commonly used to denote the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, were established in this dissertation in Chapter One.
the office of a solicitor. He played the violin in local orchestras, wrote quadrilles for a mental home, and picked up his professional skills through experience, leaving the solicitor’s office to work and teach at his father’s music shop. He eventually married a woman who was his social superior and some years older than him, and for years suffered further social ostracism as a result. He hated teaching, and money was a constant problem until he reached the age of fifty.71 Even when he had established himself, had been knighted and had received the Order of Merit from the King, the public still gave him the cold shoulder. For a period of time up until the 1930s, he and Delius were the only British composers highly regarded on the Continent, but at home he was politely disregarded by the older generation of musicians, and patronized by the younger.72

Elgar’s success rested on two early works, the Variations on an Original Theme, “Enigma” of 1899, and the oratorio The Dream of Gerontius of 1900. Two symphonies, a concerto for the violin and another for the cello, and many other successful works followed, but none managed to attract the same attention as these early compositions. Critics of the time suggested that he had outlived his creative inspiration. C.W. Orr points to another, more likely answer, proposing that “perhaps if we look more closely into the matter we shall be forced to admit that it was owing chiefly to the fact that Richter had sponsored the ‘Enigma’ and Richard Strauss had publicly blessed ‘Gerontius’ that the British public were made vaguely aware that we had at long last produced a really great

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71 Pirie, pp. 24-25.
composer.” Richter had conducted the ‘Enigma Variations’ and was known to conduct nothing of which he had less than a high opinion. Starting in 1879, Richter conducted a series of concerts in London called “the Richter Concerts.” These lasted for twenty-three years. Over his full forty-four year career, his interpretations of Beethoven were revered, and he conducted a number of premieres, including those of the Brahms 2nd and 3rd Symphonies and the Tragic Overture, Bruckner’s Te Deum and the revised versions of the 4th and 8th Symphonies, and the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. He promoted the works of Dvorák, and premiered works in London by Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie, Cowen, and Elgar, including the previously mentioned Enigma Variations and The Dream of Gerontius. His record includes 2,263 opera performances and 2,088 concerts. Certainly, there were works in those performances of which Richter had less than a high opinion. Gerontius had been less than successful in its first English production, but was given shortly afterwards at a music festival in Düsseldorf, at which Strauss was the leading figure. With considerable generosity, Strauss toasted Elgar at a banquet during the festival, calling him “the first Progressivist in English music.” Accordingly, these two works, having been properly blessed by German authorities, entered into the standard repertoire, and frequent performance allowed the public at large to recognize their intrinsic merits and beauty.

Subsequent works, however, were left to fend for themselves, and the public did not follow with their support. Orr describes the trend with some sadness:

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
The Apostles,’ lacking the Straussian benediction, failed to attract as ‘Gerontius’ had done; the first Symphony had a good send-off, but was gradually shelved; Richter left England, and though some of our conductors laboured hard for Elgar they were unable to extract him from the niche prepared for him by the public.\textsuperscript{75}

To complete the vivid imagery of Elgar’s neglect by the English, Orr tells of a concert given by Sir Landon Ronald at Queen’s Hall not long before the onset of World War I. This was an all-Elgar program comprised of the London premiere of the composer’s new symphonic poem, \textit{Falstaff}, the Second Symphony, which was still a novelty to most concertgoers, and the \textit{Enigma Variations} to conclude the evening. “None present will easily forget the desolate scene. Here we had a programme conducted by a musician who had prominently identified himself with Elgar’s music; a brand-new work from our greatest composer; a first-rate orchestra, and—to mark the occasion—an array of empty benches!”\textsuperscript{76}

This, of course, does not tell the full story of Elgar, or even of his status in England, but it does point to a problem that many British composers in the early part of the twentieth century would face. The resurgence of British music would have to overcome more than simple matters of creativity on the part of the composers. It faced a great challenge from a listening public that had learned over the course of two centuries that its composers were not worthy of the same attention as their Continental counterparts.

From Elgar, we will move next in our examination of Bax’s British contemporaries to Delius. Frederick Delius (1862-1934) was born in Bradford, England and was the son of a prosperous wool merchant. After working in that industry for two years despite having shown marked musical talent, Delius

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
convincing his father to send him to America to manage an orange plantation in
Solano, Florida. Here, he took up the violin and began composing. This
eventually led to belated approval from his father, and a move to Leipzig to
study at the Conservatory with Reinecke, and then another move to Paris to
assimilate the culture and devote himself more fully to creative work.

Delius had his first work, a *Légende* for violin and orchestra, published
in 1892. He soon settled in Grez-sur-Loing, and in the decade and a half from
1899 to the beginning of the war he produced a series of works that ranked
among the great music of the period, the most important of which were a
number of attractive tone-poems for orchestra.77 His highly individualized style
derives from a number of influences, including the later German Romantics,
Grieg, Negro folk music, and the French Impressionists. Some have claimed
examples of the influence of his English childhood, but many of these can in
fact be explained instead as owing to prolonged exposure to the music of Grieg,
or to the music-making of the Negroes that he heard while in Florida.78

Mendl marks Delius along his path of symphonic poem composers,
placing him chronologically between Strauss and Debussy. He notes that none
of the works of this composer are entitled symphonic poem, but that this fact
need not deter us from seeing many of them as such. “There is no doubt,” he
tells us, “that some of Delius’s compositions are as essentially poems of
orchestral sound as any musical creations in the world could be.”79 After

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79 Mendl, p. 456.
further justifying his claim and suggesting that Delius had a mentality akin to Wordsworth, he moves into the worthwhile subject of criticism. Mentioning several Delius works, including *A song before sunrise, On hearing the first cuckoo in spring*, and *In a summer garden*, he tells us, “It was at one time suggested that in these and other works, for all their beauty, there was a lack of form; but closer acquaintance with them reveals that though they follow no traditional structure, Delius has created the appropriate form in each case.”

This observation allows us to get to the heart of the reason for a certain amount of neglect that Delius suffers in the minds of critics and scholars.

In an article for *The Musical Times* in 1915, Philip Heseltine discusses the problems of Delius appreciation in England. “Frederick Delius is a composer whose works are being gradually assimilated in this country,” he tells the reader. “The process has been, and probably will be for some time, slow, for the appeal of his music is not to the popular ear.” Today, this seems surprising, as the music of Delius is generally lighter and more beautiful in nature than much of what was being written at that time, and one would think that the general audience would have been more accepting of it than were the critics of the day. Heseltine goes on, though, to explain that the idiom that Delius used in his composing was unconventional and subtle, and his expression of himself was inclined to be moody and introspective. “You have to learn to twist yourself into his moods, and to adopt his peculiar standpoint before you can listen

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80 Ibid., 457.
sympathetically,” Heseltine claims. One must remember that this criticism came at what was essentially the height of Delius’s creative period.

Mendl, continuing his exploration of form in the works of Delius, tells us that the claims of a lack of form in the composer’s works are an old tale. He cites the notion that Wagner’s music dramas were formless because they were outwardly unlike any operas that had preceded them, and notes that this opinion has long since been debunked. Still, in 1915, formlessness was one of the most common criticisms of Delius’s compositions.

Heseltine had another complaint. He tells us that, according to the public, Delius was fifty years old (fifty-three in actuality), yet held no official position in the musical life of the country. He did not teach in any of the academies, and he was not even an honorary professor or doctor of music. He never gave concerts nor made propaganda for his music, he didn’t conduct an orchestra or even play an instrument in public. Heseltine concludes that thought by pointing out “even Berlioz played the tambourine!”

Thus, the musical public of Britain looked at him with a great deal of misgiving, if not outright snobbery, while the critics did not bother to look deeply enough into his music to find the essential forms that repeated hearings would have made clear. Many, in fact, saw him not as an English composer at all. At the height of his creative powers, Delius was judged superficially, and this cost both him and his country of birth, as neither could use his music to increase the reputation of British composers as they potentially might have.

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., pp. 137-138.
The most prominent composer of the next generation, the generation of Bax, was Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958). Born in Gloucestershire, he was educated in music at Trinity College, Cambridge, and then at the R.C.M., where he studied with Parry and Stanford. Later, he went to Germany and studied for a time with Max Bruch, and after being personally dissatisfied with some of his early works, including the first of his *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, he spent eight months in Paris studying with Maurice Ravel.

Vaughan Williams was not shy in expressing his opinions, and he had opinions on both Elgar and Delius. He admired rather than loved the music of Elgar. He had practical knowledge of it, and assiduously studied the scores of the *'Enigma' Variations* and *Gerontius*. In the spring of 1934, he conducted *The Dream of Gerontius* in what had been a planned concert but which became a memorial after Elgar’s death. Citing an article in *Music and Letters* titled “What have we learnt from Elgar?” that Vaughan Williams wrote shortly after the elder composer’s passing, Michael Kennedy points to Vaughan Williams’ appreciation of Elgar’s orchestration. Further from that same 1935 article, Kennedy quotes Vaughan Williams, “Several of us have been influenced by Elgar.”84 Vaughan Williams also wrote to Elgar much earlier in his career asking for lessons especially in orchestration. Kennedy again quotes Vaughan Williams, this time from a collection of essays printed in 1963 under the title *National Music*, “I received a polite reply from Lady Elgar saying that Sir Edward was too busy to give me lessons but suggesting that I should become a pupil of Professor

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Bantock . . . But though Elgar would not teach me personally he could not help teaching me through his music.”

Of the music of Delius, Vaughan Williams did not have a high opinion in his later years, although he admitted that it was a “lovely sound.” Kennedy quotes once more, “Delius always sounds to me like the curate improvising, I’m afraid. His music doesn’t grow. It is addition, not multiplication.” In his younger years, though, Vaughan Williams wrote to Delius as he had to Elgar, this time requesting to show the older man some of his work. This meeting was agreed upon, and Vaughan Williams came with the complete score of his Sea Symphony, which he insisted on playing through from beginning to end. His account suggests that Delius was very courteous, if not exceedingly complimentary.

These accounts show us that Vaughan Williams in his formative years recognized the talents and contributions of these two older composers. It seems that he sought out composers who would allow him to build his style little by little, expanding from the extremely conservative Parry and Stanford to take in the influence of Elgar before adding what he could learn from Bruch. From there, he gathered a little from Delius before plunging further into Impressionism by studying with Ravel. This points to a specific aspect of Vaughan Williams’s personality for which he has come under some considerable criticism from some scholars and critics. Pirie, for example, describes him as “a slow-minded, instinctive genius who never learned to

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85 Ibid., p. 59.
86 Ibid., pp. 377-378.
87 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
control notes with virtuosity; to the end of his like his manuscripts needed editing and putting in order, they were so chaotic and inaccurate.” In a footnote to this assessment, Pirie adds that this editing and putting things in order often occurred during rehearsals, “with great waste of time and temper.” It was not in Vaughan Williams’s nature to think too far beyond himself, at least in terms of his own composition. This characteristic left him open to ridicule from progressives both at home and on the Continent.

Another aspect of Vaughan Williams’s character was his insistence upon nationalism in art music. Simms cites a well-known quote from the composer in addressing both nationalism and the collection of folk music: “Art, like charity, should begin at home. If it is to be of any value it must grow out of the very life of himself, the community in which he lives, and the nation to which he belongs.” Vaughan Williams rejected aestheticism and contrived universality, professing instead the need for a utilitarian element in music that should grow from the diversity of culture and human experience. In the years leading up to the First World War, and more so in the years between the two wars, this was a very conservative attitude, one that did not serve Vaughan Williams well beyond the confines of his own land.

As someone influenced by traditional idioms, including folk song, the hymns of the Anglican Church, and the music of England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Vaughan Williams exhibited another aspect of his personal conservatism. “Why should music be original?” he once asked. “The object of art is to stretch out to the ultimate realities through the medium of

88 Pirie, p. 39.
89 Simms, pp. 251-252.
beauty. The duty of the composer is to find the *mot juste*. It does not matter if this word has been said a thousand times before as long as it is the right thing to say at that moment.”

The results of this attitude were mixed. In England up to the period of the Second World War, especially after the death of Elgar, the English thought of Vaughan Williams as their principal composer. By the conclusion of the First World War, however, it was rare to hear his music played outside of the British Isles. As Percy M. Young said in the late 1960s, “Apart from occasional performances (more particularly of the *Tallis Fantasia*), Vaughan Williams’s music is virtually unknown outside of Britain. His place in musical history therefore depends on his place in British music.” He continued, explaining, “In the years that have elapsed since his death critical opinion and musical techniques have swung away from the enthusiasm that was generated during his lifetime. The provincial character of the music now often seems something of an embarrassment.”

Clearly, even Bax’s most notable British contemporary was seen in his own time and more recently as a musician of some notable faults, despite the success he garnered and the beauty of the music he wrote.

Vaughan Williams began collecting folk music at the end of 1903. By 1913, the folksong movement had such a hold that, as Pirie tells us, “a contemporary music critic reported that a number of new English works all began with a pentatonic theme and had modal harmony.” There is no doubt that folk music was a revelation to the academically trained composers of the

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90 Ibid., p. 252.
92 Pirie, p. 46.
period. It also provided a means of reacting against Wagner and Strauss, as well as Debussy. Vaughan Williams and his friend Gustav Holst considered themselves rebels as well as heirs of the British music tradition, and although Vaughan Williams later studied with Ravel, and Holst produced in his student days a number of works imitating Wagner, both composers reacted against the “heavy” new music of the Continent. This would seem to suggest at least a subliminal absorption of the attitudes of their teacher, Stanford.93

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) met Vaughan Williams in 1895 while both attended the R.C.M. A lifelong friendship was formed, and both proceeded along similar paths as composers. Best known for his orchestral suite The Planets from 1917, Holst exhibited his interest in folk music and early English polyphony in many of his works. Folk song is particularly evident in his popular suites for military band. In a letter to Vaughan Williams dating from 1903, Holst identified Mendelssohn, Grieg, and Wagner as the composers from whom he had learned the most. The influence of Wagner did not make itself fully felt until after 1900, and Holst’s student works owe much more to the first two composers on his list, with the possible additions of Dvorák and Tchaikovsky. (It should be noted perhaps that Holst was later to express much distaste for Tchaikovsky.)94

Three important English composers died in 1934. John Warrack argues that while Elgar and Delius have not lacked in performance or sympathetic understanding, though Holst has remained “virtually the composer of The

93 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
Planets and The Perfect Fool ballet music, of the once-admired Hymn of Jesus and the always-admired, never heard Egdon Heath.” Some might argue the overall merit of this argument in the context of Western art music of the time, but when narrowed to these three composers, there is truth to the point. Holst has been seen as a composer “fascinating even in his mistakes.” To recognize this, one must see both the glories of his best work and the thought process that brings about the occasional calamities, and then be able to note that the composer sometimes produced astonishingly original effects from the juxtaposition of the two. Warrack claims that much of Holst’s problems came from a sense of “outsiderness,” a schism in his character, that made him attempt to bring together elements that would confuse his listeners and critics. We have seen earlier in this dissertation the effects of a schism or split personality, and how that duality affected Arnold Bax. In Holst, it created a musical personality that, to the conservative English, sounded both strangely modern and foreign at the same time.

Vaughan Williams, though, had rather a different view of the modern sound of Holst’s music. “If Holst’s music is modern it is not that he has acquired a few tricks which today are hailed with wonder and tomorrow are as flat as stale ginger-beer but that he has a mind which is the heir of all the centuries and has found out the language in which to express that mind,” he wrote in 1920. Later in the same article, he explains that the music of Holst never sounds “modern” in the narrow sense of the word “except now and then

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96 Ibid.
when he is exceptionally off his stroke,” because he knows what he wants to say and how to say it. “There is no attempt to tickle jaded nerves with ‘new effects’ and thus the very strangeness of much of his harmonic texture escapes the notice of the curio hunter, because it is absolutely germane to the whole conception. So it is with his masterly writing for the orchestra – so masterly that it escapes notice.”

What Vaughan Williams was saying, in essence, was that the critics and the listening public misunderstood Holst. He went on to illustrate that point, telling of a concert in which a Holst composition appeared side by side with an unnamed composition “in which all the commonplaces of the last fifty years were neatly laid out in rows.” According to Vaughan Williams, a critic cited this unnamed work as “far more satisfactory” than the Holst piece, which also goes unidentified. Vaughan Williams then asserts that the critic was right, that Holst’s work is not always “satisfactory,” and that it is not meant to be “satisfactory.” “Holst’s later work sometimes makes one feel uncomfortable – and why not? We live in uncomfortable times just now; we live in dread of what the future may bring.”

Could it be that composers like Holst and Vaughan Williams, Delius and Elgar and Bax, even as they were bringing about the resurgence of British music, were still victims of circumstance? Was the timing of the British “renaissance,” in the period leading up to and encompassing World War I, a contributing factor to the problem of how these composers were and are seen when compared to their Continental counterparts? We can now attempt to

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98 Ibid., p. 184.
99 Ibid., p. 190.
address these questions and one even greater question: Where does Bax fit into
the twin lines of thought (the line of composers of symphonic poems, and the
circumstances of the British composers of the early twentieth century) so far
presented here?

Let us start with the understanding that the British resurgence was
indeed felt on the Continent. The musical public of Germany and France and, to
varying degrees, other nations, did find some of the new British music
interesting and worthy of hearing. Taken as a whole, however, there was very
little that was accomplished in the matter of a world reputation for English
music between the premiere of the ‘Enigma’ Variations in 1899 and the
outbreak of war in 1914 that was not swept away by the war. In the early years
of the century, not only Elgar and Delius, but also Ethel Smyth and Joseph
Holbrooke were performed in Germany. These performances sometimes
included expensive opera productions. All of this ceased once the war began.¹⁰⁰
British music became insular, and even the achievements of the pre-war years
were cast in a purely nationalistic context once the war was concluded.

Both Elgar and Delius saw their reputations decline dramatically after
the war. Elgar’s stature rose again after World War II, and was at its highest by
the 1970s. Delius, though, had to rely on Sir Thomas Beecham as the only real
champion of his music for many years. (Eventually, Sir John Barbirolli and Sir
Malcolm Sargent joined Beecham in his appreciation for Delius’s work.) Both
composers have been attacked as anachronisms in the twentieth century, but
as Pirie asserts, neither should be thought of as twentieth-century composers.

¹⁰⁰ Pirie, p. 90.
Instead, they belong to the years 1880-1914. Both developed late and were middle-aged before the turn of the century. They appear less conservative when this chronology is applied.\textsuperscript{101}

Anthony Milner presents another perspective. “At the beginning of the twentieth century,” he tells us, “many composers were still more attracted to Continental models than to developing individual styles. Imitation of leading composers has of course always featured in musical development but where Britain was concerned such imitation delayed the return to a native tradition.”\textsuperscript{102} C.W. Orr adds to this that, once the First World War was over, Elgar was held in suspicion by the younger generation of composers as “representing the German tradition in music which had too long held our English music in Teutonic fetters.”\textsuperscript{103} The English put down Elgar in favor of Vaughan Williams, whose nationalistic sensibilities antagonized Continental listeners.

Listeners in Britain need to be considered here, too. In the period beginning with the turn of the century there was a readiness in musicians for new musical traditions, and an appreciation for those that had been long established. If the middle-classes had been willing to make an effort to listen to new works, it is quite possible that the record of music in Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have been richer in worthy achievement.\textsuperscript{104} Instead, composers were forced to help themselves in a climate

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{103} Orr, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{104} Young, p. 482.
in which many listeners could generously be described as lazy or disinterested. Composers vainly sought to decipher the undefined tastes of the middle-class, and the creative potential of the great mass of the people of the nation was ignored. This situation existed for over a century, and with the beginning of the British resurgence, there was much to overcome at home, as well as abroad. With this in mind, it is time to turn the conversation back to Bax, and to his tone poem *Tintagel*.

Colin Scott-Sutherland tells us that although Bax wrote prolifically in most musical genres with the exception of opera, his reputation has long rested on a small group of orchestral pieces that have become well known. “As early as 1903 he began the first of a series of tone poems which were to establish, at least to the general public, the nature of his gifts and, as I suggested earlier, to set upon his expression those apparent limits that in large measure accounted for his later neglect.” Of those works, *The Garden of Fand, Tintagel, and November Woods* quickly established themselves within the repertoire of early twentieth-century British music and rightly earned Bax a level of acclaim. These works were a mixture of Romanticism and Impressionism. Scott-Sutherland states that they evoke a poetic conception “with a virtuosic technique comparable with, and often superior to, that of Strauss.”

Mendl would seem to agree. Bax is the last composer that he addresses in his line of symphonic poets. “From an aesthetic standpoint,” he tells us, “Arnold Bax . . . occupies an interesting position in the world of the symphonic

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105 Scott-Sutherland, p. 93.
106 Ibid.
poem.” As he has made Bax the final composer examined in his long essay, it is clear that there is some level of bias at work, and this mundane observation leaves one to wonder just how “interesting” that place is in Mendl’s mind. Still, he compares *November Woods* favorably to the nature poems of Delius. He suggests that even though *The Garden of Fand* contains depictions of the sea, it is largely a fairy story, and then points to the more obvious *In the Faery Hills* as a more intricate portrayal of the little people and the fate of Oisin, the harper, while the Irish hills are only a background. *Tintagel*, according to Mendl, is not merely a picture of the waves rolling and dashing themselves against the Cornish headland, but is also, at least in part, a reflection of the legends associated with the place. Bax can be seen as a nature poet with an affinity for Delius, but also as a storyteller in the mold of Sibelius, with his use of myths and legends in natural settings.

Bax shares some common traits with many of the composers mentioned in this chapter, but also has some marked differences. His music might be comparable to that of Sibelius, but his popularity certainly is not, nor has it ever been. One might argue that Sibelius owes his lasting popularity to having been the first major composer from his country. He established a “voice” for the Finnish people, where as Bax had to follow Elgar’s English sound and at the same time compete with Vaughan Williams’s borrowing from the folk music tradition. To be fair, Bax never sought to create an English sound, or even an Irish sound, though his music up to and just beyond *Tintagel* did have hints of

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107 Mendl, p. 460.
Irish inflection. In the same vein, Bax never created a *Finlandia*, a work for his people to rally around.

Liszt had gained popularity for his abilities as a showman before his compositions were earning him fame. While Bax was a gifted pianist, reputed to be able to perform anything at sight, he stayed away from the stage, only accompanying as a youth and avoiding even that after he had been away from the R.A.M. for a few years. Smetana rose in stature due to his nationalistic operas. He is also seen as a “founder” of modern Czech music. Bax can make no such claims. He did not provide the music world with a new style of music, as did Debussy. Nor did he teach or otherwise influence young composers to follow his lead.

In his description of Delius cited earlier in this chapter, Philip Heseltine points to reasons the public was not convinced of his greatness. Similar points can be made for Bax, though his situation was less removed than that of Delius. For most of their careers, neither held an official position, though Bax was knighted and was eventually named “Master of the King’s Musick.” Neither taught at any of the academies, and Delius was not even an honorary professor or doctor of music. This is not quite true of Bax, as he received honorary degrees from Oxford in 1934 and Durham in 1935, and was on the examination panel at the University of Cork in his final years, though few who heard his music knew this. Both composers rarely gave concerts, and neither went out of his way to promote himself. Nor did either conduct or otherwise perform with any orchestra. For Bax, despite the quality of his music, the British public had little reason to take hold of him in any lasting way.
There is also the matter of the genre for which he is best known. This chapter begins with an examination of the leading composers of symphonic poems leading up to and moving just beyond Bax. Of them, only one or two were known in their time and are still known today primarily for their symphonic poems. As a relatively new and progressive genre, the symphonic poem seems to have been taken less seriously than other, more established types of music, such as the symphony or the opera. A case could be made for the notion that a composer best known for his tone poems, particularly a British composer with all the inherent bias to be found both on the Continent and at home, would not have had the same chance for popularity as he might have had were he to have concentrated more on the traditional genres. Bax did write seven symphonies, but not one was written before his reputation, for better or worse, had been established. *Tintagel*, his most often performed work, has been an important contributor to that reputation. If he is to be seen today as a composer of symphonic poems first, and other musical forms after, then he should be seen at least as belonging among the greats of the symphonic poets, taking his place in the line running from Liszt to Sibelius in the Romantic and Post-Romantic tradition.
Figure 5. *The headstone, designed by Seamus Murphy RHA, over the grave of Arnold Bax in St. Finbar’s Cemetery, Cork*
“I am going to be very disagreeable and say things which my readers, and even my much-enduring editor, will find it hard to put up with. But there is always the satisfactory retaliation open to them of calling me a pessimist or an oculist or some name like that. And after that nothing matters,” said Frederick Corder, still at the time head of the Composition faculty at the Royal Academy of Music, in the introduction to an article in *The Musical Times* of January 1918.\(^1\) His article addresses the state of music as a national art “after three and a half years of war,” and in it, he seeks to determine what had been done to cultivate and further the progress of “cultured music” in England. He questioned individually what had been done by the public, by the government, by publishers, by performers, by the press, and by composers. It is an interesting series of questions, and as they were raised between the time of Bax’s composition of *Tintagel* and his orchestration of the work, and in that they reflect a great deal of the attitude Bax and others faced at the time, they and Corder’s answers to them are well worth examining.

Corder starts with observations of the public and its support of what he calls at this point “good music.” He acknowledges from the very first that the audience for such music is not a large one. He points to the war as something that swallowed up the attention of the young men and women of the period, but then notes the increase of pianoforte lessons among children. “Actual ear-training and musical understanding remain at their usual low ebb, being only

cultivated to any extent in the musical institutions,” he tells us before lamenting that such institutions have suffered under very difficult conditions.\(^2\) Corder goes on to describe very good attendance at concerts, mentions a “slight attempt” by programmers to exclude German music, and then tells us that works by native composers are almost non-existent. He asks the reader to remind him of any English work other than Elgar’s *Carillon* to receive a second performance during the years of the war, and complains that the public continues to seek out foreign works over those of Englishmen.

As to the government, Corder says that “for obvious reasons” he must touch upon the subject only lightly. He appears frustrated by the idea of the Board of Education’s becoming interested in training music teachers, feeling instead that this is done adequately by the chartered music schools. He goes on to complain of foreign music publishers in London, and of how there is no kind of protection for the native against the foreigner in any department of music.\(^3\)

From the government, he moves next to publishers, and again suggests that he feels some hesitation toward taking on the subject. “Probably no professional musician has scantier relations with publishers than myself,” Corder claims. From that claim, though, Corder goes on to state that during the entirety of the nineteenth century, London publishers (with the exception of Novello, who Corder says confined themselves almost exclusively to choral music) treated “good instrumental music as a negligible factor.”\(^4\) Unfortunately, this statement is more value judgment than fact. Corder points to the “huge

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 8.
\(^4\) Ibid.
catalogues” of the various London publishers and identifies the music therein as “an amazing mass of triviality” and “hack-work of the very lowest.” More objectively, he also notes that a large percentage of even this music was foreign rather than from British composers. Corder is thoroughly pessimistic on this point, substantiating his claim by telling us, “Personally I could name at least a dozen really talented young men from among my pupils who succeeded in getting the always unwilling ear of a publisher, only to be forced to write down and down, ever at a lower level, with the eternal ‘Oh, that is too good for our people!’ dinned into their ears.” Knowing that Bax did indeed pay to have many of his early works published, one wonders whether he was on Corder’s list of pupils. It seems a safe assumption. One might also wonder, though, whether Corder was the worst enemy of these young composers, who went to publishers representing themselves as students or former students of a man who regularly sounded off against those same publishers.

The next group that Corder questions is the performers. He begins with an anecdote of having just recently witnessed for the first time a strong protest by a critic of a young singer who had given a typical recital, with sets by Schumann, Brahms, and then French and Italian composers, with a few English pieces to conclude the concert. He observes that this practice, the addition of native items at the end of the concert more out of obligation than sincere appreciation, has been the norm in both vocal and piano recitals for many years. He says that, when scolding performers in his acquaintance for this practice, the regular reply is that they would be only too pleased to play or

5 Ibid.
sing English works, “but they don’t know any – they were never taught any.”

Worse still, he reports that these same young performers then inevitably ask him to show them some English works worthy of performance, and when he does so, “they never even open the copies.” He suggests, “The simple fact is that they want their audience to listen to them, and not to the music they perform.” Again, this is no objective assessment from Corder, but one must wonder how much of this attitude found its way to his students.

After the performers, Corder sets his sights on the critics, asking what the press has done to help promote English music. In this area, Corder seems more outwardly at ease in his opinion. He begins by stating that England has never had a journal devoted to music that could be described as weighty and independent, and that there is not a public for it. He then suggests that The Musical Times “has gone near to fill the place of such a paper for a great number of years.” Even so, he does not feel that this journal (in 1918) has been speaking out on behalf of British composers and their music. He asks that anyone who can show him the articles in which such praise is given do so. “Able articles on abstract theoretical matters, rapturous appreciation of Russian and French composers, articles on many interesting matters I find, but except for the usual kindly notices of new works I discover no word of the tendency I have referred to,” he says in assessment of what he has found in the pages of The Musical Times. He calls on the journal, as a leader in the field of music in England, to focus more on its own native composers, naming a group.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 9.
of them whom he fails to see getting appreciation, or even mention. His list includes Arthur Sullivan, Alexander C. Mackenzie, Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, Charles Villiers Stanford, Frederick Corder, Frederic H. Cowen, Edward Elgar, and Edward German. One can debate whether the inclusion of his own name in this list makes the entire idea self-serving, but he and the others were indeed the established composers of the period.

Corder’s last group for consideration is composers. He is not at all pleased with the efforts of composers on their own behalf. “Our older composers are little regarded, and work on just as if nothing were happening. Our younger ones are in the experimental stage, and, finding that Debussy and Stravinsky are supposed to be the fashion, make frequent and futile attempts to be ‘futuristic’ on these lines – with conspicuous ill-success,” he states.9 Somewhat ironically, Corder indicates that he is pleased by the lack of success of these “futuristic” efforts. Such a position would seem to be at odds with his stance as the leader of the more progressive of the two major music schools in London. He claims that nothing can save British music unless its composers stick with their national style – “the style of Purcell, Arne, Macfarren, and Sullivan.” This statement goes a long way toward proving the problems of the resurgence of British music, where a “progressive” like Corder is calling for English composers to follow the models of Thomas Arne (1710-1778)10 and George A. Macfarren (1813-1887).11

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9 Ibid.
10 Arne is best known for his patriotic air “Rule, Britannia!” written in 1740.
11 Macfarren had his greatest success with his opera, Robin Hood, composed in 1860.
Corder’s overall view of the state of British music in 1918 is indeed depressing, but not everything he claims should be taken as absolute truth. Other authoritative sources have provided us with different perspectives, and some of those should be considered, as well. One such view, coming in answer to remarks in a vein similar to those of Corder only three years earlier, is from Ernest Newman. Newman wrote in 1915 in response to a *Musical Times* column by “A Native Composer,” who, like Corder, blamed the problems of English music on the public, the critics, and the publishers.\(^\text{12}\) He seems amused, noting that such a complaint “is very much as if a convict should tell us that he was really an excellent fellow and most unjustly convicted, everybody being on his side during the trial except the judge, the police, the jury, the counsel for the prosecution, and the spectators in the court.”\(^\text{13}\) Let us note here that Corder at least saw fit to lay some blame at the feet of the composers as well as everyone else.

Newman quickly moves away from discussion of the publishers. He essentially agrees that they share in any blame, stating that too much music is published, and that there is certainly more bad music published than good, though his belief is that this can be said in any country, and not just in England. He believes that the case is clearer in regards to the public and the critics.

\(^{12}\) It is entirely possible that this anonymous “Native Composer” was actually Frederick Corder, though this cannot be confirmed.

“The public is an utterly insoluble problem. The more I have to do with it, the less I flatter myself that I understand it,” Newman tells us. He describes believing once that he could explain why the public might like one composer over another, or one kind of music over another. Then, he states that he has given up such futile speculation. “But this much is certain,” he adds, “that the public makes no more mistakes with regard to foreign music than it does with regard to English.” Newman observes that it is easy to say, and thus commonly said, that English audiences are too ready to listen to anything that comes from abroad, while being too little inclined to listen to the work of an Englishman. He doubts, however, that there is much truth to this. Instead, he believes that the English audience simply refuses to give its time or its ear to the unknown, whether the music comes from home or from elsewhere. “It makes one sad to see Queen’s Hall only one-third full when Mr. Ronald gives a concert devoted to Elgar’s music; but I can remember the time when it was hard to get an audience for Richard Strauss in London.” He continues, pointing out that almost every foreign composer popular at the time of his writing in England had to wait some length of time before the public took him to its heart, and that the reason for their ultimate success was the fact of their popularity among so many on the Continent and in the rest of the world, which sooner or later made an impression on the British public. In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, we saw how the war and events leading up to it created an atmosphere in which Germany and German-influenced countries quickly dismissed British

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
composers once the politics of the war and nationalism became part of the equation.

While Corder and others were arguing that British audiences were not giving their native music enough of a chance against music by foreign composers, Newman was claiming that the public was shy not only toward unfamiliar British music, but toward all unfamiliar music. “The average man goes to a concert to enjoy himself. He is not at all certain of enjoying himself when he learns that a quarter or a third of the whole concert is to be given up to music by someone whose name conveys nothing to him.”\(^{16}\) This statement seems to indicate a difference in the mindset of the British concertgoer from that of the Continental concertgoer, who, one could conclude, is more willing to take chances with his musical experiences. Newman concludes this thought by saying, “I am not suggesting that the public should always act like this. On the contrary, I should prefer it to show a little curiosity with regard to new things, and a willingness to risk a little cash and comfort for a fresh experience; but so far as this caution operates against new English music it operates also against new foreign music.”\(^{17}\)

Newman refutes Corder’s assessment of responsibility from the critics by telling us that the authority of critics over the public is always overestimated both by composers and performers. He feels that the opinions of critics do not keep potential audiences away from performances that they wish to attend, and do not convince people to attend concerts they were not already predisposed to hear. He then spends a lengthy paragraph explaining that regular concerts

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 143.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
receive more attention in newspapers and periodicals than they deserve, when most concerts and most new works cannot be, by comparison to others, anything but commonplace. It is an interesting point of view. Newman is saying that if all new music were good, then good would be “average.” He feels, however, that this “average” is not worthy of much attention in the Press, that such space should be dedicated only to the truly “great” works or performances. “The truth is that far too much space is given in the Press to the doings of the ordinary run of musicians. That the experienced critic does not become wildly enthusiastic over a new work by John Smith is easily intelligible; how can he be expected to feel wild enthusiasm except for something quite out of the common?” If one accepts this point of view, then it is easy to conclude that the music critics in England were probably doing more for composers than they should have been. At the very least, it provides a very different way of looking at the situation from what Corder gives us. To bring this point home, let us consider one last quote from Newman on the subject. “The mere fact that you are a composer, even a native composer, does not entitle you to any more consideration in the Press than other honest and reasonably capable workers get; if you wish to be taken very seriously you must show that you are big enough to be worth taking seriously in a world that is crammed almost to overflowing with ability of a really high average.”

Corder and Newman seem to have sparred on this issue in the columns of The Musical Times for a period of several years. Another critic weighed in on Corder’s opinions, responding to his article of January 1918 with his own in

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 144.
March. This response deserves particular attention in that it comes not from a native British writer, but from a Frenchman, Georges Jean-Aubry. Among the achievements Jean-Aubry offers as qualifications for writing on the subject of the promotion of British music is the fact that he had recently been active in helping to arrange two recitals of English music, one of old music and one of new, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris. He had also taken the initiative in convincing the symphony orchestra of Perez Casas in Madrid to include nine English works on its programs.20

Jean-Aubry agrees with Corder in the belief that not enough interest is taken in England in English music. He feels, however, that the matter becomes one of the lack of confidence the English audience has in the abilities of their native composers. He states, “Very often I have had occasion to speak with music-lovers, with performers, with critics, and to my surprise I have found that very few of these shared my firm belief in the great future for English music.”21

Jean-Aubry’s position on English audiences is quite compassionate. He recognizes that from the time of Handel, English music had been under the influence of Germany, and that teachers of music in England came to believe over an extended period of time that music existed only in Germany. He notes that the war was beneficial to English music, forcing England out of her apathy and resignation. For one hundred and fifty years, as Jean-Aubry tells us, the public followed what they believed to be the way of things. “But this is not to be

21 Ibid.
wondered at,” he says. “There is perhaps no public in the world that shows more good-will than the English musical public; there is none that listens more politely and attentively to new or old works, as the same may be; and the public was given almost only German music.” He concludes by asserting that Germans in England worked very hard at persuading Great Britain that music was a German monopoly, and a great deal of effort was expended in promoting German over English conductors and performers.\(^\text{22}\)

It is worthwhile to look at what Jean-Aubry tells us regarding help from the English government. He points first to the German use of music for propaganda purposes before the war, thereby drawing a negative connection between music and governmental involvement. On the other hand, he notes that such propaganda is a viable means of enlarging a sphere of influence for one’s musical style. He suggests that rather than an all-encompassing approach, more individualized efforts might be the answer. Then, he recounts and instance of which he is aware in which the English were less than enthusiastic in making an effort on their own musicians’ behalf. “... when in 1910, in a spirit of reciprocity, the Société des Concerts Français in London, through the initiative of Mr. Gueritte, attempted to found a British Concert Society in Paris, they received no support from the English colony in Paris, nor from any public body, nor from any musical societies or music publishers in England.”\(^\text{23}\) It would be another twenty-four years before such efforts would be encouraged by a specific organization established by the government.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 115.
Only four years after Corder’s distressed admonishment of most everyone connected to English music, a correspondent for *The Musical Times* in Vienna wrote an article discussing British music in that city. Paul Bechert describes the “Chinese Wall which surrounded our physical and spiritual life” for the years of the war, and tells the reader that this wall is gradually coming down. He tells us how the Viennese public is awakening like Rip Van Winkle to find vast changes and surprising developments in the surrounding world. “Not the least surprising of our new experiences,” he tells us, “was the season of English music which has just come to a close here.”

Bechert goes on to describe how the concerts of that season vanquished a decades long prejudice held by the Viennese that the English lacked musical talent. He points to Vienna’s experience with English music being limited to Sir Edward Elgar and Dame Ethel Smyth, whose works, while fine enough, were more influenced by Germanic style than by any national school. Of more recent, “modern” music, he can only speak of Cyril Scott, who he names as having an affinity with the Impressionists, as someone known in Vienna prior to the current concert season. “How radically conditions must have changed in England of late!” he muses. “Suddenly we began hearing the names of such composers as Arthur Bliss, Gustav Holst, Arnold Bax, John Ireland, and others whose existence had hitherto been known only to a limited number of professionals, and we were even more astonished to find their compositions for the most part excellent works, and worthy of the most serious consideration.”

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British music, including that of Bax, was beginning to make an impression on the Continent.

Bechert characterizes the differences between this newfound British music and the new music of the Germanic composers. He describes the German music as intellectually influenced by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, with a revolutionary philosophy that lends itself to music. He talks about the *Sturm und Drang* through which the younger generation of German composers is going. But of the English, he suggests that such intellectual and philosophical strife is little known. “They are bright, healthy, and talented young fellows who do not pretend to set philosophical problems to music, but who love to revel in sound, colour, and rhythm.”25 Bechert’s view of the English composers, while perhaps a bit simplistic, is certainly positive. This was something for the British to build upon, but such building did not take place quickly enough or to the satisfaction of all concerned.

In 1931, we find a letter to the editor at *The Musical Times*, which is representative of the opinions held by many supporters of British music. The writer complains, “During the past year no less than five foreign orchestras (from New York, Vienna, Paris, Amsterdam, and Berlin) have given series of concerts in this country. The total sum of English music played in nearly twenty concerts has amounted to a performance by the New York Orchestra of Elgar’s ‘Enigma’ Variations and Eugène Goossens’s ‘Sinfonietta.’”26 He complains that the visiting orchestras only play programs filled with “well-worn

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25 Ibid., p. 396.
stock favorites” that say little for the English musical intelligence, while
neglecting masterpieces by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Bax, and Delius.

“But can it really be wondered at,” the writer asks, “as the programmes
this season of the London Symphony Orchestra Royal Philharmonic Society, the
Concert Club, and the Hallé Orchestra show (with two or three exceptions) the
same indifference and neglect?”27 The second point of the letter, beyond the
complaint of a lack of representative English works in performances of visiting
orchestras and English orchestras alike, and the further suggestion that
English masters cannot hope to be understood, and thus appreciated, without
repeated hearing, is that some kind of quota should be enforced. “Foreign
conductors should be encouraged (one might almost say compelled) to include
one English work of importance in each concert28 that they conduct in this
country, either with their own orchestras or as guest conductors.”29 The writer
believes that this is the only way for English composers to “effectively obtain
justice” both in England and abroad.

It was not just through the 1930s that some vocal British concertgoers
complained of hearing too few of their native composers’ works. The same
complaints were still appearing in letters to the editor thirty years later. “Five
professional symphony orchestras are based in London alone, and yet can even
London concert programmes be said to reflect the great renaissance which has
occurred in British music this century?” another writer asks in 1962. “Are more
than a handful of the fruits of this renaissance regularly performed? How often

27 Ibid.
28 The italics here are provided either by the writer or by The Musical Times.
29 Clotworthy, p. 353.
do concertgoers have the opportunity to hear and get to know the symphonies of Elgar and Arnold Bax?30 Clearly, at least a percentage of knowledgeable supporters of British music remained unhappy with the opportunities they had to hear the works of their native composers.

Lest we think that Corder had only opinions on which to base his views, we should now go back to examine another article that he submitted to The Musical Times, this one from several years earlier. In late 1909, writing as President of the Society of British Composers, Corder submitted a brief, one-column article citing statistics gathered by the Society. The goal was the estimate the proportion of performance of British works at the Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts for the seasons of 1907 through 1909.

The percentage values were arrived at not simply through the counting of works, but by assigning each work a value in points based upon its estimated length and importance within a full program. Each concert was valued at a total of five hundred points, with every piece being assigned a portion of those points. Corder points out to counter any objections that the very same system is at this time by the 5,000 members of the German Society of Composers to establish fees for performing rights. He adds that the Germans recognize the equity of the system “without demur.”31

The percentages reported by Corder in this article are as follows: For the 1907 season, 8.5% of the works performed at the Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts were by British composers, with 3.01% of the overall works being

premieres of British works. In 1908, the numbers drop to 7.4% with 1.4
premieres. The numbers for 1909 represent a climb in total performances, at
10.3%, but premieres dropped to 0.75%. The Society compiled statistics for
the concert series of both Sir Thomas Beecham and Sir Landon Ronald for the
year 1909, as well, and as Corder reports, Beecham gave concerts with a rate of
55% British music that year, while Ronald, another strong advocate for British
composers, was at 47% British music for the same season.

Finally, Corder tells us that at the time of his writing, the Society of
British Composers ranked 138 members, up dramatically from 51 members in
1907 and 116 members in 1908. In 1909, the Society reported that its members
listed a grand total of 525 orchestral works, including symphonies, suites,
overtures and/or preludes, symphonic poems, variations, concerti, and
miscellaneous other works. The final point that Corder makes in his report is
that, while it would be absurd to claim that all 525 orchestral compositions on
the Society’s list could possibly be of the first rank, the pieces could still be
brought together to make up sixty-one programs for a Promenade season
without going out of the country for a work, and without giving the same work
twice. With that thought in mind, it is easier, perhaps, to understand some of
his frustration.

For every negative observation on this matter, there can be found a
positive one to counter it. Finally, we begin to see the results of a more
concerted effort to improve the status at home, and perhaps more importantly,

\[\text{\footnotesize 32 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 33 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 34 Ibid.}\]
abroad, of British music. An article appearing in a 1939 issue of Tempo heralds this effort, proclaiming, “Without doubt, the outlook for British music abroad has become distinctly brighter during recent years, and there are definite signs that our composers are beginning to win a place in the concert programmes of both Continental and American musical organizations.”35 By this, the author tells us, it is meant regular places in the repertoire as those held by French, Italian, or Russian compositions, rather than mere premieres of works never to be heard again. “In this connection the work of the British Council, a government-sponsored body charged with the task of introducing British art and culture abroad, has been extremely valuable.”36

Jack A. Westrup wrote an article in 1944 praising the British Council, which was founded ten years prior. “Its main objects are ‘to make the life and thought of the British peoples more widely known abroad…, to encourage the study and use of the English language…’ and ‘to co-operate with the self-governing Dominions in strengthening the common cultural traditions of the British Commonwealth.’”37 Westrup explains that the Council is not a government department, though it was established through the Foreign Office and receives a government grant. We can see from his account of their charter that this Council was not established purely for musical purposes, and, as we learn from the writer, it turned out to be the least important of the subjects addressed by the organization. At first, the Council accomplished little for music beyond sending out a few gramophone recordings and some songs

36 Ibid.
through various diplomatic channels. The first significant act of the Council on behalf of British music was an invitation extended to more than thirty European critics to visit England as the Council’s guests in November 1935 to attend a number of regularly scheduled musical events. The idea was to allow these critics to hear for themselves what everyday music making in London was like, and the endeavor proved extraordinarily successful. As Westrup tells us, “The critics were particularly impressed by the three London orchestras – one of them was surprised to find three permanent orchestras in the capital – and by the singing of the choir of New College, Oxford, to which a special visit was paid.”

Thus began the official campaign to build favor for English music on the Continent, and eventually, in America, as well.

In Great Britain, the attitudes of concertgoers were changing, and though this change was slow, there was some evidence to show an increase in the interest in British composers. The Musical Times launched a survey through their periodical in 1964, asking readers to send back a postcard naming (1) their five favorite composers, and (2) their five favorite British composers, with neither category ranked in terms of preference. The results are intriguing, though the sample of respondents is rather small, with only two hundred or so cards returned. In the category of favorite composers, the top five show no particular surprises. Coming in first was Bach, with 116 votes, followed by Mozart with 92 votes, Beethoven with 82, Brahms with 52, and Schubert with 41 votes. The next group of five composers does provide a surprise or two. The sixth-ranked composer is Benjamin Britten with 35 votes, followed by

\[38\] Ibid.
Stravinsky with 28 votes, Handel with 26, Elgar with 24 and Haydn with 23 votes. Henry Purcell tied for the thirteenth slot with 18 votes, and Vaughan Williams came in at the fifteenth position with 16 votes, just ahead of Bruckner, Mahler, Ravel, and Sibelius, all of whom garnered 15 votes.39

When considering only the British composers, the rankings went as follows: Britten (114 votes), Elgar (112 votes), Purcell (110 votes), Vaughan Williams (109 votes), all were far ahead of any of the others. The list continues, showing Holst (53) and Byrd (51), with another drop off to Delius (39), Walton (37), and Tippett (28). From there, we see Dowland (21 votes), Bax and Sullivan (17 each), Gibbons (13) and Ireland (12 votes). A large number of composers follow this group, none collecting double-digit votes.40 It should also be noted for the sake of accuracy that some voters chose to consider Handel as a British composer, while others did not, and so The Musical Times chose not to include him in their results in the British list. They tell us that, had they included him, Handel would have been listed in “an unrealistic place halfway down the British list.”41

Through the middle years of the twentieth century, it was not unusual to read in music periodicals letters to the editor on behalf of Bax and his works. Some called for greater attention on the BBC, while others sought to gain support for recordings. As early as 1934, we find one such letter from a Robert H. Hull addressed to The Musical Times and its readership. In his letter, Hull suggests that many readers feel “the urgent need for gramophone recordings of

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Arnold Bax’s principal orchestral works, more particularly the five [at this time there were only five] symphonies, and of his chamber music.” Believing that the expense of production is the prohibiting factor in getting Bax recorded, Hull calls for some kind of write-in campaign, and asks that readers send letters to his home address to be passed on to record companies, with expressions of interest and promises to purchase recordings of Bax compositions. It is, perhaps, a naïve proposal, but one representative of Bax enthusiasts of that time and of the composer, as well.

Bax came to be known little by little in the United States during these years. Some saw him as worthy of greater attention both in America and in England, and noted their frustration with the majority who did not share that view. Three years before Hull’s request for letters supporting a request for recordings, Charles H. Mitchell, a subscriber in Illinois, carried on a heated exchange with the editors of The Musical Times in which he asserts that “the measured conservatism, the ox-like stupidity of most English critics is absolutely unrivalled.” Mitchell speaks kindly of many composers of the period, saying of Bax that he “is still fighting the impenetrable stupidity which insists he is merely another imitator of Debussy.” Later in his letter, he makes a broader statement in the same vein. “I have an infinite amount of respect for Delius, Bax, Lambert, Walton, Vaughan Williams, and others of their class. How they can write such undeniably fine music as they do in an atmosphere as cold

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and as sterilizing as that of modern England is, I confess, beyond my comprehension. Certainly England does not deserve these gifts."\(^{44}\)

The conductor Vernon Handley makes an enlightening observation, saying, “A true Bax enthusiast is like all enthusiasts incensed at the failure of others to appreciate their man’s true genius.”\(^{45}\) In the case of Bax, there are plenty of failures to be incensed about. Let us now explore more specifically the issues already laid out as they apply to this composer.

Joseph Holbrooke, in a book published in 1925, dealt with modern British composers. His chapter on Arnold Bax is interesting, if not for the small quantity of information on the composer, then more so for the misconceptions and exclusions we find. He tells us that Bax at this point was prolific, but not so in terms of songs or piano works. It would seem that the various works written specifically for Harriet Cohen by this time, and those written for Bax’s classmate, Myra Hess, had escaped Holbrooke’s notice. In attempting to describe Bax’s writing style, Holbrooke notes, “Although the composer is of Irish stock, there is no strong Irish idiom in his music, except occasional use of Irish folk-tunes in his orchestral work and chamber music.”\(^{46}\) As discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Bax had no Irish blood from either side of his family. Yet, it was a common belief that he claimed an Irish heritage as part of his family tree. More pertinent to the matter of our current focus, though, is the “complete list” of the composer’s works that Holbrooke provides in his text. Reading through the list of orchestral works, we find *Into the Twilight* from

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 836.
1908, *In the Faery Hills* (1909), *Festival Overture* (1909), *Christmas Eve on the Mountains* (1912), *Four Orchestral Pieces* (1912-1913), *The Garden of Fand* (1913), *November Woods* (1917), and the *Symphony in E Minor* (1922). There is no mention here of *Tintagel*, which was composed in 1917, orchestrated in 1919, premiered in Bournemouth in 1921, heard again at the Leeds Festival in 1922, and published by Murdoch in 1923. *Tintagel* was a known commodity as Holbrooke compiled his text, and yet he was not able even to name it among Bax’s compositions.

This quote from the author offers some explanation for his lack of attention to detail, though it seems unintentionally unflattering on Holbrooke’s part: “The first work I performed by this composer, sixteen years ago, was the early trio for violin, viola, and pianoforte, and to me his style has not changed much.” Clearly, he was not an “enthusiast” in the Handley mold.

Anthony Payne wrote an assessment of Bax and his body of work in 1984 in which he describes the composer as standing somewhere between Vaughan Williams, whom he claims had simply been around too long, and Bridge, who was much less lucky and whose work had only begun to attain regular availability thirty years or more after his death. “Bax was never as totally neglected as Bridge,” Payne tells us. “The problem with this composer is his tremendously prolific and uneven output. In 1983, at a time when many probably felt that little of real consequence awaited discovery, there suddenly

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47 Ibid., p. 57.
48 The work Holbrooke refers to here, according to his list, was composed in 1906.
49 Holbrooke, p. 60.
appeared a most generous sequence of BBC Bax programmes...” Payne goes on to note that at least a dozen substantial works, many receiving their premieres and the rest known only to a few through “semi-amateur” performances, were brought to light through these programs.

Payne’s assessment of Bax’s music is far more generous than that of Holbrooke. In discussing In the Faery Hills, Payne comments that, “Given the threadbare 19th-century English tradition which Bax’s generation inherited, his discovery of an individual vein, ahead of virtually all his contemporaries, is remarkable.” He notes that by the time Bax reached The Garden of Fand, Tintagel, and November Woods, his personality had emerged fully-fledged. Payne also feels that the center of gravity in Bax’s output lies early in his career, in the period in which the three tone poems just mentioned were composed. “The ten-year period initiated by Fand, Tintagel, et al can be seen as Bax’s high-water mark.” Much as it was for Richard Strauss, it can be said of Bax that there was no long-term benefit to peaking early in his compositional life. Surely, it was a circumstance of his later dismissal by much of the public.

Peter J. Pirie has a different, albeit earlier, perspective. To begin with, he tells us that Vaughan Williams, rather than having been around too long, “has had the supreme good fortune to survive to a great age; he has not only enjoyed the extension of his creative activity well beyond the critical period, but he has become a legend in his lifetime.” He suggests that many of Vaughan Williams’s

51 Ibid., p. 30.
52 Ibid., p. 32.
contemporaries were not able to reach that period “when the seal is set upon a creative life-work,” or that this period when reached was blotted out by the war years.

Bax is one of the composers whose reputation Pirie sees as suffering the most from the change in musical climate due to the Second World War. From his writing in 1955, he believes Bax to be in danger of “being lost without trace.” He sets out his reasons for concern as follows: “One of the few trends that have survived the war is a certain anti-romantic bias, not very well defined but on occasion vehement; this is very apt to come to the fore when Bax is mentioned, though not, strangely, in the case of Delius.”54

Pirie laments the passive, uncritical manner in which the younger generation of listeners accepts these trends and biases. “They are not very well informed, in relation to the amount of music they hear, and inclined to devour musical gossip and think they have learned about music; thus they may well form the opinion that since they rarely read of Bax, Holst or Ireland, … these excellent English composers may really be of little importance.”55 He suggests that while musicology is an excellent thing, it is for specialists rather than for the average working musician or the amateur, and that the music of Bax and others needs middle-class music-lovers who are ready to work for their pleasures and love what they know without taking their music for granted.

Summing up his hope for the future, Pirie states that there is no doubt that the “semi-literate” musical public will give way to one that is better informed. “But a composer, even in these days of revivals, does not easily rise

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
again once he has been completely forgotten, and the second world war was one last gratuitous blow for those who had never found it exactly easy to establish their reputation,” he tells us. “They went into the war years as suspect and on trial, and emerged as out-of-date old fogies.” Bax, according to Pirie, was one of the hardest hit of the victims of this circumstance.

This was not all that Pirie had to say on the matter of Bax’s recession from the public conscience, though. In 1971, he was still examining the situation and was still seeing a negative light cast upon the composer. He observes of Bax, “A desperately shy man, he was disinclined to promote his own works, and on the occasions when he was questioned about them he was quite without guile, and although a master of prose, laid the gunpowder trail under himself.” He notes the well-known Bax quote, “I am a brazen romantic,” and suggests that this is about all the average man has ever heard of Bax, and then claims that if he knows more than average, he may have read Farewell My Youth – “without noticing that this brief autobiography ends with Bax just in his twenties, and with virtually no work to his name, except perhaps the jejune Celtic Song Cycle, from which comes the expression ‘Celtic Twilight’ that knocks a further nail into his coffin.” Indeed, one can find a compelling consensus that Bax was one of his own worst enemies in terms of lasting recognition.

We learn from Lewis Foreman of an important circumstance in the matter of Bax study and performance. Foreman tells us that in the first years of the 1960s, most of Bax’s music that had been published was still in print, and

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56 Ibid., p. 195.
58 Ibid.
at very reasonable prices. This all changed one night in 1964 when the building belonging to the publisher Chappell & Company, then Bax’s publishers, caught fire and was completely gutted. Overnight, almost all of Bax’s music went out of print, and the manuscript scores to *Spring Fire* and the *Concertante for Three Wind Instruments* were destroyed.\(^\text{59}\) Newspaper reports, according to Foreman, concentrated on the destruction of the many pianos stored there, and made no mention of the loss of so much of Bax’s music. Fortunately, nothing was lost permanently. The scores were reconstructed, in many cases from parts recalled from Chappell’s agents in America and Australia. Another copy of *Spring Fire* was found among Harriet Cohen’s papers after her death, and a photographic print of the *Concertante* was at a different location.\(^\text{60}\)

Handley notes that after two complete sets of Bax’s symphonies on record and the corresponding introduction of new conductors and orchestras to these works, to say nothing of the activities of the adventurous record-buying public, nothing in the concert life of this composer has really changed.\(^\text{61}\) “In the long term I am not worried,” he tells us. “The foresight of (the record companies) *Lyrita* and *Chandos* has meant that in more enlightened times there will be a demand for the symphonies of a composer who was one of ‘the more thinking among mankind.’ In the meantime, too, I will conduct him as often as possible.”\(^\text{62}\) This was no empty promise from Handley. Starting with his own London premiere in December 1961, where he played the Third Symphony, the

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\(^\text{60}\) Ibid., pp. 410-411.

\(^\text{61}\) Handley, p. 377.

\(^\text{62}\) Ibid., p. 378.
conductor programmed Bax regularly. The following year, he became Director of Music at Guildford and developed the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra from student and amateur status into a fully professional ensemble. During his tenure there, he performed *Tintagel* (1963), *The Happy Forest*, the orchestral version of *Paean*, and the Symphony No. 4 (1964), *The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew* (1965), Symphony No. 6 (1967), *Symphonic Variations* (1970), *The Garden of Fand* (1972), Symphony No. 3 (1974), *Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra* (1978), and *Northern Ballad* No. 1 (1979). Handley also conducted Bax’s music with the orchestras of the BBC and with the primary orchestra of the Royal College of Music.

Frank Daly echoes the tone of Pirie’s remarks, stating with some irony that, “At his death in 1953 Sir Arnold Bax had become Master of the Queen’s Music and had entered into a period of musical neglect that has now to our ever-lasting shame, become total.” Daly tells us that the reasons for this neglect are not hard to find. He claims that Bax has no champion as Delius had in Beecham, and that, born into the comfortable upper middle class, Bax had no incentive to fight for recognition. One might argue the first of these points to a degree, as Vernon Handley obviously champions Bax’s music. As reputable and as skilled as Handley is, though, most critics would say that he is no Beecham. Nor are any of the other conductors working to promote appreciation for Bax. To the second point, it is difficult to debate the fact that Bax lived comfortably throughout his life, and his shyness made him even less inclined to make public efforts at self-promotion.

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63 Foreman, p. 411.
In his article, Daly provides anecdotes noting various reactions to Bax performances. Not surprisingly, some of these reactions were good and some were less so. Adding a further note about a meeting with an official of the BBC, he tells us the following: “Even later when, in the course of my duties as music critic I was introduced to Herbert Murrill, then the BBC’s Director of Music, and sought to challenge him concerning the creeping neglect that was rendering performances of Bax’s music increasingly rare, I was dismissed with an airy wave of the hand and a pronouncement that ‘Bax’s stuff really wasn’t worthy was it?’” Daly concludes the story by telling us, “The Wigmore Hall Foyer came nearer to becoming the setting for a stand-up fight than it ever realized. My self-restraint still amazes me, even after all this time.”

As with many composers, the music of Arnold Bax seems very much tied to the man. Those who knew him were exceedingly loyal both to him and to his work. As those people grew old, they passed their remembrances to a younger generation of followers who have attempted to spread the word. Others have come upon Bax completely at random. Colin Scott-Sutherland wrote a brief tribute article in *The Musical Times* that appeared in October 1963. In it, he said, “In the ten years that have passed since the death of Arnold Bax in October 1953 – years that have seen great changes in the English musical scene – his star has sunk so low on the horizon as to become invisible to all but a few who, for various reasons, have sought it diligently.” Scott-Sutherland is among the foremost Bax scholars, and one can feel the emotion he must feel as

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65 Ibid.
he writes, “I would like very much to believe that Bax’s music will shortly again find favour, and charm with its elusive beauty the ears of a young generation. But I do not. Nothing short of a violent cultural revolution will ever restore the values that ennobled the work of Bax.”

No such cultural revolution has occurred. Daly considers the timing of Bax’s death, noting that, “Bax’s death in 1953 would perhaps not have caused any ripples in musical circles anyway, but in the event the Coronation festivities and the aftermath thereof completely overwhelmed its significance. The fact that he died in Cork City and is buried in St. Finbarr’s Cemetery further added to the already mounting neglect.”67 He concludes by stating, “Whatever should prove to be the fate of Arnold Bax, … certain it is that this world can no longer harm him, but by its neglect the world, particularly our own world of music is that much the poorer in ignoring some of the most powerful and moving pages in British musical literature.” There is perhaps a certain amount of rhetoric in these words. It is true that Bax was a sensitive man, and that he was disappointed in the world for not taking his music more to its heart, but the world did not harm Bax. He lived comfortably, he saw most, if not all of his music performed in his lifetime. He chose not to pursue the limelight, and so he spent little time illuminated by it.

Enough interest has been garnered over the years that the filmmaker Ken Russell decided to create a biopic on Bax. An occasional actor, Russell played the role of the composer himself, as the film focused on Bax at age 65, which was Russell’s age at the time of the shooting. It is the only major part he

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67 Daly, p. 132.
ever played in one of his own movies. The film, called *The Secret Life of Sir Arnold Bax*, was completed in 1992. The picture also marked the last screen appearance by Glenda Jackson, who shortly after production won a seat in Parliament and devoted herself to politics full-time from then on. Kenneth Colley also appears in the film as fellow composer John Ireland.\(^{68}\) *The Secret Life of Sir Arnold Bax* depicts the composer at a crossroads, feeling that he had lost his public. It shows him reviving his career in part by writing incidental music for films, and points specifically to his score for David Lean's production of *Oliver Twist* with Alec Guinness, Robert Newton, and Anthony Newley. One of the highlights of the film shows Bax sneaking into a movie theater to listen to his music during the end credits.\(^{69}\)

Shortly after his passing, *Music and Letters* published a tribute to the life of Arnold Bax in the form of commentary by some of the important people who had known him. Some wrote only a few brief paragraphs, while others wrote considerably more. In attempting to define Bax's contribution to the musical world of Great Britain in the first half of the twentieth century both as a composer and as a man, perhaps the most instructional path we might take is the one in which we consider the opinions of those with whom he lived and worked. Some brief extracts from the letters published in January 1954 follow:

Bax’s very large legacy of music, comprising as it does works in every form except that of opera, can be an irresistibly easy target for critical comment. But those who are led by their own preferences to react against the many inspired improvisations in his important symphonic works can surely feel generously towards the sensitive and subtle author of these marvelous webs of sound.


\(^{69}\) Ibid., p. 16.
With the wheel of artistic fashion turning ever faster, it may be that the romantic personality in Bax’s music strikes with less conviction on the audiences of today than formerly. But I am certain that the beauty of his finest music – and I must say here that much of it is virtually unknown – will arrest the ear and move the heart of future audiences for a long time to come.

[Arthur Bliss][70]

Arnold Bax the artist was a fount of music. Of the English composers of his time none other, I think, made quite his effect of spontaneous and inexhaustible outpouring. There was something Schubertian or Dvorákian about his musical nature. Bax the man was shy and sensitive, he was both critical and generous, he was finely intelligent and cultivated, and there was a caustic streak in his nature.

[Arthur Benjamin][71][72]

I have never missed any performances of his orchestral works if I could help it, and it is always a source of wonder to me that such a composer should be comparatively neglected, considering the number of symphonies and tone-poems there are to draw upon and in view of their richness and beauty. When one listens to that magnificent and thrilling tone-poem ‘Tintagel’ one revels in the fact that it is indeed real music in every sense of the word, having vivid imagination, real sense of beauty and climax and luscious colouring – which is surely sufficient to satisfy any listener who possesses genuine responsive feeling for beauty.

[York Bowen][73][74]

Well – he has gone. The slightly stooping, diffident, shy figure we all knew so well will be seen no more, but the music that came from that imaginative and creative mind will still live on. Dear Arnold Bax – the world has lost a great musician and I, personally, have lost an old and loved friend.

[Eric Coates][75][76]

However greatly one was enjoying the daytime while traveling around with him, one would always look forward to the delights of the

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[71] Ibid.
[72] The Australian composer Arthur Benjamin (1893-1960) first made the acquaintance of Bax when he approached Bax in regard to composition lessons, before settling on study with Stanford at the Royal College of Music. They became lifelong friends.
[73] Bliss and others, pp. 5-6.
[74] Bowen (1884-1961) was a composer and pianist at the Royal Academy of Music at the same time that Bax was there. Like Bax, Bowen studied composition with Frederick Corder, and piano with Tobias Matthay.
[75] Bliss and others, p. 7.
[76] Eric Coates (1886-1957) was a violist and composer, whom Bax knew through Corder. Coates studied with Corder starting in 1906, shortly after Bax left the Royal Academy.
evening which would unfailingly be regaled by his wit and incomparable charm. To the list of his other virtues must be added a prodigious memory for people, places and indeed things in general. His slant upon characters he had known was always highly individual, usually sly, and fortified by a telling talent for mimicry. There was never better quiet company.

[Patrick Hadley]77 78

One of the qualities essential to the enjoyment of a nomadic life is the ability to get on with all sorts and conditions of men. This quality Arnold possessed to a singular degree. He professed to hate parties, though he went to so many that I have sometimes wondered whether he meant to be taken seriously. But whether he was at the White Horse Inn, or in a remote Irish village, or chatting with students at the Royal Academy of Music or sitting by the fire with one or two musical or literary cronies he was equally happy, equally at home; and when he chose (which was often) he had a whimsical humour that made him the best of company.

[Peter Latham]79 80

The orchestral player finds his best works for orchestra, such as ‘The Garden of Fand,’ ‘Tintagel,’ and the Third Symphony, thrilling to play. No doubt his tendency was not to make things easy, but none of the technical problems he sets are there for display – they are inherent in the thought he is expressing, and study of his music is rewarded by rare discoveries below the surface.

His loss can be repaired only by our efforts to bring his music to life. Let us do this and, in so doing, bring delight to ourselves.

[Bernard Shore]81 82

Arnold Bax, like Shelley, seemed to have something of the faun in his nature. One almost expected to see the pointed ears when he took his hat off. This reflected itself in his music.

Though no ascetic, he seemed not to belong to this world but always to be gazing though the magic casements, or wondering in the shy woods Wychwood bowers waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

77 Bliss and others, p. 9.
78 British composer Patrick Hadley (1899-1973) was on the faculty of the Royal College of Music after having studied composition there with Vaughan Williams and conducting with Adrian Boult and Malcolm Sargent. He was a longtime friend of Bax.
79 Bliss and others, p. 10.
80 Peter Latham (1894-1970) was the writer of a book on Brahms for Collier’s “Great Composers” series. He knew Bax from when the composer lived in Hampstead, and maintained a friendship with him for the rest of Bax’s life.
81 Bliss and others, p. 13.
82 The noted viola performer and teacher Bernard Shore (1896-1985) was a professor at the Royal College of Music, and the writer of the book, The Orchestra Speaks (1937). He particularly appreciated Bax’s efforts on behalf of the viola.
But for Bax, unlike the Scholar Gypsy, the spark fell continually and abundantly, perhaps even too abundantly; the very fertility of his harmonic and melodic invention sometimes prevented us from seeing the wood for the trees.

[Ralph Vaughan Williams]

I was never one of his closest friends, though a warm acquaintanceship existed between us for some twenty years. We seldom discussed music when we met, I remember, simply because with Arnold there were always so many other interesting things to talk about. (...) Certainly he was happier in watching cricket or having a pint with an Irish farm-hand than he was in attending official functions or receiving the high honours that came his way. There was always a curious remoteness about him; but for all that he was a warm-hearted, lovable man, and there are people all over England and Ireland in every walk of life who will miss him very much.

[William Walton]

The duality of Arnold Bax, the composer, and Dermot O’Byrne, the poet, might be blamed for a lack of focus in Bax’s music, but for this composer whose best works came relatively early in his career, one might easily argue the opposite. Bax gave up most of his poetic writing by the early 1920s, as he began to undertake his cycle of symphonies. The imagination that gave us all of his lovely poems and short stories may very well have fueled his ability to compose music. He sorely regretted the departure of his youth, and as his tales slowly faded in his mind, it seems that his inspiration may have taken the same path. He was “more than a brazen romantic,” but he was also truthful and self-aware in admitting to that affliction.

“We have little cause nowadays to complain of too much beauty. The sensuous sound of a Bax score is tempered by an austerity of mood, so that it begets not sickness but exhilaration,” writes Scott-Sutherland. “The keynote of his work—evident in the music composed in the last years of his life as well as

83 Bliss and others, p. 13.
84 Ibid., p. 14.
in the blazing fire of adolescence – is joy, that joy to which he had, with Yeats, penetrated in the beginning, that wonder that lies behind created things. Is it so difficult for us to recapture that wonder?"\(^{85}\)

One might well argue that there is no better time to recapture that wonder than now. The escapism inherent in Bax’s greatest works is very much akin to that of much of our entertainment today. Who better to help us with that escape than a man filled to overflowing with a curious, natural perspective of music and of the world around us? Certainly, Arnold Bax deserves a place of greater recognition than he has had, and works like \textit{Tintagel} should be heard more frequently in our concert halls. There is much prejudice yet to overcome, but with the efforts of his supporters audiences may one day think of Bax with appreciation greater than he knew in his lifetime. “Now his music is stirring to life once more, mainly through the love of the young,” Pirie said in 1971. “He may yet prove to be England’s most seriously underestimated composer.”\(^{86}\) Pirie may have been correct. There are fewer listeners underestimating Arnold Bax now than there were when Pirie wrote those words, and perhaps there will be fewer still in the years to come.

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\(^{85}\) Scott-Sutherland, p. 706.

\(^{86}\) Pirie, p. 38.
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