

# Bax and the ‘Celtic North’

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## **British musical historiography and the Bax ‘problem’**

The idea of a musical ‘renaissance’ in English—or, more accurately, British—music during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth has been commonplace in British musicology for over a hundred years. Critics from J. A. Fuller Maitland onwards have outlined how British composers, having mastered a particular foreign hegemonic model (in this case the forms and genres of nineteenth-century German music), then rejected it in favour of an indigenous idiom, the result of which was a national ‘school’ of composers.<sup>1</sup> This narrative is typical of nineteenth-century nationalist music histories, most notably that of Russia: in his *English Music in the XIXth Century* Fuller Maitland implicitly likens Parry, Stanford, Cowen, Mackenzie and Goring Thomas to the Russian *kutchka*.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, however, historians such

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, J. A. Fuller Maitland, *English Music in the XIXth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1902); Ernest Walker, *A History of Music in England* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1907, and later editions); Frank Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966); Peter J. Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Gollancz, 1979); Michael Trend, *The Music Makers: The English Musical Renaissance from Elgar to Britten* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985). This rejection of the hegemonic model in favour of the indigenous is commonplace in political as well as cultural nationalism, and has been described by Liah Greenfeld, after Nietzsche, as a ‘transvaluation of values’; see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Fuller Maitland, 186.

as Jeffrey Richards, Bernard Porter, Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes and others have begun to deconstruct the notion of a 'national school' by examining ideological issues (musical, aesthetic and political, and applicable to critics and composers alike) that the nationalist narrative had ignored.<sup>3</sup> This, in turn, has led to a wealth of research by musicologists who have considered the role played in the history of early twentieth-century British music by, for example, imperialism, the decadent movement, the politics of gender and sexuality, pastoralism and socialism; and who have focused on music-making as much as on composition.<sup>4</sup> Histories of British music have thus become concerned less with the somewhat simplistic notion of the liberation of the 'Land ohne Musik' from musically imperialist Germany by a handful of great composers than with questioning the social and institutional factors that gave rise to that narrative.

A consequence of this revisionist approach to British music history has been the opportunity to reappraise composers who do not fit easily into the nationalist narrative of self-liberation. A striking case of this is Arnold Bax. A self-confessed 'brazen romantic' who consciously rejected English folksong, Bax effectively excluded himself from the two dominant narratives of inter-war British music, namely the consolidation of the English pastoral school and the emerging modernism of Bliss, Goossens, Walton

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Christopher Norris (ed.), *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), specifically the essays by Meirion Hughes, Robert Stradling and Paul Harrington; Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Bernard Porter, 'Elgar and Empire: music, nationalism and the war', in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Oh, My Horses! Elgar and the Great War* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001), 133–73; Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840–1940: Constructing a National Music*, second edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Among the most important of these publications (many of which, ironically, are studies of individual composers) are: Alain Frogley (ed.), *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Byron Adams and Robin Wells (eds), *Vaughan Williams Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (eds), *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (eds), *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Matthew Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Byron Adams (ed.), *Edward Elgar and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Music and Modernism, 1895–1960* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

(at least in *Façade*) and, latterly, Britten.<sup>5</sup> Instead, his reputation rests on two features that, for different reasons, have not featured greatly in recent scholarship on British music: he was the most prominent musical disciple of the 'Celtic Twilight' movement—which, for the purposes of this article, I shall define as that particular branch of the Irish Literary Revival that was concerned with Celtic mythology and folklore, and which became particularly popular in Britain in the two decades prior to World War One—and in the late-1920s and 1930s he composed a number of large-scale pieces that were inspired stylistically by Jean Sibelius.<sup>6</sup> The dearth of musicological literature on British Celticism is perhaps to be expected. Aside from Elgar's incidental music for *Grania and Diarmid* and Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*, the Irish Literary Revival left little mark on the leading figures of the British musical renaissance; moreover, a movement inspired by Irish cultural and political nationalism sits uneasily within a history of British music in a period that saw the Irish War of Independence (1919–21) and the formation of the Irish Free State (1922). The lack of attention given to British Sibelianism is more surprising, given the critical acclaim that Sibelius enjoyed in inter-war Britain and the pervasiveness of his influence on British composers; it may reflect embarrassment at the inflated claims of iconoclasts like Cecil Gray and Constant Lambert, who considered him to be as significant a figure as Schoenberg and Stravinsky, or a reluctance to accord a relatively conservative non-British composer too prominent a place in the historiography of British music.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the reason, British Sibelianism

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<sup>5</sup> 'I am a brazen romantic, and could never have been and never shall be anything else. By this I mean that my music is the expression of emotional states. I have no interest whatever for sound for its own sake or any modernist "isms" and factions.' See 'Bax Defines his Music', *Musical America*, 7 July 1928, 9, quoted in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Farewell, My Youth! and other writings* (hereafter *FMY*) (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 168. Earlier in his career, Bax wrote that 'Least of all can one find a royal road to the achievement of Englishness in music by the artificial method of collocating and rhapsodizing upon a succession of English folk-tunes, some of them possibly of very doubtful authenticity'; see 'A British School of Composers', *Musical Herald*, September 1915, 409, quoted in *FMY*, 105–7: 105.

<sup>6</sup> Among the literature on Celticism in British music, in addition to the Bax literature listed below, are Anne-Marie H. Forbes, 'Celticism in British Opera: 1878–1938', *The Music Review*, 47/3 (1986–87), 176–83; and Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Among recent literature on British Sibelianism, the most significant is Peter Franklin, 'Sibelius in Britain', in Daniel M. Grimley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 182–95; Byron Adams, '"Thor's Hammer": Sibelius and British Music Critics, 1905–1957', in Daniel M. Grimley (ed.), *Jean Sibelius and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 125–57; J. P. E. Harper-Scott, '"Our True North": Walton's First Symphony, Sibelianism, and the Nationalization of Modernism in England', *Music & Letters*, 89/4 (2008), 562–89.

<sup>7</sup> Gray contrasted Sibelius's 'essentially primitive mentality' favourably with Stravinsky, who had 'none of the qualities of musicianship, except a remarkable orchestral virtuosity, and nothing grows stale so quickly'; see Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1927),

has mostly resisted contextualization, and British Sibelians have lost out as a consequence.

Thus, whilst Bax's Celticism helped him carve a distinctive niche among his contemporaries during his lifetime, his identification with such a musically peripheral movement has paradoxically served only to perpetuate and reinforce his marginalization. His Sibelianism, meanwhile, reflected the intense British interest in the Finnish composer during the inter-war years; but as Sibelius's star began to wane after 1945, Bax's quickly followed. Most crucially, Bax spawned no significant stylistic successors—neither Celticism nor Sibelianism became the basis of a national 'school' of composition in Britain—with the result that he now occupies something of a musical and musicological cul-de-sac.<sup>8</sup>

My aims in this article are threefold. Firstly, building on the work of Derrick Puffett and others, I argue that the distinction between an early 'Celtic' Bax and a later 'Sibelian' Bax is something of a false dichotomy. Instead, by drawing on approaches adopted by post-colonialist scholars of Irish literature, I suggest that the Sibelian Bax, as inter-war music critics perceived him, may be considered a 'masculinization' of the Celtic Bax, and that this change of perspective is analogous to a similar alteration to the self-image of Ireland by its artists and writers during the early years of the Free State. Secondly, I argue that the crucial shift in Bax's thinking occurs in his rejection of mythology (or at least specific myths) as a compositional stimulus in favour of land-

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187, 149. Lambert, meanwhile, claimed that 'since the death of Debussy, Sibelius and Schönberg are the most significant figures in European music, and Sibelius is undoubtedly the more complete artist of the two'. Stravinsky's neoclassicism was 'synthetic' and Schoenberg's serialism, when 'unaccompanied by the morbid fire of his best works is frankly dull and pedantic'. See Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London: Faber, 1934), 328, 105, 296.

<sup>8</sup> Although Bax has been well served by his biographers Lewis Foreman (*Bax: A Composer and his Times*, third edition, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007) and Colin Scott-Sutherland (*Arnold Bax*, London: Dent, 1973), and there exists an extensive catalogue of his works by Graham Parlett (*A catalogue of the works of Sir Arnold Bax*; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), the only article on the composer to appear in a scholarly journal in recent years has been Michael Allis, 'Bax's Elgar: Musical Quotation, Allusion and Compositional Identity in the First String Quartet in G', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 136/2 (2011), 305–52. Among the relatively rare book chapters are Derrick Puffett, 'In *The Garden of Fand*: Arnold Bax and the "Celtic Twilight"', in Jürg Stenzl (ed.), *Art nouveau, Jugendstil und Musik* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1980), 193–210; Gunnar Sundberg, 'National parallels in the orchestral works of Jean Sibelius and Arnold Bax: Focusing on their symphonic language', in Tomi Mäkelä (ed.), *Music and Nationalism in 20th-century Great Britain and Finland* (Hamburg: Von Bockel Verlag, 1997), 59–64; and Harry White, 'Music and the Literary Revival', in *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770–1970* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 94–124, especially 117–24.

scapes and seascapes (though with the caveat that these had often featured prominently in the mythology that had inspired his earlier work). Bax's location of these landscapes and seascapes as being in what he called the 'Celtic north' again recalls parallel developments in Irish literature and art, but also Sibelius; thus Bax's Celticism is the means by which we may understand his Sibelianism. Thirdly, I compare Bax's conception of nature to that of the English pastoral school. This is far from an arbitrary comparison, for English pastoralism has, to date, largely monopolized the discourse on 'music and nature' in inter-war Britain; yet as this is also the period when Sibelius and Bax enjoyed most success in Britain, it makes sense to uncover any alternative attitude to nature that their music might appear to express. I suggest that Bax's conception of nature—romantic, dystopian, and sublime—provides a compelling antithesis to English pastoralism within a dialectic of music and nature. In doing so, it removes Bax from his peripheral position within British musical historiography and propels him to its centre.

### **Bax and Sibelius**

From the British premiere of his Fourth Symphony in 1912 to the end of the Second World War, few composers enjoyed as much critical acclaim in Britain as Sibelius. To mainstream concert audiences he was 'an ally of the sensible and sensitive against the excesses of European modernism'; to British composers who rejected both serialism and Stravinskian neoclassicism, he provided a stylistic model that was both modern and comprehensible.<sup>9</sup> As Byron Adams has explained, Sibelius's appeal may be attributed to his standing 'resolutely at the nexus of a whole series of British cultural tensions' that his British disciples

expressed through their writings by invoking a recurrent series of paradoxical binary oppositions. Sibelius was perceived as being at once a mystical pantheist and a rigorous, coldly calculating logician; as both a modernist and a classicist; as primitive as a rock and as modern as a machine; as utterly individual while being the voice of a race; and as being simultaneously without precedent and the rightful heir to the Beethovenian tradition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Franklin, 192. For more on the distinction between 'modern' and 'modernist' in British musical thought during this period, see Charles Edward McGuire, 'Edward Elgar: "Modern" or "Modernist?" Construction of an Aesthetic Identity in the British Music Press, 1895–1934', *The Musical Quarterly*, 91/1–2 (2008), 8–38.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, "'Thor's Hammer'", 132.

Adams's references to primitivism, pantheism and race are particularly significant here, for perhaps the most recurring image of Sibelius among British writers of this period is that of a Nordic *Naturkind* whose organicist roots were pitted against the sophistication of Vienna or Paris; J. Cuthbert Hadden's famous description of the composer 'wrestling with Nature in her savage moods' in the Finnish forests near his home becomes a commonplace in inter-war British Sibelius literature.<sup>11</sup> This, combined with Sibelius's restrained style of composition (at least compared with Schoenberg or Stravinsky), appealed to emotionally repressed British audiences; as the critic Robert Lorenz put it, somewhat spikily, in 1939, Sibelius was 'accorded extra marks by English musicians and music-lovers alike, because ... his music [was] as chaste as snow'.<sup>12</sup> Sibelius's compositional mentality may have been considered 'essentially primitive', to use Gray's phrase, but its primitivism was that of the noble savage.

The popularity of Sibelius's orchestral music led to a number of British symphonists in the 1930s and 1940s adopting Sibelian traits in their own work, notably Walton, Moeran and, in his Fifth Symphony, Vaughan Williams; but, as Julian Anderson has noted, most of these dealt with surface features such as orchestration and texture, rather than structure. 'Influence of this sort', Anderson concludes, 'was not leading anywhere'.<sup>13</sup> Yet shortly before his death, it was a British composer whom Sibelius described as his 'son in music': Arnold Bax.<sup>14</sup> This admission of paternity may cause some surprise, even suspicion, as seemingly the sole source of Sibelius's quotation is the pianist Harriet Cohen, who was sometimes unreliable in her recollections and, as one of Bax's long-term mistresses, perhaps not always impartial in her claims about the composer. Moreover, Bax's colourful and sometimes prolix compositional style owes less to Sibelius's rigorous motivic logic than to French and Russian models, notably Debussy and Scriabin, while his structural, rather than decorative, use of melodic ornamentation recalls Delius (a composer about whom Bax claimed that he was 'never wholly convinced').<sup>15</sup> But the greatest reason for scepticism is that for the

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<sup>11</sup> J. Cuthbert Hadden, *Modern Musicians: A Book for Players, Singers and Listeners* (London: Foulis, 1913), 33–4, quoted in Franklin, 188.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Lorenz, 'Afterthoughts on the Sibelius Festival', *The Musical Times*, 80, No. 1151 (January 1939), 13–14: 13.

<sup>13</sup> Julian Anderson, 'Sibelius and contemporary music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, 196–216: 210.

<sup>14</sup> Harriet Cohen, *A Bundle of Time* (London: Faber, 1969), 152, quoted in Scott-Sutherland, 151.

<sup>15</sup> *Cuchulan Among the Guns: Sir Arnold Bax's letters to Christopher Whelen from 1949 to 1953 together with the latter's writings and broadcasts on Bax and his music*, ed. with notes by Dennis Andrews (Cumnor: Dennis Andrews, 1998), 66. With the exception of Ravel's influence on Vaughan Williams, the idea of



first half of his career Bax's primary compositional stimulus was the 'Celtic Twilight'. As is well known, in 1902, on reading W. B. Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Bax felt—or rather, given his Anglo-Saxon ancestry, imagined—the 'inner Celt' inside him, moved to Glencolumcille on the west coast of Co. Donegal (where he learned to speak Irish), and lived there, and in Dublin, for lengthy periods during the next twelve years. During this time he befriended several significant figures within the Irish Literary Revival, most notably the mystic George Russell ('Æ'), Padraic Colum and Darrell Figgis; and using the pseudonym 'Dermot O'Byrne', he wrote poetry, plays and short stories himself, some of which appeared in *The Irish Review*, which Colum edited.<sup>16</sup> He also met two future leaders of the Easter Rising, Thomas MacDonagh and Patrick Pearse, and would later commemorate the execution of the latter both in words and in music.<sup>17</sup> In this period Bax also composed a number of works—orchestral, chamber and vocal—that were based on explicitly 'Celtic' subjects, most notably his tone poems *In the Faery Hills* (1909) and *The Garden of Fand* (1913–16). These pieces helped bring Bax to the public's attention in England—though not in Ireland, where Bax 'spoke little of music to [his] Irish associates'—and established his reputation as a 'Celtic' composer, sufficiently so for the music historian and journalist Arthur Eaglefield Hull to claim that Bax, along with Charles Wood and Hamilton Harty (both of whom were Irish born and bred), had 'added the romance and fiery imagination of the Celt' to contemporary British music.<sup>18</sup>

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a French-influenced 'school' in early twentieth-century British composition has yet to establish itself in British musical historiography. An exception that considers the pervasiveness of Ravel's influence on Vaughan Williams is Byron Adams, 'Vaughan Williams's Musical Apprenticeship', in Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, forthcoming). For the influence of Russian composers in Britain, see Gareth James Thomas, *The Impact of Russian Music in England, 1893–1929* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Specifically the short stories 'Hunger' (*The Irish Review*, May 1912, 140–51) and 'The Call of the Road' (December 1912, 519–33), and the play *On The Hill* (*The Irish Review*, February 1913, 648–63).

<sup>17</sup> Bax's poem 'In Memoriam My Friend Patrick H. Pearse (Ruler of Ireland for one week)', written in 1916, formed part of a collection, titled *A Dublin Ballad And Other Poems* (Dublin: The Candle Press, 1918), that was banned by British censors. His unpublished orchestral piece, *In Memoriam*, bears the subtitle 'I gcuimhne ar bPadraig mac Piarais' ('In memory of Patrick Pearse'); the short score of this work is dated 9 August 1916. See Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 147; and Graham Parlett, 333–4, 121–2.

<sup>18</sup> Bax, *FMY*, 87; A. Eaglefield Hull, 'The Renaissance of British Music', *Musical Opinion*, 500 (May 1919), 488.

So for all these reasons Bax might seem an unlikely progeny of Sibelius. But the connections between the two composers are closer than one might suspect. Cohen recalls how moved Bax was at the British premiere of *Tapiola* in 1928—‘tears were falling down his face’—and it is no coincidence that in the years following this performance, Bax adopted a tauter compositional idiom that may well have been a response to Sibelius’s later works. To some extent this was the continuation of a trend that had been apparent since the early 1920s, when Bax began consciously to discard some of his more overtly ‘Celtic’ baggage; indeed, since the completion of *Tintagel* in 1919, works that had Celtic-sounding titles or set texts by Irish authors were conspicuous by their rarity.<sup>19</sup> But in the early 1930s this trend seemed to develop new momentum, as Bax wrote a series of works whose titles, at least, are suggestive of Sibelian influence: *Winter Legends* for piano and orchestra (1930); the tone poem *The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew* (1931), whose title alludes to the stimulus for *Tapiola*; and the two *Northern Ballads* (1931, 1934).<sup>20</sup> Such stimuli were also discerned in works with generic titles, such as the Third Symphony (1929), about which the critic Robin Hull wrote: ‘It has been suggested that [it] possesses the mood of Northern legends. Bax agrees that the suggestion is apt, allowing that subconsciously he may have been influenced by the sagas and the dark winters of the North’.<sup>21</sup>

That these sagas might have a specifically Finnish accent is made clear in the Fifth and Sixth symphonies. The Fifth (1932) is dedicated to Sibelius, who, on reading through the work, told Walter Legge that ‘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 ashamed to do so’.<sup>22</sup> A cynic might justifiably claim that Sibelius was susceptible to flattery in its sincerest form, as both the opening motif of Bax’s work and one of several countermelodies that accompanies it

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<sup>19</sup> Exceptions include: *Five Irish Songs* (1921; Colum, Joseph Campbell and Synge); ‘Glamour’ (1921, Bax/O’Byrne); *Three Irish Songs* and ‘Dermott Donn MacMorna’ (1922, all Colum); ‘I Heard a Soldier’ and ‘Wild Almond’ (1923, both Herbert Trench); and ‘Out and Away’ (1926, James Stephens).

<sup>20</sup> I refer here to *Northern Ballads* nos. 1 and 2. Although the *Prelude for a Solemn Occasion* for orchestra (1933) has been recorded as ‘*Northern Ballad* No. 3’, Bax never used this title; see Graham Parlett, 206–7.

<sup>21</sup> Robert H. [Robin] Hull, ‘Bax’s Third Symphony’, *The Musical Times*, 71, No. 1045 (March 1930), 217–20: 217. Hull continued, however: ‘It is his opinion, however, that he was not definitely aware of such an influence at the time of writing the Symphony, and that the second movement does not share this mood in any way’ (217–18).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Legge, ‘Conversations with Sibelius’, *The Musical Times*, 76, No. 1105 (March 1935), 218–20: 219.



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shares the rhythm of the main slow movement theme of his own Fifth Symphony (Examples 1(a) and (b)); this motif is then developed with Sibelian (and, indeed, Schoenbergian) rigour throughout the first movement. An example of this occurs at figure 13, where, in a manner that recalls *Tapiola*, Sibelius combines a fast-moving melody in the woodwind and horns, based on the opening motif, with a slow-moving accompaniment in the cellos and basses (Example 2).

Example 1 (a): Bax, Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 2–6, clarinets (at concert pitch). © 1933 Murdoch Murdoch & Company assigned to Chappell Music Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music Ltd. All Rights Reserved.



Example 1 (b): Sibelius, Symphony No. 5, second movement, bars 9–12, flutes. © 1921 Wilhelm Hansen, Copenhagen. Reproduced by permission of Music Sales. All Rights Reserved.



Example 2: Bax, Symphony No. 5, first movement, figure 12:9 to figure 13:8. © 1933 Murdoch Murdoch & Company assigned to Chappell Music Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

**Allegro giusto**

Fl. (8ve), Ob., C. Ang., Cl.

Horns (con sord.)

*p*

*p cantabile*

Cello, Bass *molto legato*

13

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

**Pochettino meno mosso**

+ Picc.

Vln I,  
Vla. (pizz.)

Horns (nat.)

*f cant.*

+ Fag.

*f*

*dim.*

*dim.*

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*Tapiola* is also a haunting presence in the finale of the Sixth Symphony (1934), where, in the middle of a typically diabolical scherzo, Bax directly quotes Sibelius's tone poem in the violins and violas: a never-repeated allusion that prefigures the main climax of the symphony (Example 3).

Example 3: Bax, Symphony No. 6, third movement, figure 25 to figure 26. © 1936 Murdoch Murdoch & Company assigned to Chappell Music Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Faber Music Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

The musical score for Example 3 consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 25 to 26. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The score includes the following parts and markings:

- Violins 1, 2, and Viola:** *f dramatico*
- Flutes 1-2, Oboe 1, and Clarinet 1:** *f*
- Clarinet 3, Bassoon 1, and Horns 1-3:** *f marcato*
- Horn 4:** *f*
- Timpani:** *f*

The second system continues the music, with the following markings:

- Violins 1, 2, and Viola:** *molto cant.*
- Flutes 1-2, Oboe 1, and Clarinet 1:** *mf*
- Clarinet 3, Bassoon 1, and Horns 1-3:** *mf*
- Horn 4:** *mf*
- Timpani:** *mf*

Example 3, continued.

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The image displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs). The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *sf* (sforzando) in the middle staff. The second system includes a box containing the text "+ Ob. 2, Clar. 2" in the middle staff. The third system features a measure number "26" in a box above the top staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and accents.

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The climax is followed by a lengthy epilogue, in which the sustained C-major *Klang* of the strings evokes the conclusion of Sibelius's Seventh Symphony (Example 4). The use of an epilogue is common in Bax's music, and, as Lewis Foreman suggests, may reflect the influence of Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony*; in this movement, however, the relatively early appearance of the climax, and its seamless transition into an expansive coda, may suggest an alternative model: Sibelius's Sixth Symphony.<sup>23</sup>

To suggest that Bax's style in these works is influenced solely by the Finnish composer would be a gross overstatement—the prominence of harps, celestas and glockenspiels hints at Debussy or Strauss far more often than late Sibelius—but there are enough similarities to suggest, at the very least, the surface influences described by Anderson. Moreover, the use of an epilogue following an important, synthesizing climax, and Bax's approach to motivic development, which is characterized by the gradual transformation of a single idea in different textures, rather than direct repetition of material, indicates that Sibelius's influence is apparent at a deeper level of compositional process. The implications of this were recognized by the critic Robin Hull:

The form of a Bax symphony is shaped by the inevitable though disciplined growth of the music: anyone who regards it as a pattern rigidly imposed upon the material will soon find himself in a morass of avoidable difficulties ... musical necessity is the governing factor in the formation of design.<sup>24</sup>

Or to quote the conductor and Bax apologist, Christopher Whelen:

Bax is a great musical architect. Nobody has yet pointed out the organic scheme behind each symphony. Critics talk of a 'profusion of ideas' failing to notice that each bar, each phrase stems from a 'first idea', as the American poet Wallace Stevens has called it. Once the scores have been cleaned up, on occasion re-marked, and then studied, it will be seen that there are no such things as episodes or rhapsodising. Everything is logical and surprisingly precise—Byzantine mosaics.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, the forms of Bax's symphonies are essentially content-driven, governed by a sense of what Sibelius called, in his own works, 'profound logic'.

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<sup>23</sup> Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> Robin Hull, 'Approach to Bax's Symphonies', *Music & Letters*, 23/2 (April 1942), 101–15: 105.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Whelen, quoted by Dennis Andrews, 'Arnold Bax and Christopher Whelen', in *Cuchulan Among the Guns*, 11–16: 16.

Example 4: Bax, Symphony No. 6, third movement, *Epilogue* (figure 37:5 to figure 39).  
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**Epilogue**  
**Lento**

Flutes

Contrabassoon

Horns in F *p SOLO*

Harp *dolcissimo cant.*

Celesta

Tenor Drum

Gong

Bass Drum

Violin I **Lento**  
*3 solos con sord.*  
*pp senza espress.*

Violin II *3 solos con sord.*  
*pp senza espress.*

Viola *3 solos con sord.*  
*pp senza espress.*

Violoncello *3 solos con sord.*  
*pp*

Contrabass *2 solos con sord.*  
*pp*



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Example 4, continued.

The musical score is arranged in a vertical system with the following instruments from top to bottom:

- Fl. (Flute):** Treble clef, mostly rests, with a final measure containing a half note G4 and a quarter note F4, marked *p*.
- Cbsn. (Clarinet):** Bass clef, mostly rests.
- Hn. (Horn):** Treble clef, playing a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Includes a *p* marking.
- Hp. (Harp):** Bass clef, playing a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in triplets. Includes a *p* marking.
- Cel. (Cello):** Treble and Bass clefs, mostly rests.
- T. D., Gong, B. D. (Percussion):** Three staves with rests.
- Vln. I (Violin I):** Treble clef, playing a melodic line with slurs.
- Vln. II (Violin II):** Treble clef, playing a melodic line with slurs.
- Vla. (Viola):** Bass clef, playing a melodic line with slurs.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Bass clef, playing a melodic line with slurs.
- Cb. (Contrabass):** Bass clef, playing a melodic line with slurs.

Example 4, continued.

38

Fl. *poco più f* 3 *p* 3

Cbsn. *poco f*

Hn. *poco più f* 3 3 *p* 3

Hp.

Cel. *p* 3 3

T. D.

Gong *tr* *tr* *tr* *pp*

B. D.

38 *sul pont.*

Vln. I *sul pont.* 3

Vln. II *sul pont.* 3

Vla. *poco più f*

Vc. *poco più f*

Cb. *poco f*

## Bax and the 'Celtic North'

Example 4, continued.

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Fl. (Flute):** Treble clef, playing a triplet of eighth notes followed by a rest. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Cbsn. (Oboe):** Bass clef, playing a single note followed by a rest. Dynamics: *dim.*
- Hn. (Horn):** Treble clef, playing a triplet of eighth notes followed by a rest. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Hp. (Harp):** Bass clef, no notes.
- Cel. (Cello):** Treble clef, playing a series of chords. Dynamics: *pp*.
- T. D. (Trombone):** Horn clef, playing a rhythmic pattern. Dynamics: *pp*, *poco cresc.*
- Gong:** Horn clef, playing a sustained note with a trill. Dynamics: *pp*.
- B. D. (Bass Drum):** Horn clef, playing a sustained note with a trill. Dynamics: *pp*.
- Vln. I (Violin I):** Treble clef, playing chords. Dynamics: *Tutti pp*, *Col V.I, Nat.*
- Vln. II (Violin II):** Treble clef, playing chords. Dynamics: *Tutti pp*, *Col V.II, Nat.*
- Vla. (Viola):** Bass clef, playing chords. Dynamics: *Tutti pp*, *Col Vlas., Nat.*
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Bass clef, playing chords. Dynamics: *Tutti pp*, *Col Cellos, Nat.*
- Cb. (Contrabass):** Bass clef, playing a sustained note with a trill. Dynamics: *pp*, *dim.*



## Bax and the 'Celtic North'

Interesting though the stylistic connections might be between Bax and Sibelius, a more profound relationship between the two composers may be discerned in Bax's increasing identification with a Nordic sensibility that, in the imagination of British audiences, was best exemplified musically by Sibelius's work. This identification reveals Bax's later, Sibelian pieces to be an extension of his earlier, Celtic-inspired works, rather than a departure from them; the differences between them are thus of degree rather than of kind. The first large-scale work about which Bax made explicit reference to any kind of Nordic influence was *Winter Legends*. In his programme note, Bax wrote:

The listener may associate what he hears with any heroic tale or tales of the North—of the far North, be it said. Some of these happenings may have taken place within the Arctic circle.

Legends that once were told or sung  
In many a smoky fireside nook  
Of Iceland, in the ancient day  
By wandering Saga-men or Scald.

There is nothing consciously Celtic about this work.<sup>26</sup>

The key word here is 'consciously', for, in an interview with the journalist Watson Lyle in 1932, Bax explained that by 'North' he meant 'Northern Ireland, Northern Scotland, Northern Europe—in fact, the Celtic North'.<sup>27</sup> This terminology requires some clarification. By 'Northern Ireland' it is likely that Bax did not mean the post-partition statelet of that name, whose cultural Protestantism and industrialism differentiated it from the rest of the island, and whose largest city, Belfast, Bax had described three years earlier as 'somewhat appalling ... It is not like Ireland at all'.<sup>28</sup> Instead, 'Northern Ireland' almost certainly refers to those parts of Ireland that, in Bax's imagination, possessed the same 'northern' characteristics as the highlands of northern Scotland and Scandinavia. As Peter Davidson has shown, in an important recent study on northerliness, these regions have typically been associated in art and literature with remoteness, coldness, darkness (though also occasional brilliance of light), loneliness, danger and topographical austerity.<sup>29</sup> Within an Irish context, these qualities are far

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 290. The poetry is taken from the interlude that introduces the Musician's Tale, 'The Saga of King Olaf', in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863) by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Both the saga and much of the interlude (including this quatrain) were set by Elgar in his *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1896).

<sup>27</sup> Watson Lyle, 'A Musician of the North (Arnold Bax)', *The Bookman*, 81 (February 1932), 268.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 287.

<sup>29</sup> These and other connotations of the term 'North' are considered by Davidson in his *The Idea of North* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2005).

less characteristic of modern-day Northern Ireland than they are of Donegal and the other counties on Ireland's western seaboard, with which Bax was far more familiar from the time he spent in Ireland between 1902 and 1914. 'Northerliness' is thus less a geographical term than a conceptual one.

Whilst the characteristics of northerliness identified by Davidson are certainly present in Bax's later works, they also feature in his earlier pieces, which suggests less an abandonment of Celtic idioms, and more a conflation (or perhaps a suppression) of them within a more general musical discourse of 'northerliness'. For Bax this was simply proof of a fully internalized personal style; in *Farewell, My Youth* he recalled how critics had often discerned in his work 'figures of a definitely Celtic curve, an idiom which in the end was so much second nature to me that many works of mine have been called Irish or Celtic when I supposed them to be purely personal to the British composer Arnold Bax'.<sup>30</sup> But this is surely an oversimplification. As Derrick Puffett has noted, the seeds of Bax's later style were sown most effectively in his 1916 tone poem, *The Garden of Fand*, a work based on Celtic mythology, and one whose highly decorative chromaticism and ornamentation might, he suggests, be seen as a musical parallel of the 'heavily adverbial and adjectival' early style of W. B. Yeats. Puffett argues that the themes of the three main sections of *Fand*—those associated with the sea, revelry and amorous song—become archetypes that recur in Bax's later, ostensibly abstract, works, which are thereby given 'by association, an authentically Celtic stamp'. In the Sixth Symphony, for instance, the 'Celtic drone' used to evoke the sea in *Fand* resurfaces in the C-sharp minor seventh pedal of the first movement; the 'unhuman revelry' of the second section of *Fand*, suitably ironized, provides an appropriate idiom for the scherzo sections of the finale; and the musical characteristics of *Fand*'s siren song of immortal love reappear in the second subject of the first movement and the trio of the finale.<sup>31</sup> These archetypes are often similar in melody or metre to specific forms in Irish vernacular music—the 'revelry' archetype, for instance, may recall jigs or reels, depending on the metre of the passage; the 'song' archetype is often like a *caoine* or slow air—which may explain why Bax, who rarely if ever quotes

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<sup>30</sup> *FMY*, 41. Bax reused this phrase in 'A Radio Self-Portrait', a talk in the BBC series 'British Composers', broadcast on 6 May 1949 (BBC Sound Archives, disc X 13389), quoted in *FMY*, 164–8: 165.

<sup>31</sup> Puffett, 202–3. Given that the 'Celtic drone' to which Puffett refers is most likely derived from the bagpipe, an instrument that is common in vernacular music throughout Europe, there need not be anything specifically Celtic about drones *per se*. On the other hand, their presence in music of Bax's Celtic period may indicate that the composer *did* consider them a signifier of Irishness.



folksong, writes music that frequently 'sounds' authentically Irish.<sup>32</sup> Thus the spectre of Celticism remains in Bax even when he might have thought (or wished) that he had exorcised it—though, as his equivocation over the amount of Celticism in *Winter Legends* indicates, he was perhaps in two minds about such exorcisms.

Such 'subliminal Celticism' is a recurring theme in Bax's writings. In a critique of a British national school of music, in which he rejected folksong as a purely 'external source', Bax claimed that the essence of a nation might sometimes be captured best by someone who was *unfamiliar* with it:

May it not be then that when travelling in foreign lands or even studying foreign literature, the onset of sudden wonder occasioned by presentments at once infinitely strange and infinitely familiar may cause the emotion of these very differing traits (symbolic expressions of ideas inherent in the larger race memory of all and capable of remembrance, as I believe) to stir more strongly the heart of a foreigner than those living in life-long contact with them?<sup>33</sup>

Given that Bax wrote this in 1915, during the height of his 'Celtic' period, this is less a theory of national art than a personal apologia. There were, Bax claimed, times when 'we crave with an ardour ... to become associated with those things, hitherto lost to us, which are natural to another nation and clearly reflected in the light of its alien hills and streams, its customs and ways of life'—surely a reference to the 'hidden Ireland' that he had tried to capture both in the tone poems of that period and in his collection of short stories, *Children of the Hills* (1913).<sup>34</sup> If anything, this 'hiddenness' is psychological. It is surely significant that, in a programme note for the 1949 Elgar festival, Bax defends the older composer from accusations of jingoism and imperialism by quoting, appropriately, Yeats: 'every man seeks his "antithetical self". The man of action imagines himself in dreams a brooding introvert, whilst the sedentary poet parades in his own fancy as a daring swashbuckler and rebel.'<sup>35</sup> For Bax himself, that 'antithetical self' is the Celticism of his early works; and although he claimed that the events of 1914 had 'bundled away dreams such as those in which I had hitherto indulged', those dreams persisted in his subconscious, their presence felt all the more keenly for being denied.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Niamh Burns, Laura Henderson and others for identifying various traditional Irish dance and song forms in Bax's music.

<sup>33</sup> 'A British School of Composers', 409, quoted in *FMY*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> 'A British School of Composers', 409, quoted in *FMY*, 107.

<sup>35</sup> 'Sir Edward Elgar', introduction to the programme for the Elgar Festival, Royal Albert Hall, 30 May – 15 June 1949, 2–5, quoted in *FMY*, 123–7: 125.

<sup>36</sup> 'A Radio Self-Portrait', quoted in *FMY*, 167.

That the notion of Ireland as Bax's 'antithetical self' has political as well as psychological implications becomes clear if we consider his Celticism within the cultural context of (and critical discourse on) the Irish Literary Revival, a far more appropriate place in which to do so than within contemporary Irish art music, partly because the latter was much less significant than its literary counterpart, and partly because Bax's *musical* engagement with Irishness was a response to the works of the Revival poets, not to contemporary debates on the nature of Irish music.<sup>37</sup> Postcolonial scholars such as Declan Kiberd have noted Ireland's conception within English literature as 'not-England, a place whose people were, in many important ways, the very antitheses of their new rulers from overseas'; in short, as England's 'Celtic Other'. By the late Victorian era, this 'Otherness' had acquired negative traits, within both literature and wider social discourse, that are common in descriptions of colonized nations: femininity, emotionalism and racial degeneracy. One of the tasks for the Literary Revival, therefore, was to reclaim these negative terms and either celebrate them as a badge of pride, or use them to undermine English modes of discourse in other ways.<sup>38</sup>

Bax's position is therefore somewhat problematic. His explicitly Celtic works celebrate the 'Othered' tropes of Celtic mythology every bit as much as Yeats or Lady Gregory, so much so that, as he put it himself in a radio broadcast in 1949, he came 'very near to feeling myself to be a naturalised Eireanagh [*recte*: Éireannach]'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, during that broadcast, he stated how 'the three different earthly paradises as conceived by the ancient Gael' had inspired him to write three tone poems: the hollow hill in *In the Faery Hills* (an obviously feminine image that he would explore again in his short story 'Ancient Dominions'); Hy-Brasil (the land of eternal youth) in *The Garden of*

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<sup>37</sup> Harry White has argued that 'linguistic invention' at the time acted 'as a substitute for musical composition' (*The Keeper's Recital*, 97), and develops this argument at greater length in his *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For an interesting critique of White's position with regard to Bax, see Séamas de Barra, 'Into the Twilight: Arnold Bax and Ireland', *The Journal of Music*, 21 (1 March 2004), <http://journalofmusic.com/focus/twilight-arnold-bax-and-ireland> (accessed 18 December 2012). For more on the contemporary debates on Irish music, see Martin Dowling, 'From Vernacular to "Traditional": Music in Post-Famine Ireland', in Michael de Nie and Sean Farrell (eds), *Power and Popular Culture in Modern Ireland: Essays in Honour of James S. Donnelly, Jr.* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 145–71, particularly 159–67.

<sup>38</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 9, 30–2. For more on the effeminization of Ireland in Victorian England, see Bronwen Walter, 'Gendered Irishness in Britain: changing constructions', in Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland (eds), *Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Authenticity* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 77–98: 78–80.

<sup>39</sup> 'A Radio Self-Portrait', in *FMY*, 165.

*Fand*; and *Moy Mell* (the happy plain) in the work of that name for two pianos.<sup>40</sup> But Bax's retreat from overt Celticism after World War One involved rejecting not only the mythology but the values associated with it. Gone are the sensual tone poems with their feminine/Other imagery and arguably excessive ornamentation. In their place are more austere, consciously abstract symphonies; the First Symphony (1923), Bax insisted, was 'pure music, unassociated with contemporary events'. To early twenty-first-century musicologists, however, claims for 'pure', implicitly ideology-free music elicit more questions than answers. What exactly are the characteristics of this 'pure' music? The answer may be provided by Edwin Evans in his review of the work for *The Musical Quarterly*. The First Symphony, Evans wrote, was a 'virile' work, in whose 'fierce ... gloom of the North' one might imagine a 'racial crusade against a background of sunless forests'.<sup>41</sup> The symphony therefore appears to conform to a paradigm, familiar to poststructuralists, that involves the sexual and racial suppression of the Other: the femininity of the dark, racially degenerate Celt is swept away by the 'white' Aryan, Sibelian North. But it is not quite as simple as that. Within the First Symphony one can still hear the Irish archetypes identified by Puffett—and in 'virile' passages just as much as 'feminine' ones. The result is a symphony that is sexually and racially ambiguous. The Celtic Other has undergone a process of masculinization, within a more general discourse of northerliness.

This process parallels developments in Irish literature and culture of a slightly earlier period, where masculinization went hand in hand with the development of a national consciousness separate from England, rather than defined negatively by it. A feature of poets of the Literary Revival was their evocation of figures from Irish mythology such as Cúchulainn, the Achilles-like alpha-male hero of the eighth-century epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, evoked by Lady Gregory in her 1902 poem, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (for which Yeats wrote the introduction). As Terence Brown has observed, such evocation was a means of suggesting 'a continuity of experience between past and present', by which means 'a powerful, [nationalist] propagandist weapon [was] forged'.<sup>42</sup> No less significant was the formation in 1884 of the Gaelic Athletic Associ-

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<sup>40</sup> 'A Radio Self-Portrait', in *FMY*, 166.

<sup>41</sup> 'A Radio Self-Portrait', in *FMY*, 165; Edwin Evans, 'Arnold Bax', *The Musical Quarterly*, 9/2 (1923), 167–80: 174. As Adams notes, not only was Sibelius's music (and Sibelius himself) often described as 'virile' and 'masculine' by his most ardent British advocates, but this terminology often had racist and eugenicist undertones; see Adams, "'Thor's Hammer'", 140–3.

<sup>42</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922–1985* (London: Fontana, 1985), 69–70.

ation 'for the preservation and cultivation of our national pastimes'.<sup>43</sup> An explicitly nationalist organization, the GAA promoted native Irish sports such as Gaelic football and hurling (the latter a sport that Cúchulainn was said to have played), and consciously rejected 'foreign' (that is, English) sports like soccer and cricket; consequently, it played an important role in the masculinization of Irish identity at the popular cultural level. Thus the 'virility' that Evans discerned in Bax's symphony had no shortage of antecedents in Irish culture, at both artistic and popular levels.

### From mythology to nature

Bax's retreat from Celtic mythology raises questions about what he understood 'Celticism' to mean in the first place. It was a problem he acknowledged in *Farewell, My Youth*, noting that:

... the word 'Celtic' has been probed time out of mind with no entirely satisfactorily [*sic*] result. 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.<sup>44</sup>

Bax's conception of Celticism is therefore ultimately psychological rather than political. This may seem surprising, given the republican hue of some of his poetry; but aside from this, his *In Memoriam* for Pearse, and a professed hatred for the anti-Land League (and doubtless antidisestablishmentarianist) views of Mrs Blake of Renvyle House, Co. Galway, there is little evidence that he had any deep commitment to nationalist politics, or to the literary politics of the Revival poets. For Bax, a self-confessed dreamer, Ireland was a place to escape to, the place where his 'dream became localized'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 'Gaelic Association for National Pastimes', *The Cork Examiner*, 8 November 1884, quoted in [http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/First\\_Meeting\\_of\\_the\\_Gaelic\\_Athletic\\_Association\\_GAA\\_November\\_1884](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/First_Meeting_of_the_Gaelic_Athletic_Association_GAA_November_1884) (accessed 18 December 2012).

<sup>44</sup> *EMY*, 36. Bax quotes Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (London: Walter Scott, 1896), 9: '[The Celtic race] has worn itself out in taking dreams for realities, and in pursuing its splendid visions.' Renan adds that 'The essential element in the Celt's poetic life is the *adventure*—that is to say, the pursuit of the unknown, an endless quest after an object ever flying from desire ... This race desires the infinite, it thirsts for it, and pursues it at all costs, beyond the tomb, beyond hell itself.'

<sup>45</sup> *EMY*, 40, 37.

## Bax and the 'Celtic North'

The key to Bax's conception of Celticism is his attitude to Yeats. According to Bax, Yeats's

was the key that opened the gate of the Celtic wonderland and his the finger that pointed to the Magic Mountain whence I was to dig nearly all that may be of value in my own art. Neither does my debt to that great man end there, for his poetry has always meant more to me than all the great music of the centuries; all the days of my life I bless his name.<sup>46</sup>

The most obvious manifestations of this influence are the three tone poems that were directly inspired by Yeats: *Into the Twilight* (1908), the manuscript of which is prefaced by Yeats's poem of that name (part of his 1899 collection, *The Wind Among The Reeds*); *In the Faery Hills*, which Bax claimed was inspired by his getting 'a mood under Mount Brandon with all W.B.'s magic about me', perhaps most particularly in the work's central section, which is based on a passage from *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889); and *The Garden of Fand*, surely influenced by 'The Secret Rose' (also from *The Wind Among The Reeds*).<sup>47</sup> All three of Yeats's poems date from before 1900, when he drew frequently on Irish mythology for inspiration; and it is worth remembering that it was reading the early, folklorist Yeats, not the social commentator of *Responsibilities*, that enticed Bax to Ireland in the first place. It is therefore possible, even probable, that Bax's understanding of 'Celticism' may have been influenced by Yeats's discussion of the term in his 1898 essay, 'The Celtic Element in Literature'. In this essay, Yeats identifies as essentially 'Celtic' what he calls 'the old way': a sense of mystery and ecstasy, rather than merely beauty, in nature:

Men who lived in a world where anything might flow and change, and become any other thing; and among great gods whose passions were in the flaming sunset, and in the thunder and the thunder-shower, had not our thoughts of weight and measure. They worshipped nature and the abundance of nature, and had always, as it seems for a supreme ritual that tumultuous dance among the hills or in the depths of the woods, where unearthly ecstasy fell upon the dancers, until they seemed the gods or the god-like beasts, and felt their souls overtopping the moon; and, as some think, imagined for the first time in the world the blessed country of the gods and of the happy dead.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 'A Radio Self-portrait (1949)', quoted in *FMY*, 166.

<sup>47</sup> Graham Parlett, 76; Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 67; Jeremy Drake, sleeve notes for Bax, Symphony No. 1, *In the Faery Hills, The Garden of Fand* (Naxos CD 8.553525).

<sup>48</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'The Celtic Element in Literature', in Robert Welch (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* (London: Penguin, 1993), 189–200: 191, 193.

Celticism, in other words, was not simply the ‘opening of ... the great fountain of Gaelic legends’, but also a state of mind that was underpinned by contemplation, nature mysticism and pantheism.<sup>49</sup>

The confluence of pantheism and mythology is a recurring theme in early Bax, both in his Celtic works and in several pieces inspired by English poetic interpretations of classical mythology. These include *Enchanted Summer* (1910), a setting for soloists, chorus and orchestra of part of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*; *Nympholept*, a piano work (1912) that he later orchestrated (1915), whose title comes from a poem by Swinburne; *Spring Fire* (1913), a symphonic poem influenced by Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon*; and *The Happy Forest*, another work originally for piano but later arranged for orchestra (1914/1922), based on a prose-poem by Herbert Farjeon. *Nympholept* presents a particularly interesting case. Lewis Foreman has claimed that the piece had ‘nothing to do with Ireland’, but its literary paratext and musical language would suggest otherwise.<sup>50</sup> According to the composer, the piece is a musical depiction of ‘how one walking at summer-dawn in haunting woods was beguiled by the nymphs, and, meshed in their shining and perilous dances was rapt away for ever into the sunlight life of the wild-wood’: in short, as David Parlett has put it, ‘a sylvan equivalent of the maritime Garden of Fand’.<sup>51</sup> The melodic archetypes identified by Puffett in *Fand* are present in *Nympholept*, too, as they are in the other classically-inspired works. This would seem to suggest that, *pace* Puffett, the archetypes owe as much to particular mythological tropes in general, irrespective of their origin, as they do to anything specifically Irish; thus a similar musical depiction is given to the *sidhe* of *In the Faery Hills* or *Fand* as to the classical dryads of *Nympholept* or the Nordic wood gods of the much later, Sibelius-influenced tone poem, *The Tale The Pine-Trees Knew* (1931). But all these works share a pantheistic impulse, and a sense of ecstasy at nature, that make them Celtic in concept, within Yeats’s definition of the term, if not necessarily in subject matter.

Bax’s Celticism, then, is ultimately as much to do with his attitude to nature as it is to his use of Celtic mythology. He used landscapes and seascapes as compositional stimuli throughout his career; indeed, as early as 1914 he argued that the only ‘distinctively English features toward which the British composer may turn for inspiration’

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<sup>49</sup> Yeats, 199.

<sup>50</sup> Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Title page of the manuscript of the piano version of the piece (The British Library, Add. MS. 54737), quoted in Graham Parlett, 100; David Parlett, ‘Baxworks’, <http://www.davidparlett.co.uk/bax/bax1519.html#164> (accessed 18 December 2012).



were 'the lovely landscapes and the unequalled light of our showery north', and in his radio interview he stated that 'nearly all my early work is pure and impersonal nature music'.<sup>52</sup> The same might also be said about some of his later music: the sea imagery associated with the Fourth Symphony; or the forest associations of *The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew*; or, via its *Tapiola* quotation, the Sixth Symphony. Given the suggestion in these later works of forbidding northern topography, their description by the conductor Christopher Whelen as "'frozen" music, that does not flow as much as it is hewn' makes for an apt (and rather obviously Sibelian) metaphor.<sup>53</sup> But for Bax these northern landscapes were also Celtic. In a letter to Whelen in 1951, he clarified that he owed his ideas to 'every part of the west'—the geographical west being, as mentioned earlier, culturally 'northern' in Bax's terminology. These western places included Glencolumcille and other parts of Co. Donegal that he knew from his early visits to Ireland; parts of counties Sligo, Galway and Kerry; and Morar in north-west Scotland, where he had orchestrated his last four symphonies. Moreover, when Whelen suggested that it was the *scenery* of these areas, not the mythology of the 'Celtic Twilight', that produced the 'mystical element' in his work, Bax did not demur, claiming instead that the 'Celtic Twilight' was 'all bunk'.<sup>54</sup>

Again there is a literary parallel to this. A feature of Irish writing in the later years of the Literary Revival and the early years of the Free State was the sublimation of earlier mythology in what Brown has called an 'apprehension of the west [coast of Ireland] as a place of fundamental natural forces, of human figures set passively or heroically against landscapes of stone, rock and sea'.<sup>55</sup> The geography and culture of the west was crucial to constructions of 'authentic heroic' Ireland. From J. M. Synge's *The Aran Islands* (1907) to rural novels that contained a social agenda such as Peadar O'Donnell's *Islanders* (1928) and Liam O'Flaherty's *Thy Neighbour's Wife* (1923), the west, Brown explains, is always set apart, as the most rural, Catholic and Gaelic part of a country that, during the premiership of Éamon de Valera, was often defined by these three terms. The west also proved to be a source of inspiration for artists such as Paul Henry (1876–1958), a Belfast painter who, between 1909 and 1919, was based on Achill

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<sup>52</sup> 'A Native British Art', *The Musical Standard*, 86, No. 902 (1914), 342, quoted in *FMY*, 103–5: 103; 'A Radio Self-Portrait', quoted in *FMY*, 165. Bax also claimed that Elgar's love of nature was 'a trait, I think, inherent in almost every member of the island race' ('Sir Edward Elgar', quoted in *FMY*, 125).

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Whelen, 'Bax, the Symphonist—Frost, Fire and Water', quoted in *Cuchulan Among the Guns*, 96–8: 96.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Christopher Whelen (early to mid-1951), quoted in *Cuchulan Among the Guns*, 65–7: 65–6.

<sup>55</sup> Brown, 94. See also Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 225–6.

Island, Co. Mayo. A contemporary of Jack B. Yeats, Henry did much in the early years of the Free State to promote the idea of the west coast as 'authentic' Ireland, most famously through paintings such as *Connemara* (1925), a reproduction of which appeared on a widely distributed poster of the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company in the mid-1920s.<sup>56</sup>

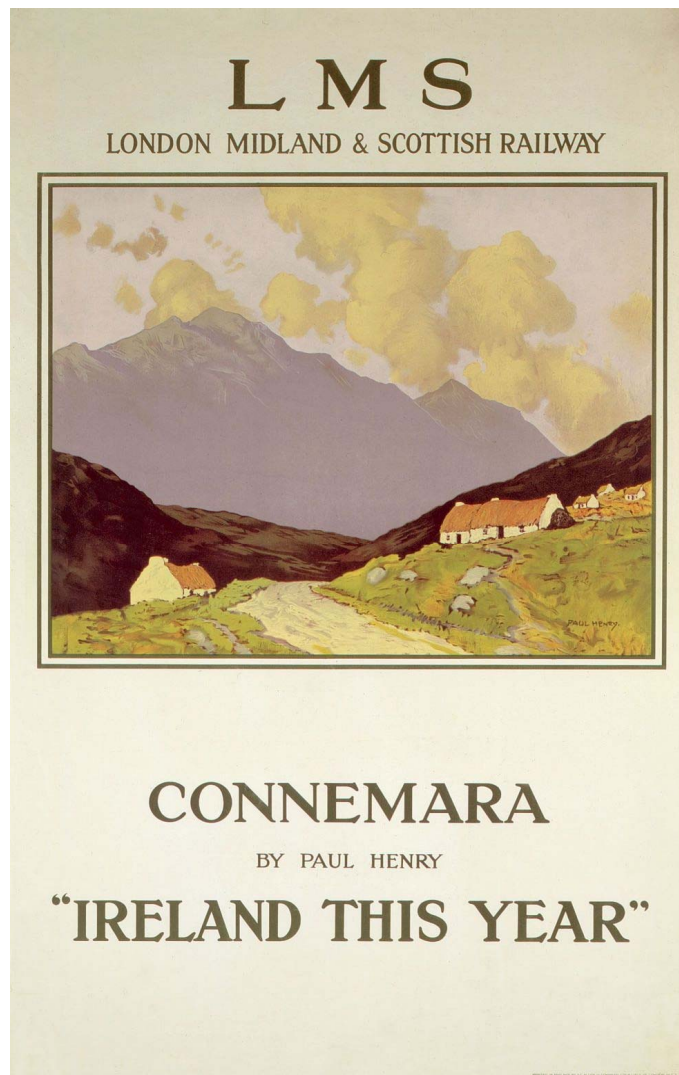


Illustration 1: *Connemara* (1925), Paul Henry. Image © National Railway Museum / Science & Society Picture Library. © Estate of Paul Henry / IVARO 2013.

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<sup>56</sup> S. B. Kennedy, *Paul Henry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 94–5.

## Bax and the 'Celtic North'

*Connemara* perhaps gives an overly utopian vision of the west of Ireland. A better example of what Brown means by 'the west as a place of fundamental natural forces' is *Launching the Currach* (1910–11), where the imbalance between humanity, embodied in the five ordinary, yet heroic, men who set afloat the vessel of the painting's title, and nature, embodied by the seemingly endless sea beyond, is illustrated starkly; or *The Watcher* (1911), a painting inspired by Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, which Henry had read shortly before he moved to Achill, in which a girl stands alone on a rock, looking out towards a stormy sea that, we sense, has devoured her family or friends.<sup>57</sup> Consequently Bax's later work, although less overtly Celtic, still forms part of a wider discourse in which sea, rock, and mystery intersect.



Illustration 2: *Launching the Currach* (1910–11), Paul Henry. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland. © Estate of Paul Henry / IVARO, 2013.

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<sup>57</sup> Kennedy, 40, 48–50. The vision of Ireland as a rural Gaelic civilization was promoted by a number of Irish painters of the period, notably Henry, and reflected the symbolic importance of land ownership among the population of the Free State (Brown, 96).





Illustration 3: *The Watcher* (1911), Paul Henry. The image is reproduced courtesy of Pym's Gallery, London. © Estate of Paul Henry / IVARO, 2013.

### **Bax and English pastoralism**

Bax's response to natural stimuli provides an interesting, even subversive, counterpoint to another movement that reached its peak in the inter-war period: the English pastoralist school. As is well-known, English musical pastoralism grew out of the folk revival of the early twentieth century and, in particular, folksong collecting, an activity whose aims were both musical and political: musical, because, as Vaughan Williams argued in 1934, 'any school of national music must be fashioned on the basis of the

raw material of its own national song';<sup>58</sup> and political, because folksong provided a link to a disappearing pre-industrial past that was increasingly idealized in a ruralist English nationalism. Consequently, folksong acquired what Julian Onderdonk has called 'almost mythical powers of social and cultural renewal'.<sup>59</sup>

The ways in which folksong brought about this renewal varied according to the manner in which a composer engaged with it. At the simplest level, many composers harmonized folksongs and arranged them for voice(s) and/or instrumental ensemble, either individually or as part of a medley. A more original approach was for composers to write melodies of their own in the modal and pentatonic style of folksong, particularly in vocal settings of texts that are associated with a rural setting. At the most sophisticated level, composers could use the musical raw materials of folksong—its irregular rhythms and metres, generally small melodic intervals, and modality—to fashion a musical language that was modernist both syntactically (because it was characterized by formal discontinuity and tonal ambiguity) and semantically (because the underlying message of such disjuncture might seem to be emptiness or hopelessness).<sup>60</sup> In this way the renewal to which Onderdonk refers lays itself open to critique.

A good example of such a critique is Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony*. Several commentators have noted the composer's explanation that the work was inspired less by England than by the French countryside in which the composer fought during the First World War; thus it might best be thought of as a memorial to those who died in that conflict, notably Vaughan Williams's friend and fellow folksong-collector, George Butterworth.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, as Daniel M. Grimley has suggested, *A*

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<sup>58</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 41.

<sup>59</sup> Julian Onderdonk, 'Vaughan Williams's folksong transcriptions: a case of idealization?', in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, 118–38: 119.

<sup>60</sup> Vaughan Williams's music provides good examples of all three types of engagement with folksong. Among the first type are his *Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties* (1908) and his suite, *English Folk Songs*, for military band (1923); among the second type are 'Bredon Hill' from *On Wenlock Edge* (1909), his setting of part of Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, and the song 'Cold blows the wind on Cot-sall' from his opera *Hugh the Drover* (1924). A large amount of Vaughan Williams's later work may be included among the third type; particularly noteworthy examples from the 1920s, besides *A Pastoral Symphony*, include *Flos Campi* and *Sancta Civitas* (both 1925), and the opera *Sir John In Love* (1928).

<sup>61</sup> Vaughan Williams described the symphony as 'really war time music—a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night in the ambulance wagon at Ecoiv[r]es & we went up a steep hill & there was a wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset—its [sic] not really Lambkins frisking at all as most people take for granted': letter to Ursula Wood, 4 October 1938, in Hugh Cobbe (ed.), *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 265. See

*Pastoral Symphony* belongs to a wider British artistic discourse in which 'the pastoral re-emerges, surprisingly (and even shockingly), as a default mode of response to the First World War' through the distortion of its most conventional elements.<sup>62</sup> Grimley argues persuasively that distortion in *A Pastoral Symphony* takes place at two levels: the symphonic, through the adoption of sonata deformations that may owe something to Sibelius; and the pastoral, through tonal strategies that suggest fracture and dissolution rather than a return to Arcadia.<sup>63</sup> Similar subversions of the pastoral can be found among the works of other inter-war British composers, notably Bliss, Holst and Bridge.<sup>64</sup>

That Vaughan Williams and his colleagues should have invoked the genre of the pastoral, even a distorted pastoral, indicates the ideological importance of ruralism during the inter-war period. As Alun Howkins has observed, the idea that the true essence of England lay in the countryside, not in the cities, became central to England's national self-image in the two decades prior to World War One, and remained so throughout the inter-war period.<sup>65</sup> This idea enjoyed support across the political spectrum. For those on the political right, it provided 'an organic and natural society of

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also Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, second edition (London: Travis & Emery, 2008), 125; Eric Saylor, "'It's Not Lambkins Frisking At All': English Pastoral Music and the Great War", *The Musical Quarterly*, 91/1–2 (2008), 39–59 (especially 48–50); Daniel M. Grimley, 'Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral', in *British Music and Modernism*, 147–74: 149.

<sup>62</sup> Grimley, 'Landscape and Distance', 160. Grimley draws particular attention to the wartime paintings of Paul Nash, in which conventional symbols of a pastoral landscape may be reinterpreted as images of war (160–3).

<sup>63</sup> For Grimley, the D-major climax towards the end of the finale, which seems to suggest arrival in a 'seemingly life-affirming musical realm', immediately dissolves into two tonally irreconcilable centres, A $\flat$  major and A minor, thereby revealing its promise of salvation to be fleeting, illusory and irrecoverable (Grimley, 'Landscape and Distance', 170–1).

<sup>64</sup> Saylor considers Elgar's *Une voix dans le desert* and Bliss's *Morning Heroes* in "'It's Not Lambkins'". See also Richard Greene, 'A Musico-Rhetorical Outline of Holst's "Egdon Heath"', *Music & Letters*, 73/2 (1992), 244–67; and Ciara Burnell, *The Anxiety of Memory: Frank Bridge's Late Works and Inter-War British Modernism* (PhD diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2009), particularly chapters 2 ('Remembering War: Modernist Mourning in the Inter-War Works', 107–77) and 3 ('Dances without Dancers: Disillusionment, Disembodiment and Death in the Late Orchestral Works', 178–256).

<sup>65</sup> Alun Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Culture and Politics 1880–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 62–88. Howkins identifies a relative decline in British industrialism, growing middle-class anxieties about urban life, especially racial degeneration, and the idealization of the English countryside by soldiers during the First World War as particular reasons for the growth and consolidation of ruralism as an ideology.

ranks, and of inequality in an economic and social sense, but one based on trust, obligation and even love';<sup>66</sup> this perspective was summed up well in 1924 by the Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who claimed that 'To me, England is the country, and the country is England'.<sup>67</sup> For those on the left, ruralism offered a means of restoring a sense of wholeness that had been lost through the alienating effects of urban modernism. Unlike the social inequality that underpinned conservative ruralism, the impetus behind these views was democratic and often communitarian, and frequently expressed itself in social organizations such as the English Folk Dance Society (whose membership by 1926 had topped one thousand) and the Folk Song Society, two of whose most active members, Vaughan Williams and Holst, were both firmly on the political left. (Indeed, Vaughan Williams's professed aim to make his music 'an expression of the whole life of the community' is indicative of some of the social ends to which the folksong movement was directed.<sup>68</sup>) Through such communal activity was bridged the cultural divide between the reality of an increasingly urbanized nation and the romantic conceit that its spiritual heart was rural.

But it was a very specific type of rurality. As Howkins notes, the English countryside idealized by right- and left-wing ruralists alike was what the poet Edward Thomas called the 'south country': 'Roughly speaking ... south of the Thames and Severn and East of Exmoor ... the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and part of Somerset'.<sup>69</sup> The 'southern' quality of these counties was topographical and cultural as much as geographical: their rolling hills, woodlands and hedgerow-enclosed fields suggested a countryside that was fertile, prosperous, and, in an aesthetic sense, picturesque; and their thatched cottages and half-timbered pubs evoked an agrarianism that pre-dated the Industrial Revolution—a revolution whose legacies were the Blakean 'satanic mills' of the great cities of northern and cen-

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<sup>66</sup> Howkins, 80.

<sup>67</sup> Howkins, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Who Wants The English Composer?' (1912), *Royal College of Music Magazine*, 9 (1912), 11–15, quoted in David Manning (ed.), *Vaughan Williams On Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39–42: 42; Frank Trentmann, 'Civilization and Its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29/4 (October 1994), 583–625: 598. Trentmann also draws attention to more extreme forms of social activity in the countryside, such as the organic husbandry movement promoted by Rolf Gardiner, H. J. Massingham and others.

<sup>69</sup> Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Dent, 1909, reprinted 1984), 1, quoted in Howkins, 64; see also Howkins, 62–4. Thomas may well have known Hilaire Belloc's poem, 'The South Country', which first appeared in 1910 (Howkins, 84).



tral England.<sup>70</sup> Beneath this retrospective imagery, however, lay a relationship between town and country that was essentially modern. Because an urban citizen's experience of the countryside was generally recreational rather than occupational, s/he was, to some extent, in *control* of nature in a way that would not have been the case had s/he had to live off it. Countryside ramblers, whose weekly numbers had swelled to 100,000 by the 1930s, were under no obligation to embark on a walk in the wind and the rain if they did not need to; farmers, however, had no option but to surrender themselves to the elements.<sup>71</sup>

The close connection between national identity, pastoralism and folksong meant that composers who made use of the latter in their music were able to elicit claims of an authentic Englishness that was implicitly denied to composers writing in other idioms, such as Bax. As noted above, Bax rejected the idea of folksong as a means to a national school of composition; indeed in 1915 he rejected the idea of a national school altogether, claiming that 'the mere fact of British birth is no qualification for the production of exclusively British art work ... if one does not *feel* British', which at the time of writing he almost certainly did not.<sup>72</sup> Thus he effectively excluded himself from the *echt* Englishness promoted by folksong-derived pastoralism. But, in addition, the near absence of folk material in his music also distinguishes him ideologically from the social utopianism of the pastoral movement; his discourse is rather that of a detached (if sympathetic) observer. This detachment was remarked on by a number of his fellow composers; as Puffett noted, Walton referred to a 'curious remoteness' about Bax, and Patrick Hadley described his work as 'disembodied'.<sup>73</sup> Such remoteness may have had its stylistic origins in Debussy, but it is also a feature of late Sibelius and, indeed, can also be linked to certain works in the Irish Literary Revival, notably Synge's *The Aran Islands*.

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<sup>70</sup> Howkins, 64.

<sup>71</sup> Trentmann, 586.

<sup>72</sup> 'A British School of Composers', quoted in *FMY*, 105. Bax's attitude changed somewhat during his time as Master of the King's Musick, during which period he wrote a column in *Radio Times* entitled 'Give British Music a Chance!', reflected on the inherently English qualities of Elgar, and described Vaughan Williams as the most 'characteristically English composer of all time'. See 'Give British Music a Chance!', *Radio Times*, 6 April 1945, 3, quoted in *FMY*, 117–20; 'Sir Edward Elgar'; 'Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Tribute on Behalf of the Musicians of Britain (1952)', introduction to the programme of the *Celebration Concert on the occasion of the 80th birthday of Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, O.M.*, Royal Festival Hall (12 October 1952), 3–4, quoted in *FMY*, 115–17.

<sup>73</sup> Puffett, 209, note 35.

It is Bax's attitude to nature and natural stimuli that separates him most from pastoralism and ruralism. The seascapes and northern forests that inspire so much of his later work suggest not so much human control over nature as the pantheistic submission to its extremes found in *Tapiola*, or even, in places, Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie*. There is no hint of the communitarianism of the Folk Song Society but rather the solitude of early nineteenth-century Romanticism: Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, but in a Celtic mist. And just as European Romanticism could contrast a barbarian, sublime North with a civilised South, so the 'Celtic North' of Bax's music may be considered a sublime antipode to a picturesque English pastoralism located in an idealized, Anglo-Saxon 'south country'. Bax's landscapes and seascapes, like those of *Riders to the Sea*, or of George Moore's Turgenev-like collection of short stories, *The Untilled Field* (1903), are not sites of recreation to be enjoyed, but places where elemental forces have to be withstood. Whereas the landscape of southern England might offer glimpses, albeit fleeting ones, of rural Arcadia, the Celtic North of England's 'Other' provides no such solace.

### **Conclusion: centres, peripheries, hybridity**

Viewing Bax through the lens of colonial or post-colonial theory is fraught with difficulties, not least because he participates in two separate colonial discourses. The first, and more obvious, is cultural. In his early Celtic period, Bax identifies with, and musically subscribes to, the cultural and political aims of the Irish Literary Revival; following World War One his tauter style reflects the 'masculinization' of Irishness that Yeats and others began in the 1890s, and takes as its stimuli the same western coastlines (the 'Celtic North') that inspired certain Irish writers and artists in the 1920s prior to the reaction against ruralism in the work of Sean O'Faolain and Patrick Kavanagh.<sup>74</sup> However, a second—musical—discourse also exists, based on genres. The fact that Bax expressed his later, Sibelian style most notably in the non-programmatic symphony, a genre that pre-World War One British critics regarded as essential for the establishment of a British national school, but which, at that point in his career, Bax rejected in favour of semi-programmatic, Debussy-influenced tone-poems, perhaps indicates a degree of what the critical theorist Homi Bhabha has described as 'hybridity'.<sup>75</sup> For Bhabha, the process of decolonization first involves the disavowal of

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<sup>74</sup> For more on this reaction see Neil Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 3 ('Lyrical Fields and Featherbeds: Representations of the Rural and the Provincial'), 57–99.

<sup>75</sup> The need for a British composer to write a great, internationally recognized symphony was a pressing one before World War One, the search seemingly coming to an end with Elgar's First Sym-

‘culture as the culture of the colonialist’, but, following this, ‘the *formal* process of disavowal [is reversed] so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse’. The result of this is an object that recognizes difference rather than denies it, and which, as Bhabha puts it, ‘opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’.<sup>76</sup> For Bax, the German symphonic model may well have been associated with the ‘colonial power’ of a British musical (and political) establishment from which, early in his career, he felt alienated. But his turn to symphonic writing later in his career may be seen as analogous to Bhabha’s ‘hybrid’; tinged as they are with vestiges of his earlier Celticism his symphonies may be seen as an acknowledgement that his ‘inner Celt’ *could* co-exist with the side of him that never quite became a fully naturalized Éireannach.

What wider conclusions can we draw from all this? Firstly, if Bax is indeed Sibelius’s ‘son in music’ he has to be considered in the light of the Sibelius vogue of the 1930s, not only stylistically but also ideologically. If Sibelius’s popularity was a symptom of the British reaction against continental modernism, and if his music was admired for its ‘purity’ and ‘whiteness’—words that should raise alarm bells in the 1930s of all decades—where does that leave his ‘son in music’?<sup>77</sup> Secondly, Bax’s detached depiction of nature as a destructive force beyond human control provides an antidote to pastoralist constructions of nature as an Edenic metaphor for a better world (even when, as noted above, these constructions are sometimes critiqued). This antidote is inherently antithetical. The relationship in this period between music and

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phony (1908). For more on the early reception of this symphony, see Aidan J. Thomson, ‘Elgar and Chivalry’, *19th-Century Music*, 28/3 (2005), 254–75, particularly 266.

<sup>76</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 114 (italics original), 4. For an application of Bhabha’s theories to Ireland, see *Ireland and Cultural Theory*, particularly the essays by Gerry Smyth (‘Decolonization and Criticism: Towards a Theory of Irish Critical Discourse’, 29–49), and Richard Kirkland (‘Questioning the Frame: Hybridity, Ireland and the Institution’, 210–28); and Stephanie Bachorz, ‘Postcolonial theory and Ireland: revisiting post-colonialism’, in Aaron Kelly and Alan A. Gillis (eds), *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 6–14.

<sup>77</sup> J. P. E. Harper-Scott suggests that the Sibelianism of Walton’s First Symphony, a work completed in the same year as Bax’s Sixth (1934), and one that marked Walton’s retreat from his earlier modernism, might be considered in the context of an anti-cosmopolitanism in inter-war British literature and art that increasingly mythologized the industrial north of England and emphasized the need for insular ‘social cohesion at home’ rather than imperial consolidation abroad (Harper-Scott, ‘“Our True North”’, 571, and also, more generally, 569–73). Plausible though this model is for Walton, it would be inappropriate to apply it to Bax given his lack of a conventionally ‘modernist’ corpus of works analogous to, say, Walton’s *Façade*.

## Bax and the 'Celtic North'

nature is far from homogeneous but something that is the result of several different dialectical processes: rural/urban, utopian/dystopian, social/non-social, controllable/non-controllable. These dialectics are all value-laden, which makes Bax's treatment of nature all the more significant; by demonstrating that nature does not have to be conceived in terms of a pastoral-Eden metaphor, he deconstructs the ideological premises that underpin that metaphor, above all a faith in social progress. Finally, it raises important questions about how we should view the musical 'Celtic Twilight', broadly defined. The Anglocentric bias to British musicology has traditionally resulted in the marginalization of all things Celtic; yet surely a 'decentred' history of this period requires the movement to be given more than the peripheral treatment it has hitherto received, particularly since three composers closely associated with it—Bax, Bantock and Moeran—were also associated personally or stylistically with Sibelius. Indeed, the 'Celtic North' presents an opportunity musically to problematize, contest and deconstruct the idea of 'Britishness' itself.

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