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Peter Warlock's *The Curlew*:
Influences and Forces Driving the Narrative

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Introduction

Collections of poems in song cycles often have a common theme that links the songs together to create a cohesive idea. This is also true in *The Curlew*. However, there are indicators placed throughout the piece that imply that there is more than just a cohesive idea happening. There are clues hidden in the music to indicate that a story is presumably being told of someone, in this case the tenor, receiving bad news in the form of a birdcall in Song one, the tenor clarifying the details of the bad news in Song two, the tenor slipping into a temporary sleep or dream-like state as an escape in Song three, and then waking and facing reality in Song four. The composer, Peter Warlock, wrote several themes in *The Curlew* that were developed throughout the piece and were strategically placed to help narrate a story within the song cycle.

Peter Warlock

Peter Warlock was born Philip Heseltine in London, England in 1894. He studied piano as a young child. After unhappily staying in England he spent a year in Ireland and became interested in Celtic culture, languages, and folklore after which he returned to England and started composing. In 1915 he met Minnie Lucy Channing, whose nickname was “Puma,” and they had a relationship for several months. The following year they got married. In 1917, after they were married over a year, they moved to an island off the coast of Ireland, where Heseltine learned about Celtic folklore and legends and became interested in the occult. During this time, he met the poet W. B. Yeats in Dublin. Yeats also had a fascination with the occult and the two became friends. Heseltine returned to London in 1918 and published some songs he had written

in Ireland. However, he published them under the pen name Peter Warlock. He chose this name because of his interest in the occult. From this point on all of his work was published under his new name although he still used the name Heseltine for critical and analytical publications.¹ In the spring of 1921, Warlock visited Budapest and befriended Béla Bartók.² In the fall of 1921, Warlock moved to Wales, his mother's country of origin, and finally found an environment that he was comfortable working in. By this time, he and Puma had ended their relationship.³ He finished *The Curlew* song cycle in 1922.

W. B. Yeats

William Butler (W. B.) Yeats (1865–1939) studied poetry in Ireland as a young child and, at some point, developed an interest in the occult and Celtic legends. He came from an artistic family of poets, painters, and craftspeople. He was living in Ireland at a time when his Protestant roots were becoming more and more of a minority and Catholicism began to take over. Apparently, this affected Yeats's writing for the rest of his life. In 1889, Yeats met a woman named Maude Gonne, an actress, and fell in love, but she did not love him back apparently because of political differences. This experience influenced Yeats's poetry. He proposed to Gonne four times over twelve years, with no luck. She later married someone whose political views, in particular supporting Irish nationalism, were more similar to her own. During these twelve years Yeats published his two collections of poems that are sung in *The Curlew*.

¹ Barry Smith, s.v. "Peter Warlock," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 23, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29912>.

² Ian Parrot, "Warlock in Wales," *The Musical Times* 105, no. 1460 (Oct 1964): 741.

³ Barry Smith, s.v. "Peter Warlock," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 23, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29912>.

One collection, *The Wind Among the Reeds* was published in 1899, while the other, *In the Seven Woods*, was published in 1903.⁴

The Curlew

The Curlew deviates from the traditional idea of song cycles of the nineteenth century. Peter Warlock set some of the poems of W. B. Yeats to music. The song cycle has four sung poems and an unusual accompaniment of instruments: flute, English horn, two violins, viola, and cello. The instruments play a prelude before the poems and interludes in between with no breaks between the songs. Each instrument plays a role in the song cycle and each instrumental section plays its own role in the narrative of the song cycle as a whole.

The Curlew has four songs: “He Reproves the Curlew,” “The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love,” “The Withering of the Boughs,” and “He Hears the Cry of the Sedge.” Songs one, two, and four are from Yeats’s collection of poems *The Wind Among the Reeds*, while the third song is from *In the Seven Woods*. While most traditional song cycles are written for voice and piano, this cycle is written for a tenor, string quartet, flute, and English horn. The songs are written continuously with no breaks in between. There is no key signature and it is written in mixed meter. The poems are about someone mourning the loss of love, or the fear of loss, however, they are all written in different forms as shown in Example 1a–d on pages 7–9. The first poem is six lines long, the second poem is seven lines long, the third poem is by far the longest with 24 lines written in three stanzas, and the fourth poem is written in one stanza with ten lines. The third song, and poem, has a different type of content than the other three. It contains folklore

⁴ “William Butler Yeats,” Poetry Foundation, accessed May 23, 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-butler-yeats>.

while the other three are mostly about nature and lost love. The third poem mentions the curlew and the peewit, whereas the first poem is the only other one to mention the curlew. The curlew and peewit are birds that were commonly flying around Ireland and Wales at the time of Warlock and Yeats. Both birds are associated with legends that their cries symbolize a foretelling of loss or death. In the score, the flute and English horn play the parts of birds in the opening of the piece. According to Dr. Ian Copley, a music critic, these two instruments introduce the voices of the curlew and peewit.⁵ They seem to have been chosen for their ability to produce bird-like sounds.

⁵ I.A. Copley, "Peter Warlock's Vocal Chamber Music," *Music & Letters* 44, no. 4 (Oct 1963): 363.

Chapter 1: Poetry in *The Curlew*

Warlock's Choice of Poems

Examples 1a–1d show the four poems of *The Curlew*. Why were the poems taken from two different poem collections? Although this practice was common among composers of song cycles, *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *In the Seven Woods* seem to have different content and styles. *The Wind Among the Reeds* is related to human experiences with a bit of Celtic folklore mixed in while keeping the length of the poems relatively short with an average of about 14.38 lines per poem with the poems' lengths ranging from six to 44 lines. From this collection, Warlock chose three shorter poems with six, seven, and ten lines from this collection. The three poems he chose were the thirteenth (Example 1b), sixteenth (Example 1a), and twenty-sixth (Example 1d) poems out of 37. The poem that comes in sixteenth, "He Reproves the Curlew," comes first in the song cycle while the thirteenth poem, "He Mourns the Loss of Love" comes after. The twenty-sixth poem, "He Hears the Cry of the Sedge," comes last in the poem collection and in the song cycle. Why were the poems in *The Curlew* taken from two different poem collections? Even though it was not an unusual practice, why did Warlock do so with the poetry in *The Curlew* as the style and content were so different from each other? Additionally, although it was not unusual to place the poems out of their original order in the song cycle, why did Warlock do so with *The Curlew*? Looking at Yeats' original poetry book might tell us why. In *The Wind Among the Reeds* the titles of the poems do not use the pronoun "he." Around 1906, a later edition of this book had removed the names and put pronouns in their place.⁶ In the first

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Principles of the Mind: Continuity in Yeats's Poetry," *MLN Comparative Literature* 83, No. 6 (Dec 1968), 896.

edition, in place of “he” there are names, Hanrahan and Aedh. The actual titles of the poems in the first edition are “Aedh Mourns the Loss of Love,” “Hanrahan Reproves the Curlew,” and “Aedh Hears the Cry of the Sedge.” Warlock has placed the poems out of their original sequence and grouped them by name putting Hanrahan first. Who are Hanrahan and Aedh? According to Yeats, at the end of his book, he mentions that, “Hanrahan is fire blown by the wind.”⁷ He also wrote that “Aedh...is fire burning by itself.”⁸ If this idea is carried through the song cycle, Hanrahan, or the fire blowing in the wind, would start the cycle. Then Aedh, the fire burning by itself, would presumably settle in a location. An interruption in the form of a poem from another poem collection, “The Withering of the Boughs,” would follow and then return to Aedh, the settled fire. Therefore, in the beginning, the fire presumably starts in one place and ends up in another place to stay for the remainder of the song cycle despite an interruption. Hanrahan and Aedh represent two different sides of one fire, or personality. Hanrahan is a side of the personality that tends to feel like a victim of the wind that represents poetry.⁹ Aedh is a more romantic side that has clear ideas on what defines beauty and tends to be disappointed when his surroundings do not live up to those expectations.¹⁰ This seems to relate to Yeats’s admiration and unrequited love of Maude Gonne, however, Warlock’s use of this poetry can be re-imagined for the purposes of *The Curlew*. Hanrahan, the victim of the poetry in the wind, represents the tenor becoming a victim of the curlew’s cry, while Aedh represents the tenor being disappointed at the idea of not being coupled with his mate of choice.

⁷ William Butler Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (New York: The John Lane Company, 1899), 73.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Principles of the Mind: Continuity in Yeats’s Poetry,” *MLN Comparative Literature* 83, No. 6 (Dec 1968), 884.

¹⁰ Ibid, 885.

The other poem collection, *In the Seven Woods* (Example 1c), has some poems but also some short stories and a play at the end. Each poem or short story is somewhat longer than the poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* with an average of about 49.33 lines, not including the play. The individual pieces in this collection vary considerably in length with the shortest being eight lines and the longest story being 220 lines. The play is substantially longer. The content seems to be made up of a combination of Irish folklore and stories that are from Ireland's "Heroic Age."¹¹

The Wind Among the Reeds uses names from Celtic folklore in the titles of the poems, but the poems' content mostly describe a state of being instead of telling a story, or they describe experiences a mortal human could realistically experience rather than stories of myths or legends. In fact, Yeats even wrote as a note for the names, "I have used them in this book more as principles of the mind than as actual personages."¹²

¹¹ William Butler Yeats, *In the Seven Woods* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903), 1.

¹² William Butler Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (New York: The John Lane Company, 1899), 73.

Example 1: The poetry in the four songs from Peter Warlocks *The Curlew*, by W. B. Yeats

1a: “Hanrahan Reproves the Curlew”¹³

O, Curlew, cry no more in the air,
 Or only to the waters in the West;
 Because your crying brings to my mind
 Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
 That was shaken out over my breast:
 There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

1b: “Aedh Mourns the Loss of Love”¹⁴

Pale brows, still hands and dim hair,
 I had a beautiful friend
 And dreamed that the old despair
 Would end in love in the end:
 She looked in my heart one day
 And saw your image was there;
 She has gone weeping away.

1c: “The Withering of the Boughs”¹⁵

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
 ‘Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
 I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
 For the roads are unending and there is no place to my mind.’
 The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill
 And I fell asleep upon lonely Eichtge of streams;
 No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
 The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths the witches take,

¹³ William Butler Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (New York: The John Lane Company, 1899), 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁵ William Butler Yeats, *In the Seven Woods*, (New York: John Lane Company, 1903): 21–23.

Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles of wool,
 And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
 And of apple islands where the Danaan kind
 Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
 On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams;
 No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
 The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
 Coupled with golden chains and sing as they fly,
 A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
 Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so blind
 With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by;
 I know, and the curlew and peewit on Eichtge of streams;
 No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
 The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

Example 1d: Aedh Hears the Cry of the Sedge¹⁶

I wander by the edge
 Of this desolate lake
 Where wind cries in the sedge
 Until the axle break
 That keeps the stars in their round
 And hands hurl in the deep
 The banners of East and West
 And the girdle of light is unbound,
 Your breast will not lie by the breast
 Of your beloved in sleep.

The first poem in Example 1a hints at what the narrator fears when they hear the curlew.

This could be the fire blowing in the wind, the mind (or Hanrahan) traveling to the thing that

¹⁶ William Butler Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, (New York: John Lane Company, 1899): 43.

they fear the most. The second poem in Example 1b, when Aedh supposedly enters the poetry, seems to definitely address a specific person and has acknowledged the loss of someone. The mind has traveled to the most devastating possibility and is there to stay for the remainder of the song cycle along with Aedh's poem.

Warlock starts with the poem that is supposedly about Hanrahan, then moves to the first poem about Aedh. This idea is interrupted by the poem from the different poem collection, then returns to the previous poem collection to finish the cycle with the second poem about Aedh. Because the third poem in Example 1c has different folkloric content, and the other three poems represent experiences that could really happen, the third poem is like a break, or interruption, from reality. In the first stanza of the third poem in "The Withering of the Boughs," the lines from Example 1c, "'For the roads are unending and there is no place to my mind.' The honey pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill," seem to symbolize the process of the tenor slipping into sleep or a dream state. In the following line, "And I fell asleep upon lonely Echtge of streams," is where it seems the tenor has officially fallen asleep or has fully immersed in a dream state.

The first, second, and fourth poems that describe feelings or fear of loss, are shorter, and describe realistic human experiences. The third poem talks about characters or beings from Celtic folklore and supernatural entities such as witches, etc., and is a much longer poem. Why does this interruption happen? A line in the third poem could explain: "I fell asleep upon the lonely Echtge of streams." Warlock could have possibly used these poems in this particular order to describe someone's experience of loss and the need for an escape in the form of a temporary sleep or daydream state. The music, particularly in the instruments, reflects this sequence of events.

Folklore in the Poetry

There are several folkloric stories present in this set of poems. First of all, “Irish folklore paints the Eurasian Curlew...as bringers of bad luck, especially when they call at night.¹⁷ The other bird mentioned is the peewit, also known as a northern lapwing. Both of these birds were known to fly around the Welsh countryside where Warlock was writing this song cycle. The first stanza of the third poem mentions the “lonely Echtge.” This is a mountain range in Ireland that is said to be where Celtic folklore took place and was named after a goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danaan.¹⁸ The second stanza mentions the “Danaan kind.” This is most likely referring to the Tuatha De Danaan which are a group of deities in Irish folklore that communicate with mortal people and each one is associated with facets of nature. The third stanza mentions swans with golden chains. Dean Miller writes about a story involving Celtic folklore about the swans in chains. He writes,

In an Irish account dating from the eighth century, Angus, the son of the Dagda, “the good god,” falls in love with the swan maiden Caer who appears to him in a dream. On visiting Loch Bel Dracon at the time of the great Celtic festival of Samain (1 November), he sees a flock of 150 swans, each pair linked with a silver chain, and among them his beloved Caer wearing a golden chain and coronet. When he calls to her she leaves the flock and he, too, takes swan form. Together they circle the loch three times and, chanting magical music which puts to sleep all who hear it for three days and nights, they fly to the royal palace.¹⁹

This story would fit with the poetry because the pairs of swans linked with chains describes “coupled with golden chains.” “Where the swans fly round” describes the part of the story where the two swans circle the loch three times. “I know of a sleepy country” describes the location in

¹⁷ Rachel Warren Chadd and Marianne Taylor, *Birds: Myth, Lore and Legend* [Bloomsbury, London?]: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, 284.

¹⁸ Anonymous Author, “Sliab Echtge – stair nah Eireann” History of Ireland, accessed May 23, 2018, <https://stairnaheireann.net/2015/09/11/sliab-echtge/amp>.

¹⁹ Dean Miller, *Animals and Animal Symbols in World Culture* (New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2014), 132.

the story around the loch where the people fall asleep when they hear the swans. “And sing as they fly” describes the “magical music” that makes the king and queen happy and hopeless, deaf and blind. In the first five lines of the last stanza of the third poem in Example 1c, this story of the king and queen seem to be unusually happy in the midst of unhappy prose. The situation in this stanza is completely the opposite of the depressing situation the tenor is experiencing when he hears the curlew’s cry. Perhaps the tenor here is dreaming of his desired situation. In “The Withering of the Boughs,” there is a phrase that is repeated three times at the end of each stanza. “No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind; The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.” In other words, the trees have not begun dying because of the weather becoming colder, but because the poem’s narrator has possibly told them about their suspected future loss of their loved one when they hear the curlew’s cry.

In the first and fourth poems east and west seem to have a special meaning for Yeats. In the first poem of the cycle, “Hanrahan Reproves the Curlew,” after asking the curlew not to cry in the air, he wrote, “or only to the waters of the west.” This is referring to the Banners of East and West associated with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the occult organization that Yeats was a part of starting in 1890 and remained in for over thirty years. In the fourth poem, Example 1d, The Banner of the West represents diminishing light while the Banner of the East represents increasing light.²⁰ The banners seem to represent the motion of the sun according to Earth’s perspective. Perhaps the phrase “or only to the water of the west,” could be asking the curlew not to cry until the person reaches the twilight of his or her life. “And the girdle of light is unbound,” could mean that there is nothing the narrator can do to stop time from moving.

²⁰ Anonymous Author, “Banners of East and West” Azoth Art, accessed May 23 2018, <https://azothart.com/product/banners-of-east-and-west>.

There are some places where the music accommodates the folklore mentioned. Where the first supernatural entities enter the song cycle, in the third poem from *In the Seven Woods*, Warlock wrote “Faster,” and the string quartet, previously playing triplets to the beat, are now playing four sixteenth notes to the beat. When the Danaan kind are mentioned, in the next measure the second violin and viola switch to six sextuplets to the beat when the poem mentions the dancing of the Danaan kind as seen in Example 2. These sextuplets continue until the “dance” is over. In song three where the poem mentions that the king and queen “wander till all the years have gone by;” there is a full measure rest for all voices with a fermata that, at first glance, seems to be unnecessary. This large pause could symbolize all the years going by.

Example 2: Sextuplets in “The Withering of the Boughs.” m. 190

The image displays a musical score for five parts: Voice, Violin (top), Violin (middle), Viola, and Violoncello. The music is in 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "dan - ces When the light grows". The score features several sextuplets (groups of six sixteenth notes) in the Violin and Viola parts, and a triplet in the Voice part. The Viola part also includes trills. The Violoncello part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with rests.

Chapter 2: Bird Themes

There are several themes that show up repeatedly in this piece that represent various birdcalls. The curlew, peewit, and other birds are introduced in the prelude to Song one and appear strategically throughout the piece, some of them being altered or developed. These themes will be discussed, as well as how they are constructed rhythmically and musically, and how and why they are altered as they fit with the song cycle. Also, the breaking down of the themes into motives will be shown, and in some cases, the chords under which these themes appear. How all of these factors contribute to the cycle's narrative will be discussed.

Curlew

The first two measures open with the English horn playing a theme that Dr. Copley calls the "Curlew cry," shown in Example 3.²¹ Although this cry is repeated throughout the cycle, the first time it is played, it is unaccompanied. This way, the English horn can sound more authentically like a curlew without any other notes to influence the listener. Ian Parrott, an expert on Welsh music, says that Warlock "must frequently have heard flocks of Welsh curlew flying overhead with their scooping rising sixths and sevenths."²² When the English Horn in F is transposed to concert pitches, a perfect fifth down, the theme starts on a B and ascends to a G, the highest note of the theme, creating a rising minor sixth. The viola immediately follows with a

²¹ I.A. Copley, "Peter Warlock's Vocal Chamber Music," *Music & Letters* 44, no. 4 (Oct 1963): 363.

²² Ian Parrott, "Warlock in Wales," *The Musical Times* 105, no. 1460 (Oct 1964): 741.

developed version of this cry that is transposed in mm. 3–4 in Example 4. Throughout the cycle, the viola sometimes takes the part of the curlew cry theme, presumably because its timbre sounds similar to the English horn but can sustain notes longer, therefore, it can play the longer, more developed versions of the theme.

Example 3: Curlew Theme in English Horn (pitches sound a perfect fifth lower than written), “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 1–2



The Curlew theme is written in slow motion. The actual curlew does make a cry that ascends melodically but the notes ascend much more quickly. The real curlew cry does sound like an ascending minor sixth, as in Example 3. Three eighth notes, C#, F#, and E#, are inserted between the first three eighth notes and triplet figure of the original curlew theme. The second time the theme is played in the viola, the additional notes seem to be implying that there is more to say than in the first time it is played by the English horn.

Example 4: Developed Curlew theme in Viola, in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 2–8

When the tenor enters at m. 45, shown in Example 5, the melody is in the curlew theme but transposed down a step and a half starting on G \sharp and reaching a peak of E \natural to form the rising minor sixth. The rhythm is somewhat augmented.

The English horn repeats the curlew theme in the same augmented rhythm as the tenor at m. 60, as in Example 6.

Example 5: Tenor Curlew Theme in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 45–47

Example 6: Curlew Theme, English Horn (itches sound a perfect fifth lower than written) in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 60–62

The curlew theme is found in the cello part right before the lyrics of the second poem as a

subtle reminder in a low voice with a *pppp* dynamic marking almost as a subliminal message, as in Example 7. This version of the theme is also somewhat developed as it starts with the same rhythm as the original theme but the interval from lowest note to highest is a slightly larger interval of a diminished seventh, from F \sharp to E \flat , also like a curlew. The last four notes are manipulated rhythmically with the D stretched out to a dotted eighth note and the next two notes as thirty-second notes instead of adding a second triplet figure. Because the interval leapt up a diminished seventh instead of a minor sixth, the E \flat goes down chromatically stepwise within the theme to land on A \natural instead of G \sharp .

Example 7: Curlew Theme in Cello in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 88–89



Before the third poem is sung, the curlew theme comes up again in the English horn, starting on B \flat , shown in Example 12, but is interrupted when it reaches the G \flat just as the C \sharp in the viola part in mm. 4–5 in Example 4.

During the third poem, the theme shows up again hidden in the flute while the tenor is singing, “I know of the leafy paths the witches take.” It starts on a D \flat and reaches a B $\flat\flat$, and the way down is written in a triplet form, possibly to accommodate the rhythm of the text in Example 8. Could Warlock have deliberately hidden it?

Example 8: Hidden Curlew Theme in Flute in “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 177–179

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Voice and Flute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The voice part has the lyrics: "I know of the leaf - y paths the witch-es take". The flute part features a hidden curlew theme with triplets and a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking.

The English horn plays the theme before the last poem reaching up a minor seventh, but mid-theme is cut off and reaches an octave as seen in Example 9. This cutting off of the theme could symbolize the tenor waking up as the cycle approaches Song four.

Example 9: Final Curlew Theme in English Horn (pitches sound a perfect fifth lower than written) in “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 238–239

The image shows a musical score for the English Horn. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note, with a fermata over the final note.

Example 10: Motives in Curlew Theme in English Horn at Concert Pitch in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 1–2

The image shows a musical score for the English Horn. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is split into two motives: Motive A (the first five notes) and Motive B (the last four notes). Both motives are marked with triplets.

The curlew theme is split into two motives, A and B. Motive A is the first five notes including the two highest notes, G, while motive B has the last descending four, shown in Example 10. In m. 35, motive A is played in the second violin while the first violin continues

the theme with a developed version of motive B two octaves higher, shown in Example 11. This developed motive B transitions into a birdsong figure.

Example 11: Motives A and B in violin parts in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 35–36

When the tenor finally enters the song cycle, he is telling the curlew to “cry no more in the air,” shown in Example 5. What better way is there to communicate with a curlew than to speak the curlew’s language? That is what the tenor does by taking the melody of the curlew cry from the opening measure. However, when the tenor ends their opening phrase of the curlew theme, they end on a G#, the same note the theme starts on. The English horn, in the beginning, starts the theme on a B but ends on a C# instead of a B, shown in Example 10. This whole step discrepancy between the first and last notes gives the curlew theme in the English horn a more unsettling effect even though it is unaccompanied. When the tenor sings the theme, it is slightly less unsettling because it begins and ends on the same note and because the final G# sits within the framework of a diatonic G# diminished chord from the string section with a bit of dissonance coming from the English horn. The reason for this slightly less unsettling feeling is because the

tenor is sending his message in more of a declamatory tone while the entire phrase is staying within the confines of the opening's mysterious and foreboding, yet peaceful tone.

When the curlew theme appears again in m. 60, in Example 6, near the end of the first song in the English horn as if it is another reminder of its presence to show the tenor that it will not stop crying. The tenor addresses this by singing, "there is enough evil in the crying of wind." When the theme appears again it is in the cello where is the only place in the piece that the cello plays it as in Example 7. In this version of the theme, it starts on an F \sharp but ends on A \natural to add to the unsettling feeling. This version seems to be deep in the tenor's subconscious because it is played in the lowest voice with a dynamic marking of *pppp*. Because this curlew cry is also unaccompanied, it must be a memory of the original curlew cry in the beginning. Because this theme's last note is a minor third higher than the first note, there is an even more unsettling feeling than in the original theme. This is because, if the tenor did not realize who he was going to lose before, he does now. This idea is addressed at the beginning of the second song when he sings, "Pale brows, still hands and dim hair, I had a beautiful friend."

When the curlew theme appears again at m. 121 in the English horn, shown in Example 12, it is also interrupted between motive A and motive B. The theme starts on a concert B \flat and uses the same content of the original theme until it reaches the highest note. Instead of rising to a minor sixth, it rises to B \flat an octave higher. The note is sustained before continuing with a birdsong version of motive B in the following measure. The reason the high B \flat is sustained is because it is accommodating a peewit call from the flute and upper three string voices that will be shown on page 31. This looks like a foreshadowing of the opening for song three where the tenor sings, "I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds: 'Let peewit call and curlew cry

where they will.” This foreshadowing of the birdcalls before the acknowledgement of it by the tenor is well-suited to this song cycle considering the curlew’s cry symbolizes a foreshadowing of death.

Example 12: Curlew Theme in English horn in F (pitches sound a perfect fifth down) in “The Withering of the Boughs,” m. 121–124



When the curlew theme appears in m. 177, Example 8, the flute plays the theme while the tenor is singing, “I know of the leafy paths the witches take” in the second stanza of song three. Although the tenor has no dynamic marking and the flute is at *pp*, the flute seems to drown out the tenor in this measure. This theme is a transposed version of the original theme where the flute enters on a D \flat and ends on an E \flat .

The final time the curlew theme is played, in m. 238 from Example 9, it is by the English horn in song three in the middle of the third stanza. The second stanza ends with the king and queen being happy as “all the years have gone by” and the tenor acknowledging that he knows what the curlew and peewit know. Only motive A is played here while motive B is not played as seen in Example 9. This interrupted theme could indicate the moment when the tenor wakes from his dream or snaps out of his fantasy. Song four does not have the curlew theme because it is no longer needed. The reality of the tenor’s fate has already been realized and he does not need a hint or reminder. The curlew’s message has been received. As the curlew takes center stage in this piece, the curlew theme is passed through all the voices whether in whole or in part.

Peewit

The peewit, or Northern Lapwing, is the other bird mentioned in the song cycle in the third song. This bird also has a legend connected to it, similar to the curlew. According to the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust in the United Kingdom, “The peewit call of the bird was associated with the legend of the seven whistlers – seven birds flying together by night, whose cries presaged disaster. This call was said to cry ‘bewitched, bewitched’ and so bring evil to those who have heard it.”²³ Another interesting fact, according to the Solway Wetlands, is “The collective noun for a group of Lapwings is a ‘deceit:’ this originates from the idea that Lapwings are deceitful and treacherous.”²⁴

In the prelude to Song one, after the initial curlew theme, the flute enters at m. 20 with a theme that starts on a repeated F \sharp but ends melodically as if it is imitating a bird, shown in Example 13. According to Dr. Copley, this theme is the “Peewit’s call.”²⁵ The theme returns at m. 68 in the flute part but enters on an A \natural instead of F \sharp , shown in Example 14.

²³ Peter Thompson, “November” Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. Accessed March 13, 2020. <http://gwct.org.uk/wildlife/species-of-the-month/2012/november/>

²⁴ Anonymous Author, “Lapwing” Solway Wetlands. Accessed March 13, 2020. <http://solwaywetlands.org.uk/lapwing>.

²⁵ I. A. Copley, “Peter Warlock’s Vocal Chamber Music,” *Music & Letters* 44, no. 4 (Oct 1963): 363.

Example 13: Peewit Theme in “He Reproves the Curlew,” Flute, mm. 20–25

Musical score for Example 13, measures 20–25. The score is for Flute, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello. The Flute part features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes and a quintuplet of sixteenth notes, labeled "Motive C". The other instruments provide harmonic support with sustained notes and chords.

Musical score for Example 13, measures 20–25, showing Motives D, E, F, and G. The Flute part is divided into four distinct motives: Motive D (triplet), Motive E (triplet), Motive F (quarter note), and Motive G (quarter note). The other instruments provide harmonic support with sustained notes and chords.

It enters one final time, again on $A\flat$, and in the flute part between the third and fourth songs and after the sleep or fantasy state has ended, shown in Example 15.

Example 14: Second peewit theme, in “He Reproves the Curlew,” Flute, mm. 68–70

Musical score for Example 14, showing the second peewit theme in 3/4 time. The score features four staves: Flute, Violin (top), Violin (middle), and Violoncello (bottom). The Flute part contains three motives labeled C, E, and G. Motive C is a triplet of eighth notes. Motive E is a quarter note followed by an eighth note. Motive G is a half note. The Violin and Violoncello parts provide harmonic support with sustained notes.

Example 15: Third Peewit Theme in “He Hears the Cry of the Sedge,” Flute mm. 297–300

Musical score for Example 15, showing the third peewit theme in 3/4 time. The score features five staves: Flute, Violin (top), Violin (middle), Viola (bottom), and Violoncello (bottom). The Flute part contains five motives labeled C, D, E, F, and G. Motive C is a quarter note. Motive D is a quarter note followed by an eighth note. Motive E is a quarter note. Motive F is a quarter note. Motive G is a quarter note. The Violin and Violoncello parts provide harmonic support with sustained notes. The Viola part has trills (tr) under the notes.

Unlike the curlew theme, the peewit theme is confined to the flute part throughout the entire piece. The theme is split into five motives, C through G shown in Example 13. As the peewit is mentioned only in one poem instead of two like the curlew, and is not in the title of the piece, the peewit theme takes second billing to the curlew theme. It is only played three times

throughout the piece although fragments of it appear occasionally. The first time it is played, it appears in the prelude on F \sharp which is part of a half-diminished seventh chord, played by the strings, discussed by Brian Collins.²⁶ While the string section is playing F \sharp , C \sharp , D \sharp , and A \flat , the flute doubles the F \sharp in the cello. In this peewit theme, the half-diminished seventh chord in the strings would be constructed as D \sharp as the root, F \sharp as the third, A \flat as the fifth, C \sharp , as the seventh, with the flute playing the root. The next appearance of the peewit theme is in Song one after the tenor sings, “there is enough evil in the crying of wind,” shown in Example 14. The flute enters on an A \flat and contains only motives C, E, and G, shown in Example 14. Motive C is shortened to five consecutive A \flat ’s instead of ten consecutive F \sharp ’s in the first peewit theme, as in Example 13. This placement of the peewit theme seems to represent the evil crying in the wind. This is the only peewit theme that is not played over an inverted half-diminished seventh chord. It is played over a D \flat minor chord in second inversion. The final peewit theme occurs between Songs three and four. It appears to be one last reminder of deceit in the song cycle before the tenor awakens and faces reality in Song four. This version of the theme contains all of the motives whether in whole or in part as shown in Example 15. This theme also starts on A \flat but only has three consecutive pitches before moving on to the next note. It also enters as part of an inverted half-diminished seventh chord. The string section is playing B, D, F (second violin on E \flat trilling to F), and A. In this theme the flute is playing the seventh of the chord.

The theme begins with several repeated F \sharp s or A \flat s for each placement. As the piece progresses, every time the peewit theme is played, these repeated notes are repeated fewer times.

²⁶ Brian Anthony Collins, “A Chordal Basis for the Music of Peter Warlock” (PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, July 1994), 19.

This could indicate that time is running out, especially considering that the fourth song talks about how the “axle break” and “keeps the stars in their round” and “the girdle of light is unbound.” The first and third peewit calls enter with the flute playing a note of the root and inverted half-diminished seventh chord before the tenor sings in the beginning and in the interlude between songs three and four. The second peewit theme is not over a half-diminished seventh chord but plays on A \flat over a diatonically built D \flat minor chord making the flute an augmented fifth above the root. Because this placement of the peewit theme immediately follows the tenor, “There is enough evil in the crying of wind,” the odd choice of an augmented fifth above a minor chord could symbolize the “evil” in the wind whereas the two peewit themes above root and inverted half-diminished seventh chords represent the actual peewit.

There are two places in the tenor part that are reminiscent of the flute’s peewit theme. One place is the second line of the first poem, “or only to the waters of the west” in mm. 51–53, shown in Example 16. It starts on a repeated A \flat . The other place is in song two when the tenor enters with, “I had a beautiful friend,” shown in Example 17. Although these entrances seem to resemble the entrances of the last two peewit calls on repeated A \flat s, it seems likely that Warlock wrote them, especially the second time, in a recitative style to move the plot along in a relatively short time as in an opera. Of course, this text would want to be hurried through due to the painful nature of the song’s content. Although in the first case, in Song one in Example 16, one could wonder what Warlock was thinking starting this tenor entrance on an A \flat considering the three lower strings are accompanying this phrase with a D \sharp , E \flat , and B \sharp . In the second one, although the A \flat is sustained in the tenor voice, its function changes with every beat in m. 98 as shown in Example 17. In the second beat the A \flat plays the role of the fifth in a D minor triad. In the third

beat the A \flat is the root of an A major seventh chord. In the fourth beat, the A \flat is the fifth of a half-diminished seventh chord built from D \sharp . This could represent the mixed emotions of the tenor as he realizes who he will lose.

Example 16: Tenor in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 51–53

Or on - ly to the wa - ters in the west;

Example 17: Tenor in “The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love,” mm. 98–100

I had a beau - ti ful friend And dreamed that the old des - pair would end² in
love in the end

Throughout the piece, the decreasing number of repeated pitches of Motive C in the peewit theme seems to correlate with how much time the tenor has left before reality hits, contributing to the narrative of the song cycle.

Other Birdsongs

In addition to the musical acknowledgements of the curlew and peewit, there is also what sounds like additional miscellaneous birdsong played by the first violin.²⁷ The general birdsong

²⁷ Brian Anthony Collins, “A Chordal Basis for the Music of Peter Warlock” (PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, 1994), 67.

in the prelude and interlude sounds pleasant and peaceful to reinforce the desirable surroundings that Warlock was living in. It creates a contrast between peaceful unnamed and uninvolved birds, and the curlew and peewit cries with their undesirable messages that their calls symbolize. The first birdsong appears in the prelude where Warlock is establishing the atmosphere of the piece shown in Example 18. It appears after the first two curlew themes in the English horn and viola, and right before the first peewit call. This birdsong is, like the original peewit call, played over a half-diminished seventh chord. The lower three voices in the string section are playing F#, C#, D#, and A#, the same sustained notes from the original peewit call previously mentioned. Unlike the peewit call, the “resting” notes in this birdsong, the notes that linger a bit longer between the sixteenth notes, begin and end on C# which is part of the half-diminished seventh chord that supports it, minimizing the dissonance. In the original peewit call, although the first ten notes are on a repeated F# (part of the inverted half-diminished seventh chord), it has “resting” notes that do not belong to the chord, for example, G# and F# in m. 22, and the C# and F# in mm. 23 – 25 in Example 13.

Example 18: Birdsong in the First Violin in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 18–20

The musical score for Example 18 consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Flute, showing a melodic line in 6/8 time. The second staff is for the Violin, featuring a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes and a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff is for the Violin, showing a sustained note G#4. The fourth staff is for the Viola, showing a sustained note C#5. The bottom staff is for the Violoncello, showing a sustained chord of F#4, C#5, D#5, and A#5.

Because the birdsong in the first violin has less dissonance against the accompanying strings, it has a more peaceful and agreeable sound than the peewit call which is supposed to bring bad news. The agreeable sound of the birdsong provides an effective contrast to the curlew and peewit calls to address the idea that even in the most peaceful surroundings, bad things still happen.

Example 19: Birdsong in the First Violin in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 75–78

Birdsong in the first violin appears again in mm. 75–78 in Example 19. It appears immediately after the second peewit call, from Example 14, between the first and second songs when the peewit call is the “evil in the crying of wind.” When the second peewit call is placed over a D \flat minor triad, this second birdsong passage is over the same triad that has been rewritten as a C \sharp minor triad. In this second round of peewit/birdsong in Examples 14 and 19, both are more dissonant and less agreeable with the string accompaniment than the first round of birdsong/peewit in the prelude to song one in Examples 13 and 18. In the peewit call, the A \sharp that it enters on is not part of the triad below it as well as the E \flat in m. 70 of Example 14. In the second birdcall from Example 19, although it begins and ends on a C \sharp as part of the triad below it, the A \sharp in m. 77 does not. The “evil in the crying of wind” has even adulterated the peaceful

nature of pleasant birdsong this time. This is the last place in the piece that birdsong appears because it is no longer appropriate after Song two when the tenor realizes what will happen.

Example 20: Peewit Gesture in “He Reproves the Curlew,” m. 6

There is another place in the song cycle that Warlock gives an avian sound. In the beginning of the piece when the viola plays the developed version of the original curlew cry in Example 4, it suspends on a C# mid-theme in mm. 5–6. This suspension is to accommodate what is happening in the flute and both violins. There are two gestures of a thirty-second note slurred into a quarter or dotted quarter note that Dr. Copley has speculated as representing the curlew or peewit shown in Example 20.²⁸ This gesture gives the sound of a peewit. The reason that this gesture and the peewit call from the flute can both represent the peewit, is that the gesture is similar to the sound of one peewit, or many peewits in unison, while the peewit call in the flute sounds like several peewits calling together but not necessarily in sync with each other. This

²⁸ Ian Parrott, *The Crying Curlew Peter Warlock: Family & Influences Centenary 1994* (Llandysul, Dyfed, Wales: J.D. Lewis & Sons Ltd., Gomer Press, 1994), 75.

would make sense considering the peewit's legend that seven of them fly together. If seven are vocalizing randomly together, it would give off the uneven, chaotic rhythm of the flute's peewit call if all the peewits' vocalizations are considered equally and comprehensively. One single peewit sounds like the squeaker in a dog toy. Several peewits in unison sound like the gesture written in Example 20. Several peewits not in unison sound like the peewit theme from the flute. This first set of unison peewits is written as part of Warlock's introduction to his beautiful but sad and mysterious atmosphere in the prelude to song one. This unison peewit gesture appears again in song one immediately after the tenor sings, "O curlew cry no more in the air," as if Warlock had written it deliberately to defy the tenor. The last place it appears is also in Song one immediately after the curlew cry in the English horn before the tenor sings, "there is enough evil in the crying of wind" again, appropriately placed. The curlew theme, peewit theme, and violin birdsong not only help set up an atmosphere for Warlock to tell his story, the development and placements of the curlew and peewit themes help narrate the story.

Chapter 3: The Mystical Theme

The idea of mysticism is heavily portrayed in *The Curlew*. Not only are the curlew and peewit legends mystical, Warlock wrote a beautifully haunting theme to capture the mystical tone of the song cycle. Mysticism is typically thought of as ideas associated with supernatural phenomena or communication with divine entities. Although there are several ways to define mysticism, it is a rather generic term that, no matter which definition is used, suggests keeping an open mind. It is this open-mindedness that applies to *The Curlew*.

Theoretical Construction

Example 21: Mystical Theme. "He Reproves the Curlew," mm. 9–10

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is written in 3/4 time and D major. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two measures, 9 and 10. A long slur spans across both measures, encompassing the first notes of all four instruments. In measure 9, Violin I and Viola play a half note D4 with a sharp sign, while Violin II and Violoncello play a half note D3 with a sharp sign. In measure 10, the instruments play a sequence of notes: Violin I and Viola play a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4; Violin II and Violoncello play a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note F#3. The score ends with a double bar line.

Warlock infused sounds of mysticism by way of his mystical theme that he placed strategically throughout the song cycle. According to Brian Collins, Dr. Copley refers to it as the

“gloom motif.”²⁹ It has a sound that is firmly rooted yet mysterious as though it is seeking knowledge through non-traditional channels. This is the theme in the prelude to Song one at m. 9 in Example 21. The combination of the vertical diatonic inverted F# major chord throughout the string section coupled with the horizontal movement of the first violin and viola give this theme a mystical sound.

Even though *The Curlew* is an atonal piece, Warlock hints at tonality here and there. One place is in the mystical theme. The first two beats in Example 21 appear to be a major triad in second inversion where the fifth above the root is sustained in the cello and second violin. The root of the triad is in the viola, while the first violin plays the triad’s major third. The cello and second violin give a “grounding” effect that makes the theme sound firmly rooted. The first violin and viola have a moving part that may move in somewhat different rhythms and for a different number of measures every time the theme is played. What does remain the same every time is the parallel movement between the first violin and viola parts. The two parts travel in thirds. If Warlock were to continue this theme within a diatonic F# major key, the first violin and viola parts would move in a combination of major and minor thirds from each other. However, Warlock defies our expectations and has them move in constant parallel major thirds from each other, deviating from the F# major key. The first violin moves in an Ionian mode in F#, assuming the intent is to establish an F# major phrase. Since the consistent pattern of the relationship between the first violin and viola is a major third, it can be assumed that the mode in the viola would be Phrygian, F#, G, A, B, C#, D, E, F#. The F# major key is assumed because it sounds as if Warlock is deliberately setting up a diatonic expectation. He surprises us by moving the

²⁹ Brian Anthony Collins, “A Chordal Basis for the Music of Peter Warlock” (PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, 1994), 66.

“melody” and its harmony modally. He is broadening our minds which is what mysticism suggests. The mystical theme is in the prelude between various birdcalls because Warlock is establishing a mystical atmosphere of the birds and their legends and what their calls mean.

After Song one is over, the curlew, peewit, and birdsong all make another appearance before the mystical theme appears a third time in m. 81, shown in Example 22. This time the perceived chords go from an F \sharp major triad to an A \flat major triad, also in second inversion. In m. 85, however, the moving part that moves modally with the first violin is transferred from the viola to the cello as in Example 23.

Example 22: Mystical Theme, in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 81–82

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Violin, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is written in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is divided into two measures, 81 and 82. In measure 81, the Violin part begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, and then a quarter note E4. The Viola part begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F#2, and then a quarter note E2. The Violoncello part begins with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F#2, and then a quarter note E2. In measure 82, the Violin part continues with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note C4, and then a quarter note B3. The Viola part continues with a quarter note D2, followed by a quarter note C2, and then a quarter note B1. The Violoncello part continues with a quarter note D2, followed by a quarter note C2, and then a quarter note B1. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with a treble clef for the Violin and a bass clef for the Viola and Violoncello.

Example 23: Mystical Theme in “He Reproves the Curlew,” mm. 85–86

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two measures. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The Violin I part starts with a half note F#4, followed by a quarter note G4, and a half note A4. The Violin II part starts with a half note F#3, followed by a quarter note G3, and a half note A3. The Viola part starts with a half note F#2, followed by a quarter note G2, and a half note A2. The Violoncello part starts with a half note F#1, followed by a quarter note G1, and a half note A1. The score is written in a standard musical notation with a treble clef for Violin I and II, an alto clef for Viola, and a bass clef for Violoncello.

It has also transitioned from an $A\flat$ major chord to a $C\sharp$ minor triad in first inversion while the cello takes the $E\flat$ and does not necessarily move in a separate mode to accommodate the interval between the first violin as in the first two appearances, but both the first violin and cello are moving in the same mode, Dorian in $C\sharp$. The moving part in the cello for this theme in m. 85 precedes the curlew theme in the cello in m. 88 in Example 7, contributing to the “subconscious” message as the tenor realizes whom he will lose. This contributes to Hanrahan becoming Aedh in the poetry. The next appearance of the mystical theme is right before the start of Song three in Example 24. It is in the form of an $E\flat$ major seventh chord in second inversion with the cello and second violin taking the fifth of the triad. In mm. 130–133, the moving parts in the first violin and viola do not necessarily commit to specific modes, but the intervallic relationship between the two voices go back and forth between major and minor thirds in mm. 130–131 to become blurry in mm. 132–133.

Example 24: Mystical Theme with Blurred Intervals in “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 130–133

The musical score for Example 24 consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The music is in 3/4 time and has a key signature of one flat. Violin I plays a melodic line with a slur and a trill. Violin II plays a single note with a trill. Viola and Violoncello play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

The “blurring” of the previously intervallically consistent “clear” theme could indicate the blurriness of someone falling asleep or becoming drowsy. Immediately in the following measure, the tenor has already begun the poetry for Song three mentioning the curlew and peewit.

Sleep Inducing Theme

The next time the mystical theme enters at m. 146 in Example 25, only two pitches are played in the strings, F and A. If the mystical triads are normally in second inversion, this would imply that a D is missing. It would normally be played in the viola that is playing an F instead. It would be fitting that this appearance of the mystical theme has no root in the strings because the tenor is singing, “for the roads are unending and there is no place to my mind” as his mind is not rooted either. The chord has lost its root due to the tenor slipping into a fantasy state in Song

three. The flute takes the root on D as part of a D minor triad but trills to E to give the triad shaky ground.

Example 25: Mystical Theme in “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 146–147

The musical score for Example 25 consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with lyrics: "roads are un ending and the". The second staff is for the Flute, featuring a trill on D. The third and fourth staves are for Violin I and Violin II, respectively. The fifth staff is for the Viola. The bottom staff is for the Violoncello. The music is in 3/4 time and features a mystical theme.

The theme appears again immediately after the first stanza of the third song in Example 26. This time the triad is a complete F major chord in second inversion. This time the second violin enters with the fifth on C two measures after the cello. The “grounding” effect for this theme has returned gradually because the mind of the tenor has gone from a transition state to a deliberate fantasy state. The F on the word “dreams” in m. 171 has a transitional function. According to the pitches used in the tenor in m. 170, the key would be in F minor when they sing, “The boughs have withered because I have told them my,” but the function of the F switches to the root of F major on the word “dreams” with the establishment of the mystical theme. At this point in the song cycle, the dream sequence has been officially established. The following lyrics in the tenor mention the witches.

Example 26: “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 171–174

The musical score for Example 26 consists of six staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with the lyrics "dreams." written below it. The second staff is for the Flute, showing a melodic line with a slur. The third staff is for the Violin (I), featuring a more complex melodic line with slurs and ties. The fourth staff is for the Violin (II), with a simpler melodic line and a slur. The fifth staff is for the Viola, showing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The bottom staff is for the Violoncello, with a simple melodic line and slurs.

Theme Upon Dreaming

The mystical theme appears again in Song three between the second and third stanzas starting in m. 207 in Example 27. The tenor in the previous measure is singing, “The boughs have withered because I have told them my,” over a sustained half-diminished seventh chord in the string section while the pitches in the melody are accommodating the half-diminished seventh chord C, Eb, Gb, and Bb. However, the first beat of m. 207 contains an adulterated version of the F major triad mystical theme with an added G and an Eb trill in the second violin to create an F major seventh effect with an added G. The “tonality” of this theme is muddled again because the tenor is transitioning from one dream to the next.

Example 27: Mystical Theme “The Withering of the Boughs,” mm. 207–208

The musical score for Example 27 consists of four staves. The top staff is for the first Violin, the second for the second Violin, the third for the Viola, and the fourth for the Violoncello. The music is in 3/4 time. The first violin plays a melodic line starting with a half note, followed by quarter notes, and ending with a half note. The second violin, viola, and cello provide harmonic support with sustained notes and chords, including some trills in the second violin.

The last appearance of the mystical theme is the longest and takes place in the third stanza in Song three. It begins before the tenor enters with the legend of the swan with the golden chain. The tonality of the D major triad is established at m. 215 in Example 28 where the cello and second violin have “grounded” the triad in second inversion. The viola and first violin have taken their usual positions of root and third respectively although they occasionally play in unison. As the tenor is singing the melody for the swan legend, the entire melody is sung as if it is in D major. This D major triad pattern in the strings is sustained until around m. 231 in Example 29, where the chords transition to E major, D major, and then D minor in the moving voices, in the first three beats, when the tenor sings about how the sound of the swan singing has made the king and queen happy and hopeless, and the dream sequence is beginning to come to an end. The mystical theme is mostly sustained through the swan legend because it is the “most fantasy” part of the song and entire cycle where the swan and lover, unlike the tenor and his lover, are together forever.

Example 28: Mystical Theme in “The Withering of the Boughs,” m. 215

Musical score for Example 28, showing the Mystical Theme in measures 215. The score is for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Violin I part features a melodic line with a slur over four notes. The Violin II part has a single note. The Viola and Violoncello parts have a single note with a slur.

Example 29: Mystical Theme, m. 231

Musical score for Example 29, showing the Mystical Theme in measure 231. The score includes Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Voice part has lyrics: "made them so hap - py and hope - less so". The Violin I part has a melodic line with a slur. The Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello parts have a single note with a slur.

Upon Waking

After the final theme appearance, the mystical theme no longer applies to the song cycle’s narrative. All dreams, fantasies, or pretenses have ended leaving the listener with the harmonically sparse fourth and final song. The absence of the mystical theme and various bird calls leaves the tenor with the reality that he is alone. The mystical theme also helps narrate the song cycle. The blurring and unblurring of the moving parts in the strings come at pivotal places

in the score marking where the tenor has fallen asleep, is transitioning from one dream to another, or has woken.

Chapter 4: Occult

In 1917, Warlock moved to Ireland. It was around this time that he got involved in occult studies and chose the pen name Peter Warlock. After being exposed to the music of Frederick Delius and Bernard van Dieren, he had imitated their compositional styles whether intentionally or not. He had had a difficult time with composition and had not written much for a while until he began his occult studies. What does the occult encompass? In general, it deals with matters involving divination or attempted communication with supernatural beings. Some of the various activities that Warlock was involved with include astrology, the tarot, and the work of Eliphas Levi and Cornelius Agrippa, which includes magic spells and incantations. According to Barry Smith, Cecil Gray noted that many of Warlock's notebooks contained detailed notes from all of these practices.³⁰ In August 1918, Warlock had been at his occult practices for a while and suddenly had a busy summer composing. He wrote a letter to a former piano teacher from school, Colin Taylor, saying, "I have already received very definite and detailed communications concerning music from sources which the ignorant and unheeding would call supernatural: and there is unlimited power behind these sources."³¹ Some songs that were written that year include, "Take O Take Those Lips Away," "My Gostly Fader," "The Bayley Berith the Bell Away," "As I Ever Saw," and "Whenas the Rye." These five songs seem to have a different character than music he had written before. His songs, "The Wind from the West" from 1911 and "The Cloths

³⁰ Barry Smith, "Peter Warlock and the Occult," SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology/Suid-Afrikaanse tydskrif vir musiekwetenskap 13 (Pretoria, South Africa: 1993), 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

of Heaven” from 1916 sound reminiscent of German lieder and have a pleasant and relaxing sound while using little to no chromaticism. In 1916–1917 when he wrote the three-song collection *Saudades*, all three songs sound atonal, although the second has a written key of four flats. All have an elegant sound in the piano and are somewhat reminiscent of the music of Les Six. Although all of these songs are quite beautiful, they sound as if they come from a genre that had already been written by others. In 1918, Warlock seems to have developed a different sound than before and was suddenly able to write in several different moods and with poetry from several different poets. For example, “As I Ever Saw” and “Whenas the Rye” sound very happy and energetic. “As I Ever Saw” has a positive message praising the qualities of a specific woman while “Whenas the Rye” is about a woman who is eager to move on with life as she does not want to remain a maid. On the other hand, two other songs, “Take O Take Those Lips Away” and “The Bayley Berith the Bell Away” are slow and sad as each one talks about deceit and tragic fate, respectively. Another one, “My Gostly Fader,” has a mood somewhere in between. The tempo is neither slow nor energetic and has a feeling of hope as a man is in confession asking forgiveness for a social infraction. Barry Smith writes, “for it was in these songs that Heseltine at last found his own individual voice as a composer. Gone is the self-conscious imitation of Delius and van Dieren.”³² Whether or not Warlock’s occult involvement had negative effects on his life, it did at least, have a positive effect on his compositions.

³² Barry Smith, “Peter Warlock and the Occult,” SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology/Suid-Afrikaanse tydskrif vir musiekwetenskap 13 (Pretoria, South Africa: 1993), 76.

The Tarot

The Tarot is a deck of 78 cards used for divination but also for gaining intuitive insights. The 22 major arcana cards have characters or themes while the remaining minor arcana cards are similar to a traditional deck of cards with four suits each including a king, queen, knight, and page. The four suits are cups, swords, wands, and pentacles, or coins. A method for composition using an occult activity would be to use the symbolism of the Tarot. In 1920, Paul Foster Case published a book called “Introduction to the Study of Tarot” when he devised a system correlating the 22 major arcana, or keys, of the Tarot, to the Hebrew Alphabet. According to Alison Deadman, a music professor and esoteric student, says that, “the scheme that Case uses to relate the Hebrew Alphabet to the major arcana of the Tarot is identical with that used by the occult society known as the Golden Dawn which Paul Foster Case was directly involved with.”³³ Another person with the Golden Dawn was Allan Bennett who was a teacher of Aleister Crowley, a famed occultist by whom Warlock was fascinated. Allan Bennett kept diaries of Golden Dawn notes and had the Hebrew letters matched up with the twelve pitch classes.³⁴ Therefore, there is a pathway, shown in Table 1, connecting the 22 major arcana Tarot cards to musical pitch classes through the Hebrew Alphabet within the studies of the Golden Dawn that Warlock definitely had exposure to through his friendship with Yeats.

³³ Alison Deadman, “Letter, Musical Pitch, and Color in the Work of Paul Foster Case,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2006), 11.

³⁴ Jon Sewell, “Musical Tones and the Hebrew Alphabet,” Eleusyve Productions, last modified January 28, 2019, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://ritesofeleusis.com/musical-tones-and-the-hebrew-alphabet>.

Table 1: Tarot vs. Hebrew Letters vs. Pitch Class³⁵

Major Arcana Tarot	Hebrew Letters	Pitch Class
Emperor, Tower, Judgement	He, Pe, Shin	C
Hierophant	Vav	C#/Db
Lovers, Sun	Zayin, Resh	D
Chariot	Het	D#/Eb
Fool, Magician, Strength	Aleph, Bet, Tet	E
Hermit	Yod	F
Empress, Justice	Dalet, Lamed	F#/Gb
Death	Nun	G
High Priestess, Hanged Man, Temperance	Gimel, Mem, Samekh	G#/Ab
Devil, Star, World	Ayin, Tsadi, Tav	A
Wheel of Fortune	Kaf	A#/Bb
Moon	Qof	B

As to which Tarot deck Warlock was using, there were already many editions to choose from at the time, each with their own unique interpretations. However, in 1910, Edward Arthur Waite, an American born British poet, co-created his own deck and accompanying manual, “The Pictorial Key to the Tarot.” This deck became very popular in England and the United States, and is known as the Rider-Waite deck. It was illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith, and both Waite and Smith were members of the Golden Dawn as well. Based on all of this history, it is

³⁵ Jon Sewell, “Musical Tones and the Hebrew Alphabet,” Eleusyve Productions, last modified January 28, 2019, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://ritesofeleusis.com/musical-tones-and-the-hebrew-alphabet>.

very probable that Warlock studied from and used, a Rider-Waite deck and its corresponding interpretations.

One part of *The Curlew* that is beautiful yet baffling, is the peewit theme in Examples 13–15. After seeing Motive C written as ten consecutive F \sharp pitches the first time, five A \flat pitches the second time, and three A \flat pitches the third time, this inspiration had to have come from somewhere. Since each pitch class is lined up with one, two, or three major arcana Tarot cards, it is possible to see which cards are associated with F \sharp and A \flat . Since there are twelve pitch classes and 22 major arcana Tarot cards, the cards are assigned to pitches based on the Hebrew Alphabet. The Hebrew Alphabet is made up of twelve single letters, seven double letters, and three mother letters. The mother letters were assigned to three pitch classes C, E, and G \sharp splitting the octave into three equal parts. The double letters are assigned to seven pitch classes while the single letters are assigned one to every pitch class. Therefore, some pitch classes have only one Tarot card assigned to it while others have two or three. Warlock could have chosen any Tarot card he wanted based on what it symbolizes and how it relates to *The Curlew*.

If the first peewit theme in Example 13 beginning with ten F \sharp s is considered, the F \sharp could be represented by two Tarot cards, Empress and Justice. If the Justice card was in its reversed position, or upside-down during the reading, “the deeper meaning of this situation is being withheld for reasons only Higher Power understands.”³⁶ This would make sense considering the first peewit theme comes at the very beginning and the tenor has not realized who he will lose until later in song two.

³⁶Anonymous Author, “Justice,” Tarot.com, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.tarot.com/tarot/cards/justice/universal-waite>.

The second and third peewit themes come in on A♭s. The three cards that represent A♭ are The Devil, The Star, and The World. If the Devil is interpreted for this theme, it symbolizes a threat or presence of evil just like the message from the peewit.³⁷ This could definitely apply to the second appearance of the peewit theme when it enters on an A♭ over a D♭ minor triad in the string section. Also, this peewit theme comes immediately after the tenor sings, “There is enough evil in the crying of wind.”

The Devil card would certainly be an appropriate choice for the third peewit theme. It comes right before Song four when the tenor wakes from his dream state and is left alone with nature. Here, The World card would also be an appropriate inspiration because, “The World card points to the presiding wisdom which upholds life and all worlds.”³⁸ When this peewit theme ends, the tenor sings about the “desolate lake,” “the wind cries in the sedge,” “axle break,” “keep the stars in their round,” and “the girdle of light unbound” implying that the world is in control of the tenor’s fate. It also represents achievement of a goal as the peewit has achieved its goal of delivering the message to the tenor.

As for the number of times the starting note of the theme is repeated in Motive C, this could be explained with the minor arcana cards within a suit. The suit of swords would definitely be the most appropriate option. The suit of cups represents various facets of happiness and success. The suit of pentacles mostly represents facets of financial dealings. The suit of wands mostly represents various aspects of vocation and family. The suit of swords, however, symbolizes mostly loss and hardship. Within this suit, there are several cards that relate to the

³⁷Edward Arthur Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Boston: Weiser Books, 1910), 128-131.

³⁸Anonymous Author, “The World,” Tarot.com, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.tarot.com/tarot/cards/the-world/universal-waite>

events in *The Curlew*. The ten F♯s in Motive C of the peewit theme in Example 13 could be represented by ten of swords which symbolizes loss coupled with bad luck.³⁹ This theme is the first hearing of the peewit theme when the tenor is unlucky hearing it for the first time. The second appearance of the peewit theme in Example 14 that represents the evil crying in the wind, has five notes on A♯ in Motive C. This would be represented by the five of swords card the symbolizes loss coupled with defeat.⁴⁰ The tenor seems to have admitted defeat in the following song when he describes his beautiful friend and has realized who he will lose. The final peewit theme in Example 15 with three A♯s in Motive C, would be represented by the three of swords card. This card symbolizes loss coupled with delay.⁴¹ This final peewit theme comes between Songs three and four when the tenor is alone and his sense of reality has been delayed due to his dream-like state in Song three. Based on the symbolism of the cards, it appears that Warlock could have hand-picked these Tarot cards to write and alter his peewit theme.

³⁹ Edward Arthur Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Boston: Weiser Books, 1910), 234.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 244.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 248.

Conclusion

Several factors contribute to the narrative of this song cycle. Considering the third poem, “The Withering of the Boughs” from *In the Seven Woods*, is so different from the other poetry in content and style, it contributes to the idea that the tenor was in a dream state, particularly during the last stanza. The idea of putting the other three poems in the order that Warlock put them also contribute to the idea of a story being told considering that Hanrahan becomes Aedh. The swan legend in the third stanza of the third poem would be the perfect place in the song cycle for the tenor to be in his dream state considering the happy nature of that segment amid depressing surroundings. The blurring and unblurring of the intervals between the moving parts within the mystical theme to symbolize falling asleep, slipping from one dream to another, and waking up also contribute to the narrative. Not only are the placements of the various bird themes important for the song cycle’s narrative, their absences are significant as well. For example, factors contributing toward the tenor waking to a bleak reality in song four include the sparse or non-existent accompaniment of the voice by the strings and winds, the curlew theme being cut off upon waking from the dream state, and the absence of all the bird themes, completely removing all facets of fantasy. All of these factors contribute to the haunting feeling of being alone.

There are ways that Warlock could have used the occult to inspire his music. However, there are other means of divine assistance that could have inspired Warlock’s compositions. One of them is the art of automatic writing which was introduced to him by a friend, Hester Dowden, who was known for her automatic writing skills and with whom Warlock boarded for a time.⁴²

⁴² Barry Smith, “Peter Warlock and the Occult,” SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology/Suid Afrikaanse tydskrif vir musiekwetenskap 13 (Pretoria, South Africa: 1993), 77.

The methods of analysis regarding this process in relation to Warlock's music have yet to be explored. Even as far as the idea of applying the Tarot to Warlock's music have just begun to scratch the surface in this study. The peewit theme in particular was chosen as a subject for study regarding occult practices because, although there are many unconventionalities in Warlock's music due to an incomplete education in composition and a desire to write on his own terms, there are some details in *The Curlew* that I have not been able to explain away as Warlock's personal style. One of these details is the peewit theme and why Warlock altered it the way he did, especially regarding Motive C. Another interesting fact about *The Curlew* is that Warlock dedicated it to Cecil Gray. According to Barry Smith, "Gray also testified to the uncanny accuracy of Heseltine's power of divination by means of the tarot."⁴³ Of all the activities available through the occult, the Tarot seems to be an appropriate means of assisting with the writing of *The Curlew* considering the legends of the curlew and peewit foretell death or bad news, which are, in a way, their own form of divination. Even though occult activities are not regarded as serious by everyone, they were serious to Warlock. There is an activity called table-turning that when performed is an attempt to communicate with a supernatural being, such as in a séance or use of a spirit board that Warlock was also involved with. In fact, according to Barry Smith, in a written letter, Warlock wrote to a former girlfriend, Viva Smith, in November 1918, "Don't play about with what you call 'table-turning' – Either take the matter seriously and understand it thoroughly ... or leave it altogether alone."⁴⁴

⁴³ Barry Smith, "Peter Warlock and the Occult," SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology/Suid Afrikaanse tydskrif vir musiekwetenskap 13 (Pretoria, South Africa: 1993), 74.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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