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The Music of Hamish MacCunn

(1868-1916):

A Critical Study

Alasdair Jamieson

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The Music of Hamish MacCunn (1868-1916)
A Critical Study
Alasdair Jamieson

Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 2006

ABSTRACT

Apart from a single study of *Jeanie Deans*, MacCunn's music has, to date, never received a detailed examination. This thesis aims to provide a contextual basis for, and a stylistic analysis of, his major works, and so establish informed criteria by which a truer assessment of MacCunn's significance may be made, challenging the sovereignty of *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* in the public's reckoning of his compositions and hence revealing it to be not an isolated peak but one summit among many.

Hamish MacCunn (1868-1916) grew up in Greenock on the west coast of Scotland before removing to London at the tender age of 15 to further his musical studies at the Royal College of Music. His assimilation of a robust orchestral technique was rapid and before he reached his twentieth birthday he had already tasted the pleasures of public approbation. Thereafter, a sequence of orchestral works, cantatas, songs and two grand operas with a pronounced Scottish character appeared in the late eighties and nineties. It is this period which is the focus of the study, but later works dating from MacCunn's time conducting West End shows are also discussed. Through a generic survey of his output, the thesis locates the composer's works within a historical and biographical framework, isolating characteristic traits both novel and derived from the earlier Nineteenth Century inheritance, and evaluating his position as a composer of his time and afterwards. In particular his strengths and penchants as a composer have been identified with special emphasis on the composer's bias for dramatic or narrative music, amply demonstrated in his overtures, cantatas and, above all, his two operas *Jeanie Deans* and *Diarmid*.

To complement the chapters on MacCunn's musical works, an opening biographical chapter, a comprehensive catalogue, a family tree, iconography and bibliography have been provided. Throughout the thesis, reference has been made to primary sources held in Glasgow and other libraries throughout Britain and the United States, in an attempt to arrive at as complete a picture of MacCunn as possible.

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Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material offered has been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other university. If material has been generated through joint work, my independent contribution has been clearly indicated. In all other cases material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

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Acknowledgements

I should like to thank various people for their help while carrying out research. This thesis could not have been written without the courteous support of librarians across the country, in particular: Lesley Couperwhite and Betty Hendrie at the Watt Library in Greenock, Dr. Peter Horton and Paul Collen at the Royal College of Music, Bridget Palmer at the Royal Academy of Music, Muriel Chamberlain at Wakefield Library, the staff at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Central Library, the British Library at St. Pancras and Boston Spa and the Theatre Museum, London. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York and the Chapel Hill Music Library in North Carolina were expeditious in sending copies of important documents. I wish to register my gratitude to everyone who has replied to countless queries about MacCunn.

It has been reassuring and edifying to be able to communicate with two other MacCunn scholars, Dr. Jennifer Oates in New York and Jane Mallinson in Glasgow. Though suffering frail health, Mrs. June MacCunn (married to the composer's grandson Robin) has offered encouragement and has filled in some gaps in my knowledge. One of the more memorable days I spent was at the house of Dr. John Purser on Skye; his evangelising zeal for the cause of Scottish music and his collection of documents and books were inspirational (as were his home-produced bog myrtle beer and fresh crab from the loch!).

My largest debt is to my supervisor, Professor Jeremy Dibble. Without his extensive knowledge of British Music, his obvious enthusiasm to impart this knowledge and his unerring judgement, this thesis would be a very different being. His supervisions were very positive experiences and always left one feeling spurred on to do better.

Abbreviations and Library sigla.

General

VS – Vocal Score

MS - manuscript

p – page

s – system

b – bar

MT – *The Musical Times*

Library sigla

GB-Gu Glasgow University Library

GB-En National Library of Scotland

GB-Lbm British Library, St. Pancras

GB-Lcm Royal College of Music

GB-Lam Royal Academy of Music

GB-LEbc University of Leeds, Brotherton Collection

GB-DRu University of Durham Library

US-NYpm New York, Pierpont Morgan Library

US-CHH Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Music Library

US-Eu Evanston, Northwestern University, Music Library

INTRODUCTION

As a single light shining brightly obscures other objects of equal or greater worth from sight, such is the fate of so-called ‘one-work’ composers whose popular favourite keeps other contenders firmly in the shadows. To the casual observer Hamish MacCunn (1868-1916) would seem to fall into this category. Like many other people, I came to MacCunn through his one well-known piece, *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, which, as a boy growing up in Colinton, Edinburgh, I thought of as the perfect musical corollary to hill-walking in the nearby Pentlands. It exactly expressed the exhilaration one felt in the landscape, and, by extension, the unique pride taken in one’s native country. It appeared regularly in the programmes of the Scottish National Orchestra (as it then was) at the Usher Hall, but nothing else by MacCunn did. Scottish Opera neglected to stage his operas and choral societies rarely explored his cantatas. His countrymen’s attitude to him is still a benignly patronising one, putting him unthinkingly on the same level as William MacGonagall because of his ‘quaint’ name. What has emerged from further research is a composer whose inexhaustible gift for memorable melody, whose harmonic daring, whose musico-dramatic savvy deserve to be brought from the shadows, studied and celebrated.

The curve of MacCunn’s life may be considered typical of an early developer. Having experienced fame as a composer in the full tide of youth – when it could present opportunities and elicit commissions – he chose not to reinvent himself musically but was content to polish, refine and, to some extent, repeat those traits which had served him well. If ever a composer were defined by the forms in which he wrote, then it is MacCunn; all his compositions come about as responses to external, non-musical stimuli, virtually always

words. There was no place for abstract works after his student exercises at the Royal College of Music and he seems to have been little affected by that institution's bias towards symphonicism. Consequently his work-list contains orchestral ballads and character pieces, cantatas, operas and songs; there are also several chamber and piano pieces all of which are descriptive in intent. MacCunn saw this descriptive/ dramatic manner as the way forward for music,¹ and the structures he creates are in keeping with his vision. He avoided sonata form movements, preferring non-developmental, closed forms; in this regard he shared a similar outlook to his compatriot MacKenzie. Even the three early orchestral works *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, *The Ship o' the Fiend* and *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow*, in spite of their being nominally in sonata form, contain development sections which are, to varying degrees, episodic. In his opera *Diarmid* the lip service paid to the Wagnerian system of *Leitmotiven* remains just that, and, though effective, it in no way approaches the symphonic organicism of the German's music dramas. After *Diarmid* (1897) circumstances start to control the composer rather than the other way round, which had been the arrangement hitherto. The necessity of earning money through conducting West-End shows reduced the amount of time available for composition; he had a wife and son to support and a comfortable standard of living to maintain. There *were* some large-scale commissions he fulfilled in these years and - as it turned out - a last substantial personal project, the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads*; but overall, as Maurice Lindsay pithily points out 'The gifted all round musician died at 48. The Scottish composer died at 30.'²

The Scottishness of MacCunn's music has been much emphasised by commentators and remarked upon by listeners. Certainly all his major works are inspired by the

¹ Shaw, George Bernard, *London's Music in 1888-9 as heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, Constable 1937), 112.

² Lindsay, Maurice, 'Gifted composer from Greenock', *Glasgow Herald*, 20 March 1968, 8.

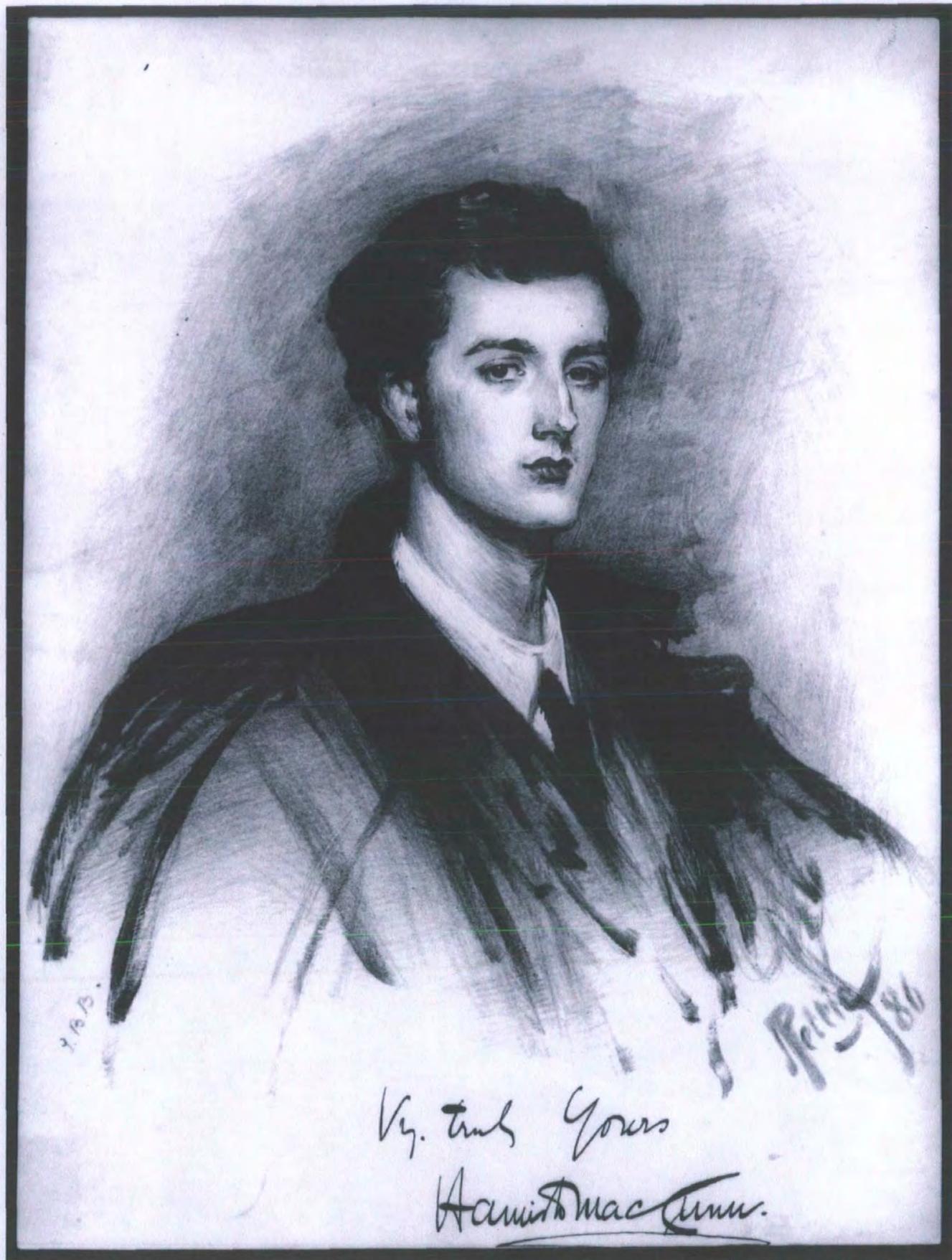
topography, history and culture of his homeland. Yet the indigenous qualities of the national music are superimposed upon a nation-less – and very proficient – technique honed in South Kensington. Unlike the styles of Vaughan Williams and Bartók which grew out of their respective country's folk music and a more conspicuous assimilation of the 'raw' material, MacCunn's penta- and hexatonic melodies, his use of modality and dotted/Scotch snap rhythms and so forth, are essentially colour elements that penetrate but superficially the music's fabric, and indeed can be switched on and off at will (a similar approach to national music shared by Stanford and Mackenzie). It is tempting to think that had he stayed in Scotland rather than move to London, his compositions might have developed a new organic ethos. But MacCunn was no ethnomusicologist striving to strip away layers of bogus stuff to arrive at the definitive version so that his true creative being could be liberated. Apart from his career being stalled by remaining in Scotland, it is likely that his compositions would have been reined in by the lower expectations of a provincial culture.

In the opening chapter of this thesis, in order to provide sufficient context for MacCunn's output, it has been necessary to give as full an account of MacCunn's life as is possible with the surviving documentation; he left no diary and only one autobiographical article, so extracts from newspapers and references in other contemporaries' works have been used to build up a picture. I have included the complete text of a long letter he wrote to *The Times* which reveals MacCunn to have been an informed and eloquent commentator on contemporary musical affairs. After this chapter, the thesis concentrates on the music, establishing a relevant backstory, isolating characteristics and analysing stylistic developments. The chapters are arranged generically but, with the exception of the songs,

this turns out to be a well-nigh chronological sequence as well – orchestral, choral, opera. The orchestral works are each treated in detail, whereas in the two chapters on choral music *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* are considered as templates for, respectively, the choral ballad and the multi-movement, dramatic cantata (genres which MacCunn distinctly favoured); other choral works are discussed in relation to these two paradigms. The partsongs and the pageants, not unimportant genres within MacCunn's catalogue of works, are incorporated into the latter parts of the choral music chapters. The twin colossi of the 1890's – the operas *Jeanie Deans* and *Diarmid* are allocated a chapter each – since these two works are to a large extent the principal foci of MacCunn's creative persona; a case is made for regarding parts of the latter work as representing the most advanced music MacCunn wrote. In the chapter on the songs, representative examples of different types of structural models are considered, and the *Cycle of Six Love Lyrics* and the settings of Robert Bridges are singled out for special treatment. Most of the composer's manuscript scores are to be found in the MacCunn Collection in Glasgow University Library. However it has not been possible to find two scores at all: *Cior Mhor*, the first publicly performed orchestral work, is tantalisingly untraceable - it appears to have gone missing at the time of the distribution of scores to Glasgow and other libraries in 1949-50 - as is the musical comedy *The Golden Girl*. Full scores to the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* are not forthcoming either; nothing has been heard of these since their posthumous premieres, which may be their only outings to date. In conversation with Mrs. June MacCunn, (who is married to Robin, the composer's grandson), she spoke of how scores had been put in store during the Second World War, and how the repository had been bombed and some music lost. Throughout the thesis reference has been made to MacCunn's

correspondence, in particular those collections kept in Glasgow University, the Watt Library, Greenock, the National Library of Scotland, the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York and Chapel Hill Library at the University of North Carolina.

As appendices, a comprehensive annotated catalogue appears alongside a selective family tree gleaned from central and local records offices, an iconography, discography and a bibliography which draws together contemporary and more recent references to MacCunn's music and career.



Hamish MacCunn: portrait by John Pettie, 1886.

CHAPTER 1

A Life

‘...This Grey Town
That pipes the morning up before the lark
With shrieking steam, and from a hundred stalks
Lacquers the sooty sky; where hammers clang
On iron hulls, and cranes on harbours creak,
Rattle and swing whole cargoes on their decks:
Where men sweat gold that others hoard or spend,
And lurk like vermin in their narrow streets;
This old grey town, this firth, the further strand
Spangled with hamlets, and the wooded steeps,
Whose rocky tops behind each other press.
Fantastically carved like ancient helms
High hung in heaven’s cloudy armoury,
Is world enough for me.’

(John Davidson 1857-1909 *This Grey Town*)

A Life

Breasting the top of a hill on the road northwards from Lochwinnoch, the Clyde estuary comes suddenly into view, with Ben Lomond and other lesser hills overlooking the watery expanse on the far side. The town of Greenock surrounds you as you descend the hill, filling the narrow coastal plain at sea level. Traditionally dependent on heavy industry and manufacturing relating to the shipping trade, Greenock is now one of the largest centres for high technology and modern communications media in Europe. In contrast to the housing estates and high rises which dominate the landscape, there is, towards the west end of town, an elegant grid system of streets with villas and well appointed terraces - comparable in quality though not in size to Helensburgh across the water. Here were the residences of the captains of industry in the 19th century, and into one such household was born James (later Hamish) MacCunn on 22nd March 1868 at 8 in the morning.

The family home was a large detached house - "Thornhill" - at the corner of Ardgowan and Campbell Streets¹. Parish records for 1861 list its inhabitants as John MacCunn - Head of family and ship owner, 58 (Hamish's grandfather), Mary C. MacCunn - wife, 50 (his grandmother), Daniel - son, 21, Clerk to ship owner (and twin brother to James, Hamish's father), Andrew - son, 18, Clerk to ship owner, John MacCunn - son, 14, scholar, and two servants. By this time James MacCunn had moved out of the family home; in 1865 he married Barbara Neill, the eldest daughter of John

¹37, Ardgowan Street.

Neill, head of the sugar refining firm of Neill, Dempster and Neill,² and they lived in a more modest terraced house round the corner from Thornhill at 15, Forsyth Street. It was here that Hamish was born, but when James and Barbara's family grew they moved back into and took over Thornhill. Hamish had an elder brother John (born in 1866) and a twin brother William who died in infancy: '...when we were 6 months old, he left me to complete the duet as a solo, there being apparently nothing but 'tacet' for him after his piping little prelude.'³ Two sisters would also perish before attaining their first birthdays - then came George (1873), Agnes (1875), Robert (1876) and Andrew (1881)⁴. The MacCunns were well off financially, having made a small fortune from the family company. The firm owned a fleet of clippers that plied the sea on the China tea trade routes. In their fleet were such renowned vessels as the Guinevere, Sir Lancelot and Thermopylae - this last was at the time the fastest of clippers (a title she shared with the Cutty Sark). The ships sailed under the company's distinctive Pegasus flag.⁵ One of the earliest photos of Hamish shows him aged about 4 in a sailor's uniform and a nautical hat with the name 'Monarch' on it.⁶

² There were 11 sugar refineries in the town in the 1860's. Several years ago, there was but one plant operated by Tate and Lyle, and even that has now closed.

³ Letter to Janey Drysdale dated 29 December 1913, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 264.

⁴ Andrew - Hamish's youngest brother - would also go on to make a name for himself as a musician. In 1897, when he was 16, he was appointed organist and choirmaster of the Free Mid Church, Greenock, 'where a new organ, to cost £1000 is now being erected by Messrs Henry Willis and sons' [source: *MT*, xxxviii (1 December 1897), 623]. He became an assistant conductor with the Moody-Manners Opera Company and was the musical director for the Renaissance Theatre (Paris) company productions of French plays at the Adelphi (London) in June - July 1909. He ended up as a successful theatre conductor in Australia e.g. he conducted the J.C. Williamson Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Co. in its Theatre Royal Sydney season in 1940. His travelling is in marked contrast to Hamish who, as far as is known, never left these islands. Andrew died in 1966, 50 years after his older brother.

⁵ Information from Bruce Biddulph from website www.clydeshipping.co.uk

⁶ Source: Greenock Burns Club Archive. Both father and son were sometime members of this oldest of all Burns Clubs (the Mother Club). The 'Monarch' was a paddle steamer made by Robert Steele and Co. of Greenock in 1835.

The brothers John and James (i.e. Hamish) appear in the records of Greenock Academy for 1876-7 and 1877-8. Hamish was also educated at Kilblain Academy and Graham's Collegiate School, and by private tutors.

....he did not distinguish himself as a schoolboy. On one occasion he won a third prize for Euclid, which was a rather unusual feat for a boy with musical gifts, but he thinks it must have been a consolation prize, as he really never knew anything about Euclid. He made rapid progress, however, with his musical studies.⁷

Thornhill was a very cultured household: Hamish's father was baillie (or magistrate) of Greenock like his father John before him. A fine amateur singer, he played guitar and cello, painted, sculpted, wrote poetry and invented many things from flying machines to special paper clips. Politically his affiliation was firmly with the Tories. He had even acted as election agent for Sir James Fergusson of Maybole when he contested (and lost) Greenock in 1878.⁸ Hamish's mother had been a pupil of Sterndale Bennett, and was an extremely able amateur pianist and singer. The budding composer was given every opportunity by his parents for his musical enterprises to flourish. He later acknowledged this: 'I always feel that their instruction and encouragement have formed an all important factor in my musical development.'⁹ His parents would often take him to London and he spent one season, when he was eight years old, at Sydenham, where he went to hear the Crystal Palace orchestra every day. Hamish played the piano from the age of five and also composed one piece at that stage. He wrote nothing more until he was twelve: 'Then I started an oratorio which wouldn't "oratore", besides which I was

⁷ Drysdale, Janey, 'Scottish Composers - Hamish MacCunn' in *The Dunedin Magazine*, ii no.2 (March 1914), 66.

⁸ Letter from Sir James Fergusson to James MacCunn, 6 February 1878, uncatalogued in the Watt Library, Greenock.

⁹ H[adden], J.C[uthbert]., 'Scottish composers and musicians', *The Scottish Musical Monthly*, i no.3 (December 1893), 54.

much more keen on sailing around Rothesay Bay.’¹⁰ He also enjoyed fishing on the Isle of Arran, the Cowal burns and at Arrochar. His music teachers included Mrs. Liddell - ‘a dear old Greenock lady’¹¹ - who taught him the piano and encouraged him with oranges and sweets. He learnt the violin from the age of seven with Mr. Calvert, musical director at Greenock’s Theatre Royal; later he studied more seriously the piano, organ, harmony and composition with a Mr. Poulter (at that time the principal music teacher in Greenock). By 1882 he had written some songs, short piano pieces and a *Cavatina Pastorale* for ‘cello and piano, presumably for his father to play. One text he chose to set, a translation from Krummacher’s German - *The Moss Rose* (30 April 1882) - would be revisited in 1884, and it is instructive in comparing the two settings to see how far the young composer progressed in that time under the guidance of a truly great teacher - Parry - at the newly established Royal College of Music in London.

§§§§§§§§§§

‘Art thou a youth, prepared on life to start,
With opening talents and a generous heart,
Fair hopes and flattering prospects all thine own?’
(from Sir Walter Scott *Inscription for the Monument of the Rev. George Scott* (1830))

The competition for the fifty open scholarships to the College had been fierce: 1,588 applications had been received. These were reduced by preliminary local examinations to 480.¹² Further sifting in London yielded 76 and out of these the body of professors

¹⁰ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 29 December 1913, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Held in Greenock on 28 March 1883. See *MT*, xxiv (1 December 1883), 268.

decided on the final fifty¹³. Stanford, who was one of the examining professors, recalls the occasion vividly:

The first election of scholars was a most dramatic and moving occasion. The examiners sat round a large horseshoe table in the Council Room of the Albert Hall, and had first to hear the performance of some of the candidates whose merits were too equal to be decided upon by the preliminary judges.[...] When the names of the successful fifty were decided upon, they were ushered into the room in a body. By some misunderstanding outside, [...] they were one and all under the impression that they were those that had failed. When Grove told them that they were the scholars, this motley crowd of boys and girls, of every walk of life from the mill and the mine up to the educated school, gave simultaneously what I can only call a colossal gulp. The effect of it was so touching that Madame Goldschmidt's face collapsed into her pocket-handkerchief, and most of us had a curious lump in our throats.¹⁴

MacCunn's contemporaries at the College included Charles Wood, Herbert Brewer, Marmaduke Barton and W.H. Squire. Wood won the Morley Scholarship for composition, and went on to become a professor in the institution. Brewer only held his organ scholarship for two terms having successfully competed at the end of the Michaelmas Term for a similar honour at Exeter College, Oxford¹⁵. Barton, a pianist, and Squire, a cellist, remained in MacCunn's inner circle of friends throughout his life. Consulting the RCM Register for the years 1883 - 1885 we get an insight into his academic life.¹⁶ His principal study was composition with Parry: reading between the lines of the thumbnail reports written each term, MacCunn presents himself as a talented but occasionally wayward student. Comments like 'Has great abilities and intelligence but does not bring them to bear readily' and 'Must set his face to control and direct his energies' give the first inkling of his independence and impetuosity. Parry seems to

¹³ On 20 April 1883.

¹⁴ Stanford, Charles Villiers, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary* (London, Edward Arnold 1914), 217-18.

¹⁵ He actually left on 22 December 1883 due to ill health.

¹⁶ Information from *RCM Scholars: Register of Reports, no. 1*, held in *GB-Lcm*.

have set chamber music tasks for his students, in particular string trios. Joachim, the arch Brahmsian, on a visit to the College saw one of these student works:

[He had] got it into his head that MacCunn was influenced by Wagner, and said 'he had been subjected to pernicious influence' [Parry in his diary 4 April 1886]. There was no doubt in Parry's mind to whom the accusation was directed, since MacCunn was his pupil. Ouseley on the other hand seemed even more comical, for he complained of MacCunn's putting a 2nd subject of a minor movement in the Dominant major, and said, as if it settled the question, 'That is not in my book, you know.'¹⁷

MacCunn's second study was the piano where his professors were Frederic Cliffe and later Franklin Taylor; Taylor considered he was sufficiently gifted to be able to pursue a solo career on the instrument.¹⁸ He abandoned lessons on the viola with Alfred Gibson after four terms (his final report noted 'very little improvement'¹⁹) and learnt the bassoon with W.B.Wootton. Harmony and counterpoint were undertaken with Frederick Bridge ('Quality good, quantity somewhat small'²⁰), while he breezed through the ensemble, orchestral and choral classes with distinction.

MacCunn played an important part in students' concerts, which took place in the West Theatre of the Royal Albert Hall. He appeared eleven times between 16 July 1884 and 27 May 1886 playing the viola in chamber music, accompanying singers and instrumentalists and being one part of a piano duet with Marmaduke Barton. Four of his songs were performed for the first time in these concerts, as was his cantata *The Moss Rose* with the composer conducting.²¹ But it became clear that MacCunn considered himself to be outgrowing the College education: he participated in no more concerts

¹⁷ quoted in Dibble, Jeremy, *C. Hubert H. Parry, His Life and Music* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1992), 221.

¹⁸ Henderson, A[rchibald].M[artin]., *Musical Memories* (London, The Grant Educational Company 1938), 65.

¹⁹ Information from *RCM Scholars: Register of Reports, no. 1*, held in *GB-Lcm*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Thursday 10 December 1885.

from May 1886 to April 1887 when he left, and he had already tasted the first fruits of fame when August Manns premiered his orchestral *Cior Mhor* at the Crystal Palace on 27 October 1885. MacCunn declined his Associateship of the College to make a point which he explained in a fulminating missive to Parry:

It was not with the examination I found fault. But I have always felt, while at the College, what was to me an entirely foreign sensation, namely, that, while meeting the various men there in their several capacities, I had not met one man, bar yourself, who had acted to me, during the most ordinary intercourse common to society, with the remotest vestige of a supposition that *possibly* I might *be* a gentleman!

Their opinion was, of course, not my criterion of myself, but, in this associateship business the “last straw” seemed to me to be arrived at when they offered me *their* associateship, *their* patronage, *their* God-forsaken passport to society which appeared to me only consistent with their former demeanour and uncouth behaviour. Hence my reasons for declining the degree were simply that musically I did not esteem it, and socially I thought of it and those who conferred it with infinite and undiluted disgust. Remember I am always particularly speaking of the College *without your* personality.²²

The letter, however, does go on to upbraid Parry for not getting to know him socially, for not inviting him round to Parry’s house in Kensington Square. Parry is forced in his reply to reveal his wife’s infirmity as the reason his house cannot be ‘a sort of meeting ground for all the pupils who were in earnest about their art.’²³ The older man is placed in an embarrassing position by the breathtaking tactlessness of the young Turk. Happily, the strong underlying cordiality between the two men restored the relationship soon enough and Parry would act as one of the witnesses at MacCunn’s wedding in 1889.

Outside term time, MacCunn left his lodgings in Notting Hill²⁴ and returned home to Greenock. Family holidays were taken on the Isle of Arran where the as-yet teenage Hamish could indulge his passions for fishing and sailing. He loved the landscape here; *Cior Mhor*, his first foray into orchestral writing was inspired by the strikingly jagged

²² Letter 11 July 1887, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere, Sussex, quoted in Dibble, 261.

²³ *Ibid*, 263.

²⁴ 46, Larburton Road.

outline of that mountain in Glen Rosa as seen in varying weather conditions. Another family who went to Arran in the summer was that of John Pettie, the artist. Pettie, also a keen angler, first met Hamish MacCunn in 1884 when he was 'up to his knees in Loch Tanna'²⁵; the two families quickly became friendly. Both families stayed at Corrie on the east coast; Pettie particularly enjoyed painting in the hill country inland from the village.²⁶ Generally, he specialised in period costume portraits and historical scenes; he painted MacCunn's portrait in 1886 and used him as model several more times in *Two Strings to her Bow* (1887)²⁷ and its companion piece *A Storm in a Teacup, Challenged*' (1885, MacCunn is the figure on the bed), *The Violinist* (1890), *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1892) and other works. His portraits (together with press photos of the time) confirm G.B. Shaw's description of him:

He is such a significant-looking young man that he appears taller than he actually is. His hair is dark; he speaks with the accent of a Scottish gentleman; [...] There are certain youthful portraits of Mendelssohn, Chopin and Weber, a composite of which would give some interesting suggestions of Hamish MacCunn. His noble forehead, fine, clear eyes, and particularly pleasant and open expression, partly account for the reminiscence of Mendelssohn.²⁸

Pettie's biographer, Martin Hardie tells us of his subject's love of music, how

...he loved to have someone playing the pianoforte while he painted. Best of all, he liked the accompaniment of a duet, with loud and martial airs, such as Hamish MacCunn and his cousin Andrew Ker, would sometimes play, and always, when they ceased from sheer exhaustion, he would spur them on to renewed efforts.²⁹

²⁵ Hardie, Martin, *John Pettie* (London, A & C Black 1908), 203.

²⁶ e.g. *Trout-Fishing in the Highlands* (1881) shows the lower reaches of Glen Sannox.

²⁷ This picture shows a smug young lady being escorted down an English country lane by two gentlemen, a dandyish MacCunn on her right hand and a disgruntled looking fellow with fair hair on her left - modelled by Alexander Watt, son of the literary agent A.P. Watt. It seems the lady in the middle is Margaret Thallon (1864 - 1948), a Pettie family governess. For a long time it was thought to be Alison Pettie.

²⁸ Shaw, G.B., *London's Music 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, Constable 1937), 111.

²⁹ Hardie, 199.

Through Pettie, MacCunn met artists like William Quiller Orchardson³⁰ and Thomas Faed, and the author William Black, while conversely MacCunn's musical circle accounted for portraits of Sir August Manns, O. Fischer Sobell, Edmonstoune Duncan, Benoit Hollander, Edmund Bechstein, Andrew Black and Max Lindlar. More important than any of these connections was the relationship that sprang up between MacCunn and Alison Pettie, the artist's daughter, which led to a wedding on 4 June 1889 at St John's Wood Presbyterian Church. The reception took place at Pettie's large studio "The Lothians" at 2, Fitzjohn's Road³¹ where the guests included Orchardson, Riviere, David Murray, Grove, Manns and Parry.

In the two years between leaving the College and his marriage, MacCunn had experienced a rush of creative activity and had tasted the first fruits of public approbation. August Manns promoted his *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* at the Crystal Palace on 5 November 1887. This was an astonishingly assured piece of Mendelssohnian orchestral writing from a 19-year old, with winning thematic material and a forthright dramatic sweep. It was received positively but a little cautiously - the *MT* called it 'an interesting novelty'³² - as if critics wanted to see how this composer's career would develop before committing themselves. Suffice it to say that it is the only one of his works to hold a regular place in the repertoire today, and has been used variously as the theme tune for the 1970's television series *Sutherland's Law* starring Iain Cuthbertson, and for screen advertisements by the Scottish Tourist Board.

³⁰ Orchardson and Pettie had set up a studio when the latter first came to London. Orchardson was Alison Pettie's godfather and another of the witnesses at her wedding. His middle name - Quiller - was also Alison's.

³¹ Now the site of a statue of Sigmund Freud, behind which is the Tavistock Clinic, a renowned institute of psychology and psychiatry.

³² *MT*, xxviii (1 December 1887), 726.

MacCunn owed his early fame in London to Manns' zeal in promoting his compositions at the Crystal Palace. Two further orchestral ballads followed *Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, *The Ship o' the Fiend* - probably the finest of the three - and *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow*. Manns was also keen to secure first London performances of choral cantatas written for choirs in Edinburgh and Glasgow:

My dear MacCunn, I have proposed to the C[rystal] P[alace] Management that your cantata *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is to be included in our programmes of the ten after New Year Concerts of the present series. Will you tell me whether I could announce that work as 'First time of performance in England after its Glasgow performance'? [...] I am at work anew at your *Lord Ullin's Daughter* with the Crystal Palace Choir with a view of securing a much improved rendering on the 8th of December.³³

MacCunn was understandably grateful for Manns' efforts:

In the first place allow me to convey to you my sincerest gratitude and thanks for the inestimable benefit you conferred on me last Saturday. I shall ever feel that you have been my strongest supporter.

I enclose an account I have received from Mr. West. The reason I send it to you is that in your kind letter to me about my 'Ship o' the Fiend' you said 'I will have your score, I mean the parts, copied at my personal expense, in order that I may hear your ballad here privately'. I have not forgotten your generous offer & so forward you the account. I cannot conclude this note better than by repeating the word which best represents my feeling towards you, namely thanks! thanks! many thanks!³⁴

As MacCunn's abilities began to be recognised across Britain he received commissions from various organisations: the Glasgow Choral Union and Kirkhope's Choir in Edinburgh requested and received new pieces, Charles Hallé's orchestra and the Norwich and Norfolk Triennial Festival had to be content with old ones. The final commission made by Carl Rosa before he died in April 1889 was for an opera. The choice of subject was left up to the composer: the massacre of Glencoe, Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* and Scott's *Waverley* were all considered and discarded before *The Heart of*

³³ Letter to MacCunn, 17 November 1888, uncatalogued in the Watt Library, Greenock.

³⁴ Letter from MacCunn to August Manns, *US-Eu* MA115.

Midlothian was adopted. The *Telegraph* critic and jobbing librettist Joseph Bennett was brought on board, and the finished work, *Jeanie Deans*, eventually saw the light of day in November 1894. In addition to these larger works, MacCunn was writing a steady stream of songs to satisfy ballad concert and drawing room audiences.

MacCunn was also in demand as a conductor. Before his marriage to Alison, John Pettie had opened his large studio to him as a concert venue to try out his compositions, and to further his conducting experience.³⁵ In 1892 he was appointed conductor of the recently formed Hampstead Conservatoire Orchestral Society. The Hampstead Conservatoire was one of a number of small institutions set up in the latter part of the nineteenth century and was situated close to where the MacCunns lived at that time.³⁶ A rather patronising review³⁷ of a concert given by this group on 19 December 1892 points to the ‘not very intricate character’ of the music chosen with the abilities of the students in mind – surely a sensible measure on MacCunn’s part: Weber’s *Oberon* overture, the ballet air in G from Schubert’s *Rosamunde* music, the *Peer Gynt* suite of Grieg and other compositions were executed with ‘a fair amount of precision and with praiseworthy obedience to the conductor.’

It is difficult to establish MacCunn’s financial position as he began his married life with Alison. He must have had a healthy sum from the family ship-owning firm, but the boom days of the tea clippers were long gone. He put his business affairs into the

³⁵ On 30 May 1888 *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, *The Ship o’ the Fiend* and the orchestral song *Pour forth the wine* were performed. The concert on 20 June 1888 featured *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow*, an overture by his contemporary at the RCM [William] Edmonstoune Duncan and Schumann’s Piano Concerto played by Marmaduke Barton. Pettie had sent as a Christmas card to his wife - from Birmingham in 1888 where he had been present at a performance of *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* – a prophetic dream of ‘The Monster Orchestral Concert performed at Birmingham in 1889, sketched by a Royal Academician who was present on the great occasion’. Hardie dates this sketch as 1883, which is impossible, as no orchestral work had been written, let alone performed by then (Hardie, 200).

³⁶ 21, Albion Road, South Hampstead N.W - very close to the Petties.

³⁷ *MT*, xxxiv (1 January 1893), 42.

hands of the literary agent A.P.Watt as early as 1889. Watt negotiated the rights to certain texts MacCunn wanted to set, sorted out royalties and payments to the various involved parties, and sold his scores to publishers and magazines. By all accounts Watt was a pretty shrewd businessman who managed a good deal for his clients.³⁸ The MacCunns lived in a smart part of town and enjoyed entertaining guests in their home: 'Of course, I live well, because I feel that any form of unnecessary hardship would impair my activity. Art, to my mind, is not compatible with miserable surroundings.'³⁹ Among those who came to their house were men of letters Andrew Lang, Richard Le Galliene of *Yellow Book* fame, the Marquis of Lorne and musicians Frederic Lamond, Edward German, Louise Kirkby Lunn, George Henschel, Agnes Hamilton Harty and Philip Brozel. MacCunn took on private pupils, including Liza Lehmann, Mrs Frank Lawson - the widow of Julius Benedict - and the Scotsman Charles O'Brien. It is from O'Brien that we get an indication of his teaching style:

He had been shown one or two songs of mine, expressed his approval together with a request that we should meet. [...] At this meeting Hamish explained his reason for wishing to meet me saying that he wished to 'put me on the right road'. He criticised another song of mine [...] and his criticism was both searching and helpful. This was followed by a set of variations on an original theme worked in the manner he had indicated. His criticism was not altogether favourable and I was advised to use the variations of Schumann and Brahms as models, not Mendelssohn as I had done. A further set of variations posted to him at Leeds, [...] was somewhat more successful, written as they were on contrapuntal lines not harmonic ones. [...]

As a teacher of composition, MacCunn, though a Romantic composer, laid considerable stress on a Classical training particularly on the lines of strict counterpoint, and while always helpful at a lesson he could express his opinions bluntly and forcibly.⁴⁰

³⁸ See various records kept at *US-CHH* A.P.Watt papers no11036.

³⁹ Quoted in *The Scottish Musical Monthly*, i no. 3 (December 1893), 55.

⁴⁰ Notes made in 1967 for a proposed broadcast on MacCunn - in the possession of Sir Frederick O'Brien, Edinburgh.

In a letter to O'Brien, MacCunn criticises a set of variations, possibly the ones mentioned above, as being 'unnecessarily thick and heavy.[...] Study counterpoint . Especially in 3 parts, 5 parts, & if (you like) 7 parts. And for the present, write a theme (a short, 8 bar, simple theme) & make your variations contrapuntal, in 3 part counterpoint.'⁴¹

This is an interesting exhortation from a composer whose music was essentially non-contrapuntal, but who recognised that good part-writing and voice-leading were fundamental techniques in all successful composition.

Having requested an appointment as 'Teacher of Composition, Harmony and Counterpoint' at the Royal Academy on 2 May 1888 and being turned down, he was successful later in the year⁴² and remained in post until 1893. The Academy was known as the 'MacAdemy' at this time due to the strong Scottish contingent within the professorial staff, notably Alexander Mackenzie - as Principal, Walter Macfarren and Stewart Macpherson. There were some distinguished Scots studying there as well, chief among them being Learmont Drysdale and J.B.MacEwen. MacCunn might have expected to feel at home here, but he had (as he saw it) some grievances, which he aired in a series of letters and telegrams between 11 May and 28 November 1893. In the first letter he enquired: 'whether there was any chance of forming a composition class for him, but of course not at a fee of five shillings per hour which would not suit him at all.'⁴³ He was not teaching the first study composers - Ebenezer Prout and Frederick Corder looked after that - but the compulsory one hour Harmony and Counterpoint class. His disgruntlement led to unsanctioned absences from class; the final straw appears to have

⁴¹ Letter written by MacCunn to O'Brien, 12 December 1903 [in the possession of Dr. John Purser].

⁴² 3 November 1888.

⁴³ RAM Committee Minutes, 28 November 1893, 81.

been a telegram in which he claimed to have been ‘unexpectedly detained’.⁴⁴ A final exchange of letters between Mackenzie and MacCunn hardly concealed the depth of bad feeling beneath the veneer of politeness. Mackenzie pointed out that his telegram had arrived just at the moment his pupils were expecting him, that he could not admit ‘unexpectedly detained’ as a sufficient reason for failure to keep appointments, and that he had no alternative but to ask him to leave. MacCunn pleaded illness, pointed out that he had been summoned to teach at short notice that term as he had understood there would be no class for him at all, and finished with a tremendous self-righteous rant:

Accept my assurance that, if you and the Committee of the Royal Academy of Music consider these grounds sufficient to form the basis of a formal request for my resignation, no one could be in greater haste than I to sever even the very smallest connection with an institution which estimates so cheaply, and treats so inconsiderately, not to say discourteously, those artists who receive honour, and give honour, by being enrolled on its professional list.

Without further evidence to the contrary I cannot believe that your committee are capable of any such course of action. I must therefore decline to take the step you advise, unless I receive an official and final communication of the same tenor as your own; in which case, I beg that you will be good enough to consider my resignation [...] as being already in your hands.⁴⁵

This abrasive and rather arrogant side to MacCunn’s character will resurface on several other documented occasions in his life. We may attribute part of it to the over-confidence of youth, unsurprising, given his rapid rise to fame. In 1890 when the Chair of Music at Edinburgh University came up he wrote to Professor J. S. Blackie (whose poem *The Emigrant’s Farewell* he had set earlier in the year):

I hear that Mackenzie has decided to leave it alone. Why, then is it not offered to me? Perhaps some of those who have to do with it, are afraid that I would teach them those

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 83-4.

‘nawsty, vulgah Scotch songs.’ So I would - rather! I hear that there are a lot of Englishmen wanting to come over the border and get the job.⁴⁶

But there are other instances of simple thoughtlessness - cancelling a keynote speech he was to make at a Conference of Music Teachers at an hour’s notice⁴⁷ - and stubbornness - various altercations with the management of the Carl Rosa Company, Edward German and W.S. Gilbert. Such character traits suggest arrogance; however, Liza Lehmann, his pupil, considered that here was a man ‘whose manner sometimes led strangers into complete misunderstanding of the inherent modesty of his nature!’⁴⁸

To relax in town, MacCunn enjoyed a game of billiards or a round of golf on the Wembley course - he could get round in 90; interestingly, he appears not to have been a member of any London club. In the country he continued in his boyhood pursuits of sailing and fishing, this latter sometimes with his father-in-law with whom he corresponded on the subject. John Pettie would die in 1893 from an ailment of the ear,⁴⁹ MacCunn’s own mother died in 1897, while right at the start of the ‘Nineties Alison had given birth to their only son - Fergus (1890-1941).⁵⁰ In musical terms this decade was dominated by the composition of the two grand operas *Jeanie Deans* (1894) and *Diarmid* (1897). To compose operas after the earlier orchestral ballads and secular choral cantatas would seem to mark a natural progression: all three genres required a vivid and dramatic

⁴⁶ Letter to Professor J.S.Blackie, 13 November 1890, *GB-En* MS2638/fol.170. Blackie had published a book on Scottish Song in 1889 and was a prominent figure in Edinburgh society.

⁴⁷ *MT*, xxxix (1 October 1898), 677.

⁴⁸ Lehmann, Liza, *The Life of Liza Lehmann by Herself* (London, Fisher Unwin 1919), 201.

⁴⁹ MacCunn had joked about his condition when Pettie experienced some weeks of remission ‘Glad to hear that your ‘sinister lug’ is in a better frame of mind. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder; but abscess (especially in the ear) makes only the language grow warmer!’ Letter 30 July 1892, *GB-En* MS10994/fol.156.

⁵⁰ Fergus would later go into the London Scottish and Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry regiments. He was wounded in 1915 and severely wounded in 1917. In later life he developed a consuming interest in animal welfare. He was chief accountant of the RSPCA, its assistant secretary in 1924, a member of various SPCA’s (including the Latvian one) and published two books *Country Friends* and *Cats (Pets for Young People)*. His marriage to Maude Scott produced a son, Robin, who lives in Leeds with his wife June.

response to their core materials, opera representing a significant step up in terms of scale and ambition. Both operas were written for the Carl Rosa Company and were conducted by the composer at their premieres and on tour in the provinces. His collaborator on *Jeanie Deans*, Joseph Bennett, had also provided the poems for a *Cycle of Six Love Lyrics op.9* of 1889 and would prepare a cantata libretto for the composer in 1900 - which came to nought. The Marquis of Lorne (later the Duke of Argyll) furnished the words for the less successful *Diarmid*, a Celtic drama which allowed MacCunn to write some of his finest music for soloists and chorus, but as a piece of theatre lacked forward thrust. The two men were in contact as early as 1889. Lorne was planning *Diarmid* even before *Jeanie Deans* was heard and subsequently proposed a 'Celtic Opera Syndicate' to finance the project.⁵¹ Their relationship became soured when the Duke's libretto *Breast of Light* - a kind of 'prequel' to *Diarmid* but written afterwards - didn't fire MacCunn's imagination, remaining in sketch form and incomplete. In 1910 Argyll wrote to Janey Drysdale about the mounting of her brother Learmont's opera *Fion and Tera* by Beecham's company; MacCunn was conducting for that company at the time:

I fear that McCunn [sic] may be averse to B[eecham]'s enterprise, as he has been disappointed in not having a second [sic] opera of his own completed. This of course has been entirely his own fault, but human nature is jealous, & people are inclined to say 'If I can't do it - nobody else shall!'⁵²

MacCunn was an impressive conductor of his own works, showing sensitivity towards his singers and preparing orchestral parts with great care. In September 1898 he became Musical Director of the Carl Rosa Company⁵³ for a year between the longer reigns of Eugene Goossens I (1889 - 1898) and Eugene Goossens II (1899 - 1914). From

⁵¹ 'Music in Scotland', in *Musical Opinion*, no. 214 (July 1895), 642.

⁵² *GB-Gu MS Farmer 262/69*.

⁵³ At the same time Gustav Holst joined the company as a répétiteur.

now on, preparing productions and conducting them in the theatre would form the bedrock of his employment. Indeed it would so dominate his activities that the amount of composition decreased greatly. In the autumn of 1898 he was in charge of a successful tour of the provinces on which *Faust*, *Carmen*, *Lohengrin*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *I Pagliacci*, *Tannhäuser* and *Maritana* were performed. *Faust* in Edinburgh was received with great enthusiasm: 'Instrumentally the performance was one of the best the Rosa Company has ever given us and Mr. Hamish MacCunn is to be heartily congratulated on the brilliant playing of the orchestra'⁵⁴ By the time the company reached London for an extended season at the Lyceum (January – February 1899), dissent within the company had led to the resignation of MacCunn as conductor-in-chief. His place was taken on the opening night's performance of *Tannhäuser* by Georges Jacobi, then on the second night by T.H.Frewin and on the third by Harold Vicars. By 7 January MacCunn had been persuaded to return and the *Musical Times* noted an upturn in standards from that time.⁵⁵ On 3 February he conducted the first performance in English of Wagner's *Tristan* – a real test of his abilities and one that he seems to have negotiated with considerable flair:

Mr MacCunn conducted his orchestra with marked skill. A critic could easily pick holes in the performance: for the orchestra was at times too loud, the instruments did not always blend well together, and some of the playing was rough. But limited rehearsals, and a conductor and orchestra comparatively new to each other, have to be reckoned as extenuating circumstances; at any rate they induce one to lay stress not on the weak, but rather on the good points. The general result was far better than we had anticipated.⁵⁶

The Times was moderately impressed but disappointed by the singers' diction:

[The English language] in the mouths of most of the company was simply unintelligible, whether from the natural disabilities arising from foreign birth or from want of training in enunciation. [...] It was a curious experience to be compelled to allow the music to

⁵⁴ 'Amusements in Edinburgh', *The Era*, 10 December 1898, 16.

⁵⁵ 1 February 1899, 97.

⁵⁶ *The Athenaeum*, no. 3720 (11 February 1899), 186.

remind one of the German text before the action of the drama could be followed. This is hardly the object for which the salutary custom of presenting operas in English was adopted.⁵⁷

After the Lyceum season MacCunn continued to hold the title ‘Musical Director’, but more of the conducting was carried out by his three lieutenants. After Eugene Goossens II had taken over, MacCunn was occasionally asked back to be a guest conductor, for example in April 1901 at the Grand Theatre, Islington.

Britain was embroiled in the Boer War as the new century dawned. Various fund-raising events were organised to aid the widows and orphans of soldiers. One of these took place on 13 February 1900 at Her Majesty’s Theatre, and comprised three elements

1. A set of *tableaux vivants*: *A Dream of Fair Women*, music by Raymond Rose.
2. *The Masque of War and Peace*, music by MacCunn and conducted by him.
3. *A Patriotic Picture of Great Britain, her Colonies and Dependencies*, music by Sullivan, involving massed bands.

The evening had been devised by Louis N. Parker and was directed by Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Parker recalls an amusing incident after the show:

The Prince of Wales (Edward VII) sent for Tree, MacCunn, and myself, and we went in great trepidation to the tiny octagonal room behind the royal box. The Prince was very cordial. When we were dismissed, the three of us backed simultaneously towards the very narrow door behind us. There we got jammed. I, being in the middle, got jammed worst. My collar broke away from its moorings and flew up under my ear. The Prince laughed; the Princess laughed; their entourage smiled discreetly; and when we had at last squeezed through the door we disliked each other for quite five minutes.⁵⁸

After the Rosa Company experience, another one-year tenure as conductor was offered him by the Moody-Manners Company for the 1900–1901 season. This company,

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 4 February 1899, 13.

⁵⁸ Parker, Louis N., *Several of my Lives* (London, Chapman and Hall 1928), 191-2.

formed by the singers Fanny Moody and Charles Manners, was in existence for eighteen years between 1898 and 1916. When MacCunn was musical director, the orchestra numbered 30 – 35, occasionally reinforced with local strings⁵⁹. The tour started at Leicester on 3 September and took in Blackpool, Douglas, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Sunderland, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Burnley, Dublin, Cork, Liverpool, Hanley and Hull before the end of the year. This represented a fairly typical itinerary for a touring company at the time, staying one week in each place with a fortnight in larger centres⁶⁰. Much of the repertoire and some of the singers overlapped with the Rosa Company. MacCunn's interpretation of *Tannhäuser* at the Edinburgh Lyceum 'proceeded with praiseworthy smoothness ...[and] was received with enthusiastic approval'⁶¹. Fanny Moody herself played Elsa and E.C. Hedmond – who had played Staunton in *Jeanie Deans* – sang the part of Lohengrin. In the New Year *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tristan* were added to the repertoire.

As a counterpart to his conducting of opera in English, MacCunn was a signatory to the letter to the London County Council concerning the raising of funds for a National Opera House⁶² - other signatories included Mackenzie, Joseph Bennett, Bridge, Corder, Fuller Maitland, Martin, Parratt, Cowen, W.H.Cummings, German, Grove, Parry, Randegger, Stainer, Stanford, Aitken and Tosti. He also wrote a long letter to the *Times* in 1901 which covered the whole English and European operatic landscape, and proposed a raft of possible improvements; it is worth quoting in full for showing MacCunn's informed grasp of the situation, and for highlighting debates which still rage today.

⁵⁹ Graves, Perceval, 'The Moody-Manners Partnership', *Opera*, ix (1958), 563.

⁶⁰ Itinerary gleaned from the advertisement sections of *The Era*, 3 September – 24 December 1900.

⁶¹ *The Era*, 10 November 1900, 9.

⁶² 3 June 1899, reproduced in *MT*, xl (1 July 1899), 455.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - The close of the season at Covent Garden suggests some comment on the operatic conditions obtaining here and abroad. At Dresden for instance the King of Saxony grants £24,000 a year as subsidy, the orchestra in addition, being supported from his Majesty's purse.

In England opera is entirely without subsidy or endowment. Moreover, opera is presented before the German, French or Italian people in their native languages, while at Covent Garden any European language other than English is invariably used.

To emphasise this remarkable contrast more strongly, it may be added that opera flourishes in many German towns besides Dresden, under equally fortunate circumstances; whereas outside London, in the provinces of England, Scotland and Ireland, no operas are to be heard, in English or otherwise, except those given during flying visits of a week or fortnight's duration by touring English companies. In short there is no adequate opera in English in this country.

This subject is an interesting one to all opera-goers; but to the members of a profession which already is much overstocked and glutted by the apathetic and aimless annual output of our semi-national music-teaching institutions it is more than interesting. To them it is little less than a matter of life or death.

The opera house anywhere on the continent is one the largest employers of skilled musical labour of all kinds. Orchestral players, conductors, principal singers, chorus singers, *répétiteurs*, prompters, stage managers with a musical training, ballet directors, etc., go to make up a large proportion of the entire musical profession there. Here there is neither such employment to be found, nor is there any form of so advanced and inspiring a continuance of musical education.

For experience of operatic work is in itself a liberal musical education. Barred out from it as are our students and our musical public, it is almost pathetic to observe the eagerness with which any operatic excerpt in an orchestral concert programme is listened to. Indeed, it may be said our most popular programmes are now nearly altogether made up of extracted portions of operas - principally Wagnerian operas - with an occasional leaven added in the form of a Beethoven symphony. The contrast is always unfortunate. The listener is puzzled when asked to attend intelligently to, say, the Pastoral Symphony, sandwiched between the 'Walkürenritt' and the 'Vorspiel und Liebestod' from *Tristan und Isolde*. It is not in human nature, certainly least of all in enthusiastic student nature, to dwell on the formal and colder beauties of the symphony. The strenuous passions and kaleidoscopic splendours of the dramatic music will quite monopolise the attention; and in this way our lack of national opera loses us more than is at first sight evident. Our appreciation of so-called 'abstract' music is alarmingly on the decline, hindered, as it inevitably must be, by the increasingly frequent presence in our concert programmes of (also so-called) 'theatre' music. The public demands the excitements of opera.[...] For the student and general public there exists no opera at all. From this fertile source of imaginative education and remunerative employment our students 'finished' or unfinished are totally excluded. The prices of seats to hear music-drama (I mean to hear it effectively) are far beyond the means of most students. Indeed, the number of musicians,

of all sorts and conditions, who go to the opera in London more than a few times in the course of the season is surprisingly small. Abroad musicians go to the opera constantly.

As far as this want of opera in English is concerned, the cause of our deprivation is on the increase. We are not likely to support or encourage anything we do not appreciate, nor to appreciate what we imperfectly understand. It will never be possible for us to understand the significance of music-drama until it is properly presented before us in our native language. The recent 'boom' in comic opera *extravaganze* is partially due to the fact that the words, often very witty and droll, are in English. Had grand opera always been presented in Germany, Italy or France in an alien tongue, it is as likely as not that their appreciation and support of it, even to this day, would amount to as little as ours. I repeat that a comparison of opera in German in Germany with opera in England in English shows, virtually, that all popular performances in Germany are in German, and that none in England is in English. This contrast applies, with some minor exceptions, to France, Russia or Italy, as compared with Great Britain.

It is not difficult to understand why we were in this position many years ago. Then most of our music and musicians were imported from abroad. But nowadays, when there exist among us so many excellent English, American or colonial born singers, and so many experienced translators of foreign libretti into English, it is incomprehensible. Has the English-born, English-speaking and English-thinking 'man in the street' any decided preference for music-drama in any language but his own? Does the abstract act of listening to German, French or Italian words wedded to music give him a keener enjoyment than if the words were English? If he does not understand the language, is the very mystery of it comfortable to his imagination? If he does happen to understand, is that amount of his delight so much the less? There may be some grain of truth in this suggestion, for our insular worship of anything from 'foreign parts' is very characteristic of us in other connexions than those musical.

It has sometimes been said that English is a difficult or ineffective language in which to sing. So far from being the case, it is one of the most fluently beautiful, and, for lyrical or dramatic purposes, one of the most readily 'painted' by the infinitely varied resources of musical inflexion and emphasis. Even if the hackneyed foreign sneer were true, which it is not, that the English cannot act, surely it would be possible for foreign singers to learn English versions for use in this country on their visits here to demonstrate their vocal and histrionic superiority.

They are not to be blamed from coming. The immense sums which they are paid enable them to afford to perform in their own State-aided opera-houses at a reasonably modest remuneration. It has, I think, been pointed out that in this oblique manner we are very obligingly helping to subsidise foreign opera-houses.

Let the singers be of any nationality whatever, we should surely have at least one national opera-house at which all performances are in English.[...] Bread has no nationality, yet the Germans call it 'Brod' and the French 'pain'. We call it bread.

Without doubt we are a theatre-going people. And it is worth noticing that we are partial to a running orchestral accompaniment to the more energetic climaxes, or the extra pathetic episodes, of our spoken plays. I allude to what the programmes call 'incidental' and the profession knows as 'dramatic' music. Its application at the proper moment is quite a little art by itself. Here, at least, are the elements of an instinctive desire for music

with drama, if not for music-drama. But there are not wanting signs that the public taste is still further advanced.

In the provinces, and in London, performances by touring companies of opera in English (Wagnerian opera particularly) have often evoked the greatest enthusiasm even when given under the most disadvantageous and discounted conditions. *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, have been received (principally *Tristan and Isolde*) with the wildest demonstrations of delight. Having produced and conducted all these operas for two separate companies, in London, and in the provinces, I can vouch for the truth of this.

That infinitely better performances are easily possible, with the material which is now ready to our hand, no-one could question who has any acquaintance with the subject. We have a plentiful supply of accomplished singers of opera in English. We have orchestral players second to none in the world. There are excellent English translations of all the best operas. We have native conductors who have reason to know their business; and opportunity and practical experience are all that is necessary to give us more of these. A bright, good-looking, intelligent, and young voiced chorus is very readily mustered. We have suitable theatres, and experienced stage-managers, and, it but remains to add, a sympathetic public waiting for us to begin.

I say begin, for, excepting perhaps some performances of Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* in the ill-fated opera-house which the late Mr. Carte inexplicably attempted to establish on the run of one opera, no performances of opera in English, in or out of London have been half so good, as they could have been.

The old Carl Rosa Company, good as their representations were in the troupe's best days, have been, and are, like all existing opera companies at the present day, hampered by the want of anything approaching a really adequate orchestra.

And yet the performances of those companies were, and are enthusiastically welcomed again and again, by delighted and grateful audiences. But it will be necessary for this question of the orchestra to be taken in hand seriously by any manager who hopes to keep pace with the times.

A competent orchestra - both in quality and quantity - is of the first necessity, even if some rows of the stalls must be sacrificed for its accommodation. And in the light of what I have seen, in one company in particular, it should be said that it is foolish or worse to suppose that quality can be secured otherwise than by paying adequately, if reasonably, for it.

It is quite possible to make opera in English pay its own way, even without subsidy or endowment, and certainly without anything approaching the starvation [...] of anyone.

Few would deny the existence of a widespread and urgent demand in London and in the provinces for opera in English. Are we then, only for the want of organization and cooperation, to let matters drift along as they are? Or have we reason to hope confidently for a time to come soon when opera at a moderate price, adequately but not extravagantly supported, shall be regularly performed before English audiences in the beautiful and expressive language of this land?'⁶³

⁶³ 'Opera in English, To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 10 August 1901, 14.

It is perhaps significant that after having penned the above fluent critique MacCunn abandoned grand opera conducting, in favour of operetta and musical comedies, until in 1910 he was recruited by Beecham for his Covent Garden and His Majesty's seasons. A table of his various endeavours in London theatres is given below.⁶⁴

Table 1.1 MacCunn's conducting engagements 1902-11.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Show</u>	<u>Composer</u>	<u>Performances</u>
1902 2 April–30 July	Savoy	<i>Merrie England</i>	German	120
22 September -	Regional Tour	<i>Merrie England</i>	German	
24 November - 13 Jan 1903	Savoy	<i>Merrie England</i>	German	56
1903 23 January - 16 May	Savoy	<i>A Princess of Kensington</i>	German	115
Autumn	Regional Tour	<i>Merrie England/ A Princess of Kensington</i>	German	
10 December - 17 December 1904	Adelphi, then Lyric	<i>The Earl and the Girl</i>	Caryll	371
23 December 1903 - 22 January 1904	Adelphi	<i>Little Hans Anderson</i>	Slaughter	27 matinées in tandem with <i>The Earl....</i>
1905 5 Jan - 15 April	Lyric	<i>The Talk of the Town</i>	Haines/ Baker/ MacCunn	100
28 August - 24 February 1906	Lyric	<i>The Blue Moon</i>	Talbot/ Reubens	182
1906 12 November - 18 January 1907	Prince's Theatre, Manchester, then Prince of Wales, London	<i>The Vicar of Wakefield</i>	Lehmann	37

⁶⁴ Performance data comes from playbills in the Theatre Museum, London, and entries in Ganzl, Kurt, *The British Musical Theatre 1865-1914* (Volume 1 of 2), (London, Macmillan 1986).

1907 30 March - 3 August	Prince's Theatre, Manchester, then Apollo, London	<i>Tom Jones</i>	German	110
1909	Regional Tour	<i>A Waltz Dream</i>	Straus	
29 September - 27 November	Savoy	<i>The Mountaineers</i>	Somerville	61
15 December - 29 Jan 1910	Savoy	<i>Fallen Fairies</i>	German	51
1910 23 September - 3 November	Queen's	<i>Bonita</i>	Fraser-Simpson	42
1911 7 Jan - 27 April	Daly's	<i>A Waltz Dream</i>	Straus	111

When MacCunn took over from François Cellier at the Savoy in 1902, he collaborated with his friend Edward German; *Merrie England* was a successful show that was subsequently toured around Britain – twice! When German returned to the podium to conduct the 100th performance, the *Times* recognised that MacCunn had imprinted his personality on the score:

And though there was a suspicion once or twice of the spirit hanging fire, [...] this was due probably to the fact that Mr German had for the occasion taken Mr MacCunn's place. Mr German, of course, knows his own music best; but as Mr MacCunn, the regular conductor, has an individuality of his own, it is obvious that this must have made its mark on the performers.⁶⁵

MacCunn was pleased with the reception *Merrie England* received on its regional tour, particularly in Scotland: 'Whether it be haggis or harmony, 'mountain dew' or melody, the land o' cakes kens fine when it meets with a good thing. Hock aye,'⁶⁶ he is reported to have commented to its creator. Their relationship survived several difficult moments;

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 12 July 1902, 6.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Rees, Brian, *A Musical Peacemaker: the Life and Work of Edward German* (Bourne End, The Kensal Press 1986), 118.

there is a story of a spat in a green room before a performance and by 1907 the two men seemed to be treating one another with a certain wariness. This may have stemmed from MacCunn having suffered set-backs with his own stage ventures - as we have seen, the companion piece to *Diarmid* remained unfinished, his musical comedy *The Golden Girl* managed a provincial tour but no hearing in the capital, the operetta *Prue* was abandoned after the death of its librettist – and from his regarding German's success with a degree of envy. German, as was his way, tried to smooth the waters:

There are certain difficulties which I cannot very well explain. I am wondering if you think we should work together comfortably. The last time you were kind, very kind and helpful - indeed almost invaluable! But there came a time when I could not but feel that something had happened. Something wrong had happened. I have kept this to myself all these years and had your last letter not forced my hand I should have been still silent. (In the ordinary course of events there is not in all common sense any reason why you should not write opera with whomsoever you may choose.) As it is, I think it is best for me to tell you what is on my mind and if I am wrong you must forgive me. You will remember that evening in Dec 1901, in my room here, when I told you that I had signed to write three more comic operas to follow *Merrie England* and I said to you when Greer's wire 'On your advice will engage MacCunn', came, that the only difficulty I saw in our being associated was that you yourself were a composer. You assured me, however, that you only wished to conduct and help me with the production; we shook hands on this and you thanked me.

Your kindness and the pains you took at rehearsal I shall never forget. While wishing to have your able assistance I am wondering if it would be better for me to engage someone who is merely a conductor and not a composer.⁶⁷

German's emollient tactics worked and on the first night of *Tom Jones*, when he was suffering from the effects of overwork, MacCunn was beside him to take over the conducting if necessary. Their final collaboration, *Fallen Fairies* – a sort of sub-*Iolanthe* mixture of *féerique* and human *milieux* – was not a critical success, and was overshadowed by wranglings between German and the librettist W.S. Gilbert over the musical abilities of the American singer (and Gilbert protégée) Nancy McIntosh, which

⁶⁷ Letter, June 1906, quoted in Rees, 129-130.

led to a law-suit. When McIntosh was relieved of her duties, MacCunn wished to reinstate a song 'O love that rulest in our land' which was beyond McIntosh's capabilities but could be interpreted successfully by the new incumbent in the role, Amy Evans.

My dear Edward, Workman has just shown me a telegram from Gilbert prohibiting the use of the song in Act 2. That is, he prohibits it unless it be 'authorised' by him. Now what must be done in the matter is this. You can quite reasonably suggest to Gilbert that he revert to his original construction, re-instate the song, and omit the duet.

He told me that the duet was written in place of the song, didn't he? Well, the duet isn't much of a success with the public; whereas last night the house not only applauded, but cheered the song, and double-encored it - I didn't take the second encore, as Miss Evans was evidently, & quite naturally, pretty excited and tired.

I am convinced as things now stand that the retention of this song in the piece is, as things now stand, our only chance of avoiding an untimely closure. Therefore, dear boy, do see the old man, & if necessary "entreat" him, as the Scripture says.

Surely he must have more regard for your interests than deliberately, to allow the piece to 'peter out'. Thine, Hamish⁶⁸

At 11.30pm the same day, MacCunn wrote once more:

My dear Edward, I have just heard from Ward, per 'phone, that the song was done tonight - and that it again secured a double-encore. It is our last hope. I left the theatre about 9.30. Harry conducted, as I am feeling rather seedy. Indeed, if all this sort of damned nonsense continues, I am afraid I can be of no further active use in this matter.

I would do anything I possibly could for your sake old boy; but all this *agitato* business is getting on my nerves. In haste, Thine, H⁶⁹

The show closed just over a fortnight later.

MacCunn contributed original numbers for other shows he was conducting. He wrote a solo dance 'L'Entente Cordiale' for Winifred Hart-Dyke in *The Earl and the Girl*, five items for *The Talk of the Town* which the *Illustrated London News* considered to be the only worthwhile things in it, and seven new pieces for the remodelled *A Waltz Dream*. The casting of Liza Lehmann's *Vicar of Wakefield* caused some problems for producer David Bispham and his musical director:

⁶⁸ Letter dated 13 Jan 1910, *US-Nypm* MS107625.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

I had trouble in finding a tenor for the part of Squire Thornhill and was about to engage Walter Hyde when Madame Lehmann begged me to hear a young man whose voice had just been brought to her attention. Accordingly, one Sunday afternoon in September, 1906, I went with my conductor, the late Hamish MacCunn, and my manager Bram Stoker [...] to Madame Lehmann's house at Wimbledon, where we heard several selections beautifully rendered by a young Irishman named John McCormack.[...] I presently took McCormack aside and said, 'If I engage you for this part, you must try to get over your brogue.' [...] Though Mr McCormack accepted the part, he found it unsuitable and soon returned it.⁷⁰

The first night of the show was also not without its problems:

It will be remembered that immediately before the production of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Mr Lawrence Housman, whose name had been given as author of the book, decided to dissociate himself from that book on the grounds that "unauthorised changes and interpolations" had been made in it, leaving his name only as author of the lyrics. On the first night Mr Housman occupied the author's box with two friends and according to Mr Frank Curzon, he, or one of his companions "laughed derisively" during one of the sentimental moments of the first act. Mr Curzon then requested Mr Housman to leave his theatre, giving him five minutes to do so.⁷¹

In the last ten years of his life, MacCunn undertook three other conducting projects, both connected with his compositions and not. Firstly, he forged a link with the London Missionary Society and wrote the music for *A Pageant of Darkness and Light* performed by 800 people at the Orient Exhibition at the Royal Agricultural Hall between 4 and 11 June 1908. The *Pageant* was subsequently toured in America where 670,000 people paid to see it. In 1912 MacCunn was again approached by the Society to write a short cantata to commemorate the centenary of David Livingstone's birth; he conducted the first performance of *Livingstone the Pilgrim* in the Albert Hall on 19 March 1913.

In November 1913 the following announcement appeared in the *Musical Times*:

The conductors of the Stock Exchange Orchestral and Choral Society are now Mr Hamish MacCunn (orchestral) and Mr Frank Idle (choral). At each of the three concerts arranged for the season [1913-1914], a new work will be produced. On December 1, a suite *Gwenever* by Mr Vincent Thomas, on February 5th a suite from *Diarmid* by Mr.

⁷⁰ Bispham, David, *A Quaker Singer's Recollections* (London, MacMillan 1920), 333-334.

⁷¹ 'An author "ejected" from the theatre', *The Sketch*, 19 December 1906, 295.

MacCunn and on April 2nd Mr MacCunn's Border Ballad *The Death of Parcy Reed* will be given for the first time.⁷²

In the event the programmes changed from those advertised. The Stock Exchange Orchestral Society was one of the senior amateur - and, of course, exclusively male - organisations in London and, on the whole, their programmes pursued the well-trodden path of the amateur repertoire. MacCunn had directed one concert in the previous season and evidently had grand plans for his year in charge. He may have had to revise these plans due to a change of personnel in the orchestra as the Great War approached.

Certainly the critical reception was luke-warm: for one of the three concerts held on 5 February 1914 *The Times* critic wrote:

The flowing character of the themes, the strongly punctuated rhythms, and the picturesque orchestration made the performance of this overture [Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*] less difficult for the orchestra than that of Schumann's symphony [no.4], which is full of pitfalls. It must be recorded that many of them were not avoided, in spite of Mr. Hamish MacCunn's care. The orchestra, in fact, seemed a good deal weaker in the tone of the strings, and especially in the steadiness of the basses, than we remember them to have been for a long time and the entries were clumsily taken by wind as well as by strings many times in the course of the work.⁷³

MacCunn acted as an assistant conductor for Beecham's opera seasons. In March 1910 he was in charge of two Covent Garden performances of *Carmen* and subsequent repertory runs of *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Shamus o'Brien* [Stanford] and *Die Fledermaus* at His Majesty's Theatre. Between September 5 and December 17 (but presumably to fit in with his duties at the Queen's Theatre at the helm of *Bonita*) MacCunn was one of three conductors for the Tour of Beecham's Opera Comique Company (The other two being Beecham - who did very little of it- and Howard Carr).

⁷² *MT*, liv (1 November 1913), 757.

⁷³ *The Times*, 6 February 1914, 8.

The two operas produced were *Tales of Hoffmann* and *The Bat*, later renamed *A Viennese Masquerade*, and quickly dropped altogether to allow *Hoffmann* a clear run. There were 100 in the company, 40 in the orchestra and the great Caroline Hatchard played Olympia. In 1915, the Spring and Autumn seasons at the Shaftesbury Theatre included *Tales of Hoffmann*, *La Boheme* and *Faust*.

When conducting engagements began to thin out, MacCunn taught composition at the Guildhall School of Music for a short period (27 September 1912 - 6 December 1912), filling the place left empty by the sudden death of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.⁷⁴ He was engaged as Professor of Composition but was also involved in the opera class, the choral class and the orchestra.⁷⁵ He used his greater amount of newly available time to work on what would be his final major composition, the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* for chorus and orchestra. Revisiting the bloodthirsty poems which inspired his youthful orchestral pieces, he crafted a sequence of extensive choral settings (altogether lasting more than an hour) which show an undimmed predilection for the dramatic and picturesque. MacCunn had great hopes for these works to re-establish his reputation as a composer:

... you will have gathered that conducting has interfered a good deal with composition. That is an unquestionable fact, & is the real reason that the last ten years have not seen much new work from me. [...] Some blockheads would seem to be inclined to say that I have 'dried up'. But they don't know. And I have not yet found that any of them propose to endow me with a large income! I hope that the *Ballads* will answer them for the moment.⁷⁶

Sadly, the *Ballads* had to wait till after their creator's death for their first airing.

Janey Drysdale, Learmont's sister and the addressee of the above letter, was

⁷⁴ MacCunn also succeeded Coleridge-Taylor in the Stock Exchange Orchestra post.

⁷⁵ *City of London Record Office: Music Committee Minute Book*, xix (27 Sept 1912 - 18 Dec 1914), 31.

⁷⁶ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 29 December 1913, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 264.

instrumental in setting up the Dunedin Association and its magazine, which were concerned with the promotion of Scottish music and culture. Throughout his time in London, MacCunn kept up with what was happening in Scotland. He was pleased to be asked to be a member of the provisional committee of the Dunedin Association in 1911 but was keen to ensure that the right kind of Scottishness was celebrated: having mentioned that there are other societies in Scotland and Ireland with similar aims he points out that

These never seem to get much further than an enthusiasm for the too familiar ‘Scots wha’ hae’ order. Or else they incline in the other direction of a rather useless and irrelevant insistence (after the manner of the Duke of Argyll [!]) on ‘snippets’ of legendary particulars as to fairies, fairy beans, rowan trees, ‘bogles’ & such-like, common to all nations whose commerce with Scotland & Ireland has fired the Celtic imagination. It is, perhaps, little wonder that, betwixt the heroic & melancholy splendour of ‘the Gaelic’ as presented in Macpherson’s ‘Ossian’ and the domestic humans & incidents of Burns, the general public is quite in a ‘smirr’ as to Scottish poetry & music generally.⁷⁷

He encouraged Drysdale in her endeavours, praised the journal *The Dunedin Magazine*, was happy to hear of successful Scottish concerts promoted by the Association, and was most excited of all by the prospect of the establishment of a Scottish College of Music, even going as far as to get testimonials to his ability written by Parry, Cowen and Frederick Bridge. There are more than fifty letters to Drysdale on this subject in Glasgow University Library dating from 23 July 1913 to 13 October 1914. Here are some telling extracts from those letters:

- It must be a Scottish school of music - not a school of Scottish music
- The foreign professor - especially Teutonic - should be given a very ‘wide berth’ indeed. It is his interest to decry British music, & never more so than now.
- For it is plain -to my own mind anyhow - that, if a National Scottish School of Music be established, the director of it should be myself. I should like to assume the responsibility and I can’t think of anyone else who would be so well qualified to ensure the success of the establishment.

⁷⁷ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 6 August 1911, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 263/1.

- If Edinburgh wants me, I'll come.⁷⁸

In the event, the institution went to Glasgow; the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama⁷⁹ growing out of the Athenaeum School of Music.

MacCunn's letters often contain Scots words or phrases in place of the normal English equivalent; these phrases are always placed in rather apologetic inverted commas. Less attractively, his patriotism could involve antagonism to other races, in particular the English and the Germans. It is, however, quite likely that his comments on the Edinburgh Choral Union appointment were symptomatic of a wider suspicion of things German at the time:

I had not heard anything about the Choral Union chorus-mastership appointment; but from your letter I gather that a 'wee German lairdie' - or rather 'bardie' - has been engaged. He may be a Beethoven on tin wheels for all I can guess, but it seems strange that a foreigner should be concerned with training a chorus in respect of clear diction in the English language. I remember a German 'producer', when I conducted *Carmen* at the Beecham season at Covent Garden some three years ago, astonishing the English Chorus by asking them to show great excitement when they shouted 'To ze gale! to ze gale!!'. 'To the gaol' was what I, in my prejudiced way, had to advance as an amendment.⁸⁰

and, more explicitly:

.... Never heed the Feuer-Zauber gentleman. [...]Scotland for the Scot, and away with the foreign devils. I am becoming as bad as a Chinaman in my aversion to them.⁸¹

Feuer-Zauber translates as 'firework': the reference is to Gottlieb Feuerberg who conducted the Choral Union for their New Year's Day performance of *Messiah* in 1914 and also at the opening ceremony of the Usher Hall on 6 March 1914 when Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* was given.

⁷⁸ Letters to Janey Drysdale, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 263.

⁷⁹ The 'Royal' title was granted by King George VI in 1947.

⁸⁰ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 12 July 1913, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 263/8.

⁸¹ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 23 July 1913, *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 263/10.

MacCunn's nationalism clearly influenced his choice of subject for compositions; it was also reflected in his love of Scottish folksong. Back in 1891 he had produced an album of *100 Songs and Ballads of Scotland* published by Patersons of Edinburgh. A.M. Henderson reported on MacCunn's lecture on Scottish folksong at the Glasgow Athenaeum School of Music in 1896:

This lecture he illustrated himself, playing on that evening some of his own *Scottish Dances* which had just been published. He had a genuine love of our old Scottish Folk Songs, especially those of pronounced quality and character. He equally disliked imitations of folk-song of a spurious type. The kind of thing he detested was represented by 'Wha wadna fight for Charlie'⁸², 'Within a mile o' Edinburgh Toun' or Hume's feeble setting of 'Afton Water' with its grace notes and cadenza. MacCunn could never understand how anyone could sing this setting, when the beautiful old melody, with its lovely flowering quality was at hand.⁸³

It was to Janey Drysdale again that he wrote early in 1916 giving her intimations of his failing health:

As to myself and my doings, perhaps you may have noticed that my name has been 'out of the bill' of the opera at the Shaftesbury Theatre for some two months.⁸⁴ I know that you will be grieved to hear that this is due to the state of my health. I am seriously and dangerously ill. The trouble is cancer of the throat and *four* of the most distinguished surgeons in London have agreed that an operation is utterly impossible. I am being treated by inoculation & in other ways, and have lively hopes of recovery. But the medical prognostications leave me little real hope - & not very much time. I suffer very little, except in swallowing. And my voice is almost entirely gone. But God is good; & I know that whatever is to be will be right. And I don't think I am at all afraid.⁸⁵

MacCunn died on 2 August 1916 surrounded by his family at home at 6, Abbey Court, Abbey Road, St. Johns Wood.⁸⁶ On the death certificate the cause of death was noted as 'Carcinoma of Larynx 7 months'. Among the mourners at the funeral were Fergus and

⁸² But there is a setting of this in his collection!

⁸³ Henderson, A[rchibald]. M[artin]., 'Hamish MacCunn' in *Scottish Field*, December 1955, 67.

⁸⁴ MacCunn was to have conducted Liza Lehmann's *Everyman* but was too ill.

⁸⁵ Letter to Janey Drysdale, 7 January 1916, *GB-En* MS3651/108-109.

⁸⁶ The family residence since 1903.

Alison, James - his father, George -his brother, Professor John MacCunn - his uncle, the singers Louise Kirkby Lunn and Iver McKay, the violinist Wynn Reeves and the composer Algernon Ashton. Floral tributes were received from the actor/producer Robert Courtneidge, the Beecham Opera Company, the Stock Exchange Choral and Orchestral Society, Liza Lehmann, the operatic soprano Mignon Nevada and Edward German. He was buried in Hampstead Cemetery, his grave later the subject of a watercolour by W.S.Percy done in 1919.⁸⁷ After his death, Alison took pains to promote her husband's music: for instance, a series of letters in Glasgow University Library chronicles her efforts to get the light opera *Prue* performed. In 1922 she was approached by Louie Pounds on behalf of her brother Charles, expressing his keenness to put on a production of *Prue* if the libretto could be modernised. Alison tried to get in contact with the librettist Charles Taylor's widow, eventually finding her through placing an advertisement in the *Times*. Although both ladies agreed on the production plans, nothing appears to have come of them. Alison together with Charles O'Brien - Hamish's erstwhile pupil - arranged for the distribution of his scores to various libraries, most ending up at Glasgow University. Alison died in 1950, aged 83.

In his preface to the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* MacCunn was able to assert that the three early orchestral pieces 'have made themselves favourably known in most quarters of the world where orchestral concerts take place.' After his death, these works together with the choral cantatas held their place in the repertoire for some time. Indeed the *Ballads* themselves received their very first performances, the three for mixed chorus under Sir Henry Wood in Sheffield on 19 April 1921, and the male voice *Parcy Reed* given by the Barclays Bank Musical Society on 25 March 1925. However, twenty

⁸⁷ GB-Gu Special Collections Cal5-y.8.

years on from his death, the performances petered out. The cantatas were occasionally chosen by amateur choral societies, but with the exception of *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, other works needed special pleading if they were to be heard. *Jeanie Deans* was revived by the BBC in 1937 in a concert version conducted by Ian Whyte, who again conducted a radio performance in 1951 for the Festival of Britain. The Glasgow Grand Operatic Society also produced it in that year, and in 1968 - the centenary of his birth - BBC Scotland broadcast a shortened version of the opera. Opera West, Ayr gave the first staged performance for more than thirty years in 1986 and again in 1994; *Jeanie Deans* travelled into the southern hemisphere in 1996 for a two-piano accompanied staging by Opera Waikato, New Zealand.⁸⁸ At about the same time a CD dedicated to the music of MacCunn and containing extensive highlights from the opera was issued on the Hyperion label.⁸⁹ To give an idea of the problems encountered and dedication necessary to generate a performance of MacCunn's work we may return to 1968: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was to be sung for the International Gathering of the Clans in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh on 1 May that year. Sandy Scott of the Music Department at Moray House College of Education found the manuscript full score at the Royal College of Music, some of the string parts in the National Library of Scotland and wind/ percussion parts in the British Library. Scott and his students then copied out the missing parts. MacCunn's songs have found a champion in the soprano Patricia MacMahon and some of his piano works have been recorded by Murray MacLachlan.

It is high time that choral societies stepped outside their customary ambit of Baroque, Classical and Elgarian warhorses and discovered the dramatic dynamism of

⁸⁸ Scottish Opera, the only professional company in Scotland, has shamefully never mounted *Jeanie Deans* despite vigorous lobbying by many people, chief among them Dr. John Purser.

⁸⁹ Hyperion CDA66815, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and soloists, conducted by Martyn Brabbins.

MacCunn's cantatas⁹⁰. Even better would be a performance - concert or staged - of the opera *Diarmid*. We may have to wait a bit longer until scholarship informing public taste completely re-evaluates this and other music from the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

⁹⁰ A notable exception in recent years has been the performance of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* given by the Eildon Singers, conducted by Catherine Fish, at Melrose Parish Church on 23 May 2004.

CHAPTER 2

Orchestral Works

‘O Caledonia! stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!’

(from Sir Walter Scott *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* Canto VI)

Orchestral Works

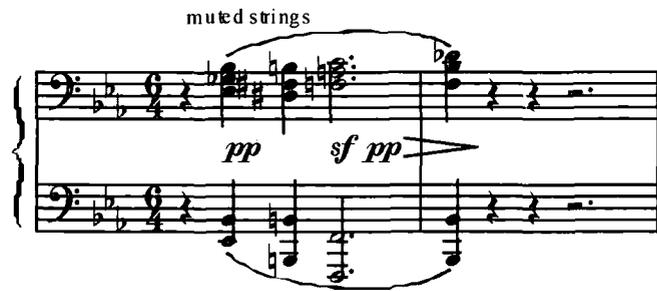
A desire to think in terms of the orchestral palette had been growing in the young Hamish even before he went to the Royal College of Music in 1883. An *Overture in C minor* dated January 1882 turns out to be a piano piece, and like the first choral setting of *The Moss Rose* suffers from overworking one musical idea in a rigid phrase structure.

Another, opposite but typical failing of a young composer - the inclusion of too many bitty, undeveloped ideas - is apparent in the sketchy *Fantasia Overture in e minor* which MacCunn conceived in Brodick on the Isle of Arran in September 1883. But the fragments themselves give tantalising foretastes of future interests and disciplines. An imposing 'motto' theme on brass answered by full orchestra is pregnant with developmental possibilities: with its short phrases and chromatic undertow it anticipates the extraordinary opening pages of *The Moss Rose* (setting 2, 1885).

Figure 2.1 *Fantasia Overture in E minor: 1-5 / The Moss Rose: 1-2*⁹¹

The image shows a musical score for two sections: *Fantasia Overture in E minor* (measures 1-5) and *The Moss Rose* (measures 1-2). The score is written for Tr./Horns and Tutti. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into four measures. The first measure is marked *mf* and the second measure is marked *p*. The third measure is marked *mf* and the fourth measure is marked *Tutti*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁹¹ The sketches for the *Fantasia Overture in E minor* are to be found at GB-Gu MS MacCunn 22, and the full score of *The Moss Rose* is at GB-Gu MS MacCunn 23. Further discussion of the opening of *The Moss Rose* starts on page 84.



Unsurprisingly the overture ends with this same motif but quietly, not triumphantly. In the middle, MacCunn clearly envisaged a sonata form structure with unity being effected by Lisztian transformation of themes. The sketch of a more lyrical triple time second idea posits the clarinet over tremolando strings and a strong bass line. It is an unanswerable question as to how much of this material would be re-used in *Cior Mhor* - performed by August Manns at the Crystal Palace on 27 October 1885 when MacCunn was yet at the RCM, but now frustratingly lost.⁹² *Cior* or *Cir Mhor* (pronounced ‘keer-vor’) - literally ‘big sheep’ - is an imposingly rugged peak on Arran. It is one of the four Corbetts on the island and is a favourite with rock climbers. MacCunn would have been aware of its distinctive outline from Brodick but may have walked up to it either by way of Glen Rosa or, from Corrie, via the beautiful but boggy Glen Sannox. In any case he was deeply affected by the scenery and was keen to record his feelings in music. The dramatic nature of the mountain appears to have been successfully caught in the music: no programme notes or details of the first performance have come to light, but *Cior Mhor* was repeated in Glasgow⁹³ and again in Greenock in January 1887 ‘when it was much admired for its perfect wealth of fresh idea and great power of orchestration’ and for its depiction of that

⁹² When Alison MacCunn delivered various compositions to Charles O’Brien for him to supervise their distribution to libraries, an inventory mentions the orchestral parts to *Cior Mhor*, but O’Brien adds a footnote ‘Not found in this parcel’, 3 April 1949, at *GB-Gu* Special Collections MS MacCunn C1.

⁹³ Saturday Popular Concert, 22 January 1887.

peak ‘as seen under two aspects of nature.’⁹⁴ It is possible that the two contrasting themes in the *Fantasia Overture* were worked up into the two aspects of *Cior Mhor*. The critics recognised that here was a young man’s work, and one somewhat tartly noted:

As a rule, it is wiser for aspiring composers to accomplish their maturing process in private. When we meet Mr. MacCunn again in our concert programmes we hope for a riper and more complete illustration of the power and originality which even in this, his first attempt, are already perceptible.⁹⁵

Certainly this critic’s hopes would be fulfilled in the next orchestral piece that appeared - *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*.

Notwithstanding the symphonic outputs of Cipriani Potter and George Macfarren in the mid nineteenth century and the early symphonies of Parry and Stanford in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s, the most favoured form for English composers venturing into the realm of orchestral music at this time was the concert overture after the models of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Berlioz. An early example of this genre in England was MacFarren’s sparkling *Chevy Chace* (1836), originally commissioned as a prelude to a melodrama by Planché but acquiring a life of its own as a concert overture – and much performed in this manner during the composer’s lifetime. Anticipating MacCunn’s indebtedness to Border Ballads for inspiration, *Chevy Chace* was a popular ballad recounting a feud between the Percy and Douglas families over hunting rights on the Scottish Border, sung to three different tunes, one of which is incorporated into Macfarren’s composition. Mendelssohn, who conducted this work in Leipzig, was to cast his musical influence over the English scene for much of the nineteenth century. Sterndale Bennett rivalled the German’s fairy landscapes in his overtures *Parisina* (1835) and *The Naiads* (1836) while Sullivan’s

⁹⁴ Hadden, J.C., Scottish Composers and Musicians, Hamish MacCunn’, *The Scottish Musical Monthly*, i no.3 (December 1893), 54.

⁹⁵ ‘Saturday Popular Concerts’, *Glasgow Herald*, 24 January 1887, 4.

Overture di Ballo (1870) and *Iolanthe* overture (1882) partake of a similarly delicate scoring. Certainly the shade of Mendelssohn's *The Hebrides* hovers over MacCunn's *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* as we shall see, and not merely regarding their shared depiction of Scottish landscapes. On the purely Scottish ascendancy, Mackenzie's *Scottish Rhapsodies no. 1 & 2* from 1880 provide a relevant ancestor. In his interview with George Bernard Shaw, MacCunn was unwilling to identify favourite composers - 'You might as well ask me which I like best, my arms or my legs.' - but expressed a fondness for Weber, especially *Der Freischütz* and *Oberon*, and for Gounod.⁹⁶ More significant are his remarks in the same interview, reported by Shaw, that map out the musical future in terms of dramatic and descriptive works, not abstract ones.

He has always put programmes to his works on the simple ground that, as he always meant something when he wrote them, he may as well tell people what the meaning is.⁹⁷

The programme for *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* is simply a paean to the Scottish countryside, with a tag from Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* for a title. Unlike other nineteenth-century symphonic poems ostensibly based on reactions to the physical world, this piece has little real literary mediation between subject and music; its predecessors in this respect would be less *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* (after a poem by Hugo) and more *Vltava*. Writing to the *Yorkshire Post* critic Herbert Thompson in 1912, MacCunn expanded a little:

... there is nothing particular to say about the intention of the work, except to say that it is just 'about the deer and the heather, & about the ancient old chiefs that are all by with it long syne, & just about what songs are about in general. And whiles I would make believe that I had a set of pipes & I was playing. I played some grand springs, & I

⁹⁶ Shaw, George Bernard, *London's Music in 1888-9, as heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, Constable 1937), 110-113 - in particular, the prelude to his opera *Faust*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

thought I played them awful bonny: I vow whiles I could hear the squeal of them!’ As Alan Breck Stewart says in Stevenson’s ‘Catriona’, Chap.XI.⁹⁸

The Land of the Mountain and the Flood bears the opus number 3, coming after *Cior Mhor* (presumably op.1) and the cantata *Bonny Kilmeny* (op.2). Considered together with *The Moss Rose* (setting 2 – with no opus number), it means that MacCunn had three experiences of orchestral writing previous to this overture. Nonetheless, the confidence he shows in scoring this work is remarkable. The forces required are conventional - double woodwind, 2 horns (not 4), 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba, timpani, cymbals and strings. MacCunn would reuse stylistic and structural traits from this overture in the two succeeding orchestral ballads, and so a tabular analysis is displayed overleaf for ready reference.

Figure 2.2 *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*: thematic elements.

1-8 First group

Allegro con moto

Cello

p

5

sf *p*

see bar 20 of Transition overleaf

⁹⁸ Letter to Herbert Thompson, 27 February 1912, GB-LEbc MS 361/162. This passage quoted actually comes from Chapter XII.

Transition

45-52 Second Group

Table 2.1 *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*: tabular analysis.

Exposition 1-100	
First Group 1-21	
1-16	Two 8-bar statements of main theme (B minor) announcing Scottish character straightway with dotted rhythms, Scotch snaps and use of the Aeolian mode. First statement on lower strings (melody in upper cellos), second statement for full strings (melody in first violins).
16-21	Build-up over descending bass line to lead to

<u>Transition 21-44</u>	Abrupt 4-note figure (20-1 cello and double bass derived from bar 7; see example on previous page) contrasts with a yearning clarinet phrase (foreshadowing bars 45-6 of Second Group). Harmony moves from ii7c down to V7 ⁽⁴⁻³⁾ in A minor, then this pattern is repeated sequentially a step down in G minor. The 4-note figure is rhythmically telescoped and repeated, underpinning a descending sequence of augmented 6th-dominant progressions touching f sharp, e, and repeatedly D, before coming to rest on a chord of A (35)
35-44	Dominant preparation: forte full orchestral chords of V, Ic, V, interspersed with an oscillation in the viola; horn calls over the oscillation.
<u>Second Group 44-100</u>	
44-60	D major: A lyrical melody, pentatonic at the outset then adding the remaining two notes, G (47), C sharp (50) and modulating to its dominant. Melody stated twice, first in second violins with viola semiquaver accompaniment and simple bass line, then in first violins with fuller accompaniment (strings, woodwind and horns).
60-100	Third, full orchestral statement ff with running bass line but considerably extended as if the composer has been carried away by the beauty of his creation. Hemiolaic phrasing (75-78 & 86-7), yearning appoggiaturas (79) created soft to be made louder immediately finally yield to a Ic chord and echoes of the main theme by oboe and horn over tonic and subdominant harmony.
<u>Development 101-191</u>	
101-109	Horn phrase descends and settles above a chord of F sharp major i.e. the dominant of the Tonic Major!
110-139	'Tonic' (B) pedal throughout all these bars gives the lie to theorists who maintain that the home key should be shunned in development sections. Fragments of both groups are heard: first group - horn, 1st violin (B7), second group - horn (E then F sharp minor), clarinet and oboe before the speed increases, more instruments are added and triplets appear. The B pedal reveals itself (not wholly unexpectedly) to be a dominant preparation for
140-168	A fortissimo skirling passage in modal E minor. Trumpet plays a heroic variant of the first group idea. Fuller sequential repetition of this phrase now in c minor (!) leading to E flat major. As the music winds down, E flat becomes D sharp and the key settles on B major the dominant of E minor.
169-191	First group in E minor but the phrase gets stuck on D major, decorated with Mendelssohnian semiquavers in the flute and clarinet. Augmented 6th chord on G (=G7) pushes down onto F sharp and dominant preparation for the recapitulation gets underway. Pre-echoes of the first group appear.

<u>Recapitulation 192-280</u>	
192-212	First group is restated disappointingly exactly. The scoring is identical.
212-230	Retransition altered to move to Tonic major
230-280	Second group in B major slightly re-scored (e.g. first of three statements is taken by upper 'cellos for the simple reason that the transposition has rendered it out of the second violin's range. Second violin comes in very soon!)
<u>Coda 280 - 327</u>	
	Pairs of woodwind instigate a triumphant revisiting of parts of the second group theme. This is a new sonority for this piece, as is the brass choir, which is isolated twice. Echoing the characteristic harmony of the second group, the final cadence is plagal.

Formally, the overture follows the normative sonata pattern, both in terms of the sequence of events and the key scheme. Indeed the recapitulation - as we shall find in other sonata and ternary movements - is virtually the same, apart from the retransition. In the short score sketch, dated 25 October 1886 MacCunn does not even write out the first group recapitulation at all, but pencils in '*come prima*'. He shows no desire to carry over developmental processes into the recapitulation or coda; the development itself is more of an episode and was criticised as such by Shaw.⁹⁹ Much of the sweep of the piece is effected by the open-air quality of the two main themes. There is clear link between the themes in their shared characteristic rhythm dotted crotchet, three quavers, crotchet: this pattern rounds off the first theme and is developed in bars 15 - 21. The three quavers /crotchet motif is used sequentially in the transition (20-24) in dialogue with the yearning clarinet pattern (derived from notes 3 and 4 of the first theme and notes 7-9 of the second

⁹⁹ 'I object, by the bye, to the 'working out' section, which Mr MacCunn would never have written if his tutors had not put it into his head. I know a lady who keeps a typewriting establishment. Under my advice she is completing arrangements for supplying middle sections and recapitulations for overtures and symphonies at twopence a bar, on being supplied with the first section and coda.' in *Shaw's Music* (London, Bodley Head 1981) i, 950. Tovey's remark about Schumann comes to mind in this connection: '[he] cannot develop an idea, he can only make sequences on it' *Essays in Musical Analysis*, ii (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1972), 46.

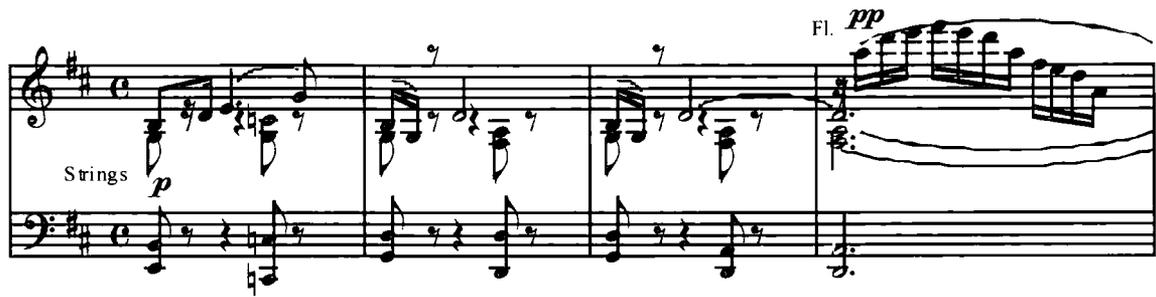
theme). The pattern noted above is used in bars 47 and 49 of the second theme and in the corresponding places when repeated. All in all, the exposition **does** possess the element of spontaneous growth that is not so apparent in the development.

In looking for possible stylistic forbears, Mendelssohn's *The Hebrides* overture makes its presence felt in a number of ways. Both overtures are in B minor; in the statements of their exposition material both composers favour working from a low sounding instrument, spreading upwards to a higher one on the repeat (MacCunn: 1-20 and 44-71, Mendelssohn: 1-20 and 47-70). Both developments feature a sudden stormy outburst - no doubt reflecting the changeable Scottish weather or, perhaps more obliquely in *Mountain and Flood*, a bellicose episode from Scotland's bloody history - and at the start of both recapitulations the same F sharp/G semiquaver oscillation is heard. There is a further less tangible connection: in the MacCunn at bar 168, the first theme is stated in e minor, making the listener believe that this is a quasi-Schubertian recapitulation in the 'wrong' key. In fact just the beginning of the theme is stated before settling on a chord of D with a flute decoration over the top. Similarly at the start of *The Hebrides*' development the first motif is stated *in the home key* but stopping on a held chord for two bars. This slowing of the harmonic rhythm after an incomplete statement of the theme seems to link the two works:

Figure 2.3 Mendelssohn *The Hebrides*: 96-98.



The Land of the Mountain and the Flood: 168-171.



During MacCunn's exposition the third full-blooded statement of the second group veers off into Brahmsian territory with hemiolaic sequences over cycle of 5ths harmony (75 - 80).

Figure 2.4 *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood: 75-80.*



Although it may be straightforward to pick out influences on the teenage composer, there are enough personal musical fingerprints to ensure his originality. Aside from the obvious Scottishisms noted in the commentary above, there are distinctive

features which will reappear in the other orchestral works and elsewhere. In the melodic and rhythmic sphere, we find widespread use of dotted rhythms, Scotch snaps, pentatonic and hexatonic scales. In this and the two companion orchestral ballads, MacCunn demonstrates a tendency towards creating open-ended melodies whose later stages can be altered and extended as necessary – usually through fragmentation, repetition and sequence.¹⁰⁰ The second lyrical theme is an example of this: the first and second statements (44-60) are similar, but the third (60-94) is developed to create a sustained climax that finally emerges onto a Ic chord of D. This model is followed particularly closely in the second group of *The Ship o' the Fiend*. There is much use made of sequential patterns leading to clear climaxes. The moderate-paced 'Scottish' melody in triple time with one or two chords per bar spawns many progeny in later works: e.g. in the two subsequent orchestral ballads, *Highland Memories/ I*, 'Eila's Song' from *Diarmid*, and 'In the Glen' for piano, to note only the most obvious examples.

Harmonically speaking, as a consequence of the style of *melodic* writing, pentatonic/ hexatonic themes are harmonised with I - IV - I progressions. This refers to the second theme again, and when this is treated in the Coda the final cadence has to be plagal as a result. (319-320).

A fondness for very expressive and usually unprepared ninth chords with the melody line pushing up to the ninth itself (e.g. bar 50) becomes a MacCunn hallmark. Similar surprisingly rich chords had appeared earlier in *The Moss Rose* and *Bonny Kilmeny* (VS no.2, p7, ss3-4). As yet there are few sightings of another MacCunn favourite – the dominant 11th chord - but these will become commoner before long, as will sudden

¹⁰⁰ See **Figure 2.8** on page 62 for a full illustration of this technique.

lurches into remote keys or onto unrelated chords; in this predominantly diatonic work there are admittedly fewer surprises. However the skirling passage in E minor (140 - 150) moves to C minor (!!) for an even more forceful restatement (151 -159). This juxtaposition of unrelated minor chords may ultimately derive from the composer's selective digestion of Wagner, in this case the 'Tarnhelm' motif from *The Ring*.

For MacCunn the orchestrator, the string body is at the core of his writing and the amount of solo writing for wind/brass is relatively limited. The danger of too much doubling is avoided here, but in minor works like *Highland Memories* (1897) the texture is often unnecessarily thick. Isolation of a woodwind choir does not happen at all and antiphony between blocks of sound is only occasionally used; but at 287 and 294 the brass section are allowed to take off with no string safety net. The same thing will occur in *The Ship o' the Fiend*; another point of contact between these two works is the busy middle strings accompaniment to the second group melodies. Here the violas are kept active while the second violins play the tune (41-51) and then both parts scurry around when the tune is passed to the first violins (52 - 60).

The Land of the Mountain and the Flood quickly established itself in the repertoire of many orchestras. It opened the Fortieth Anniversary Concert of the Institution of the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts on 19 October 1895.¹⁰¹ It was also arranged for other instrumental combinations. In the Court Circular for 22 January 1903 we read

The King has commanded the Band of the Scots Guards to play in the Grand Quadrangle at Windsor every morning when the Court is in residence [...]. Yesterday morning the

¹⁰¹ This was an all-English affair. The other pieces on the programme were Parry's *Piano Concerto*, a selection from the incidental music to *The Tempest* by Sullivan, Walford Davies' *First Symphony* (premiere), the Romance 'There's a bower of roses' from *The Veiled Prophet* by Stanford, a selection from *Suite for Strings* by Cowen and Mackenzie's *Scotch Rhapsody no. 1*.

band played the overture 'The Mountain and the Flood' (Hamish MacCunn), to which the King and Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales listened at the windows of the oak dining room.¹⁰²

MacCunn used *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* as the model for his two orchestral ballads *The Ship o' the Fiend* and *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow*. But there is an important difference, in that in the latter two works he is trying to illustrate a particular narrative rather than just give an picture of his homeland. William Allingham's 1879 edition of *The Ballad Book* had been the composer's constant *vademecum* from childhood onwards. He found it to be 'an inexhaustible source of delight and entertainment' and recommended that 'it should be in the library of everyone who loves to read and to dream of ancient beauty and valour.'¹⁰³ There is precious little beauty or valour on show in the two narratives chosen for orchestral treatment, but there is much brutality and bloodshed. *The Ship o' the Fiend* is based on the ballad *The Daemon Lover* which in turn partakes of a wider international genre of stories telling how a dead man rises from the grave, and comes to fetch the girl he loved in life. *The Flying Dutchman* is an obvious starting point; then Erben's retelling of the Bohemian version, *The Spectre's Bride*, was set as a cantata by Dvořák. The third of J.B. MacEwen's orchestral *Border Ballads* (1905-8) is 'The Demon Lover', as unfocused and prolix a work as MacCunn's is concise and pertinent. Allingham's synopsis of this ballad runs thus: 'A woman, first faithless to her lover, and then to her husband and child, is supernaturally punished.' The supernatural punishment involves the demon luring the woman onto a ship and sinking it. The full text of the ballad as used by MacCunn is given on the next page.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 22 January 1903, 7.

¹⁰³ Preface to *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* (London, Weekes 1913).

The Ship o' the Fiend

“O where hae ye been, my lang-lost
lover,
 This seven lang years and mair?”
“O I’m come again to seek your love
 An’ the vows that ye did swear.”

“Now haud your tongue o’ my love and
vows,
 For they can breed but strife;
Now haud your tongue o’ my former
vows,
 For I am anither man’s wife.”

* * * * * *
“O fause are the vows o’ womankind,
 But fair is their fause bodie;
I wad never hae trodden on Irish ground
 Were it no for the love o’ thee!

* * * * * *
“Ye may leave your husband to himsel’,
 And your little son also,
And sail wi’ me across the sea,
 Sae fair the wind did blow.

* * * * * *
“See ye not yon seven pretty ships –
 The eighth brought me to land –
With merchandize and mariners,
 And music on every hand?

“There’s mantles warm to wrap my love,
 O’ the silk and soft velvet,
And rich attires to deck her head,
 And costly shoon for her feet.”

* * * * * *
She has drawn the slippers on her feet,
 Weel wrought wi’ threads of
gold,
And he’s wrapt her round wi’ the soft
velvet,
 To haud her frae the cold.

“O how do you like the ship?” he said,
 “Or how do you like the sea?”
And how do you like the bold mariners
 That wait upon thee and me?”

“O weel I like the ship,” she said,
 “And weel I like the sea;
But where are all your mariners?
 I see nain but thee and me.”

They hadna sailed a league, a league,
 A league, but barely three,
When eerie grew the lift above,
 And gurly grew the sea.

She hadna sailed a league, a league,
 A league, but barely three;
When she espied his cloven hoof,
 And wept right bitterlie.

* * * * * *
“O what hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,
 That the sun shines sweetly on?”
“O yon are the hills of Heaven,” he said,
 Where you will never win.”

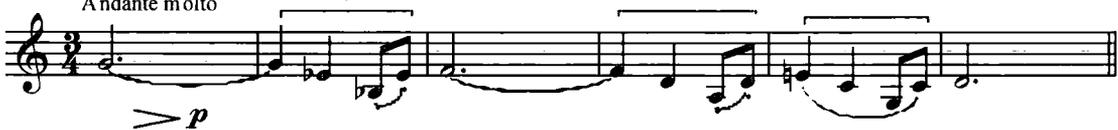
“O whatna mountain is yon?” she said,
 “Sae dreary wi’ frost and snow?”
“O yon is the mountain o’ Hell,” he
cried,
 Where you and I maun go!”

* * * * * *
The clouds grew black and the wind
grew loud,
 And the levin filled her e’e;
And waesome wailed the snaw-white
sprites
 Out o’er the roaring sea.

He strack the mainmast wi’ his hand,
 The foremast wi’ his knee:
He split the gallant ship in twain,
 And sank her in the sea.

The way the music is moulded to the sense of the words (if not to every incident in the story) produces a much more fluid-sounding version of sonata form which, having laid down its melodic material develops it with a single-minded violence which continues far into the recapitulation, before the ‘shock’ ending. In fact, the way the development merges into the recapitulation lends this piece a feeling of something throughcomposed and thus truer to the ongoing narrative. A process of Lisztian transformation is applied to the opening idea, initially gently stated by the horn and oboe in what feels like a slow introduction but is in fact the first group, but subsequently changed into something rapid and fiendish.

Figure 2.5 *The Ship o’ the Fiend*: transformations of first group melody.

Horn : 8-13
Andante molto


Oboe : 17-21


Viola : 81-85


Tutti : 129-134


There is also a relation
 to the second
 group melody
 Violin 1: 60-4


Oboes : 155-7



Trumpet 1 : 216 - 9



Violin 1 : 286-9



A table below links the words of the ballad with their musical portrayal as far as is possible.

Table 2.2 *The Ship o' the Fiend*: tabular analysis.

Section	Bars	Commentary	Ballad
Exposition First Group 1-49	1-3	D minor. <u>Seven</u> brusque beats of introduction 'Allegro molto'	'O where hae ye been, my lang-lost lover,/ This <u>seven</u> lang years and mair?
	4-16	'Andante molto'. Horn solo above rich Wagnerian harmony. Introduction of main motif 'x'. Neapolitan and aug. 6th chords made more telling by the addition of appoggiaturas (sometimes chromatic).	'O I'm come again to seek your love/ An' the vows that ye did swear'
	17-49	A dialogue between oboe (woman) and horn (man) over tense tremolando strings (40-41) Much use of 'x' (see example on previous page) in the instrumental solos. G dom 9 in harmony suggests Dorian mode. Key slips easily into F major at 49.	[Verses 1-4: Conversation between man and woman]

Second Group 49-153	49-71	A huge paragraph. A typically lyrical second subject. As in <i>Mountain & Flood</i> , a semiquaver oscillation (49-52) and a melody beginning with an upbeat. In addition, it starts in the 'cellos and after 8 bars is repeated in the first violins with a richer accompaniment, extended to 11 bars by sequential tags in the woodwind.	[Verses 5-9: a list of comforting things that the man will give the woman - warm mantles, costly shoes, soft velvets. A picture of the woman enjoying these luxuries.
	72-81	A sudden plunge into D flat before coming out to F minor.	
	81-97	<i>un poco mosso</i> : first group derivative answered by a C major chord, this pattern repeated with altered scoring.	
	97-153	For the third statement of the second subject in the 'right' key (cf. <i>Mountain & Flood</i> again) we are evidently heading for a climax. From 97 it is marked <i>agitato</i> , the scoring is for full woodwind and strings. 117-128 - an alternation between ii7c in F minor and hyperdominant of F climaxing at 129 with full orchestra on Ic (cf. <i>Mountain & Flood</i>). The melody here appears to be new but is related to the first phrase of the second group (see example on previous page). Subsides, reinforcing key of F through scalar and arpeggio shapes.	A sense of agitation underlies this pleasant scene when the woman realises that there is no crew on the ship apart from the man.]
Development 153 - 216	153-165	By this stage in the poem the Fiend (revealed to be such by his cloven foot) has forced the heroine away from her husband and son, onto his hellish ship. Over a menacing rhythmic ostinato, snippets of the First Group are heard with sinister rumblings in the bass drum.	10.'They hadna sailed a league, a league,/ A league, but barely three,/ When eerie grew the lift above,/ And gurlie grew the sea. 11.She hadna sailed a league, a league,/ A league, but barely three;/ When she espied his cloven hoof,/ and wept right bitterly.'

	165-172	A hint of peace as a snippet of the second subject is heard in D.	2.'O what hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,/ That the sun shines sweetly on?'/O yon are the hills of Heaven ' he said,/'Where you will never win.'
	172-202	This is rudely rebuffed by the trombones, and the process starts again up a step. This time there is no hint of peace but an extraordinary progression blasted out ff by brass and strings.	13.'O whatna mountain is yon?'she said,/Sae dreary wi' frost and snow?'/ O yon is the mountain o' Hell , he cried, / Where you and I maun go!'
	202-216	Arrival on the home dominant and a reference to the abrupt opening three bars of the work instigates a rushing string semiquaver passage (suggestive of the wind?) which hurls itself headlong into...	14.The clouds grew black, and the wind grew loud, /
<u>Recapitulation</u> 216-302	216-264	First group recapitulated ff/ full orchestra in a muscular triple measure. There is a hint (257-264) of the 2nd theme but it is swiftly drowned in the orchestral maelstrom.	And the levin filled her e'e;/ And waesome wailed the snaw-white sprites/ Out o'er the roaring sea.
	264-302	Isolation of brass choir as in <i>Mountain & Flood</i> and a thrilling brass motif over scuttling strings. 276: the G dom ⁹ which was characteristic of the Exposition is heard again. (It had featured at 252,254 and 256 as well) This section repeated with addition of woodwind. Climax at M reinforces d minor tonality as strings run down in energy and volume. Two bars empty at the end of this process.	15. He strack the mainmast wi' his hand,/ The foremast wi' his knee:/ He split the gallant ship in twain,/ And sank her in the sea.

Coda 303-314		Uneasy peace. The rising notes of bars 1-3 are augmented and played over dim7ths then perfect cadence in d. Held horn diad, d minor chord. Horns then augmented 6th/D and finally big bang at the end; the effects in this coda are particularly well managed.	
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As suggested in the commentary above, MacCunn’s harmonic language is becoming richer and more emotionally charged. The yearning Wagnerisms of the first fifteen bars are completely new in MacCunn’s work. An unexpected and particular reference in bars 9-10 is to the almost contemporary *Capriccio Espagnole* by Rimsky-Korsakov: key, chord (Neapolitan), scoring and overall melodic shape are identical to a passage in the second movement in the *Capriccio* - beginning 5 bars after letter **E**.

Figure 2.6 *The Ship of the Fiend*: bars 4 – 13.



Rimsky-Korsakov: *Capriccio Espagnole* / II: 5 after 



The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system features a Cor (trumpet) part in the upper staff and strings in the lower staff. The Cor part has a melodic line with a slur and a triplet of eighth notes. The strings part has a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes. The second system features a Horn part in the upper staff and strings in the lower staff. The Horn part has a melodic line with a slur and a triplet of eighth notes. The strings part has a rhythmic accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes.

The *Capriccio* was composed in 1887 and was published in Leipzig in 1888. Given that the first performance of *The Ship* was as early as 21 February 1888 at the St James' Hall, there may be no possibility of conscious influence, merely an intriguing coincidence.

Bars 17 - 49 with its oboe/horn solos over *tremolando* strings followed by pulsing pizzicato lower strings reworks sonorities from Weber's *Freischütz* overture, respectively the passage where Max gazes down into the awful depths of the Wolf's Glen, and the presence of the fiend Samiel. A sudden plunge into the flat submediant in the course of the second group (72) reminds one of Schubert, while the reintroduction of the first group theme at 81 answered by four bars of C major (85-88) again recalls the start of *The Hebrides* development section.¹⁰⁴ But more personal harmonic ties are beginning to appear: the dominant 11th chord (e.g. 95), and more strikingly, the bars which evoke the 'Hill of Hell' (186-202): the progression of seemingly unrelated chords in regular

¹⁰⁴ See pages 46-7 above.

harmonic rhythm (usually one chord per bar) will be a common tool for suggesting disquiet in MacCunn's early works. Here, the harmonic scheme is as follows:

Figure 2.7 *The Ship o' the Fiend: 186-202.*



The opening E minor [i]– C Minor [vi minor]– A flat minor [= G sharp i.e. III minor] chords may have their origin in the ‘Tarnhelm’ motif we mentioned in connection with *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*, while the augmented triads evoke Loge’s music in *Die Walküre*. In common with other British composers of the late nineteenth century,

MacCunn takes what he chooses from Wagner and adapts it for his personal use. *The Ship of the Fiend* is the most ambitious and, to my mind, successful of the three early orchestral pieces. Beyond the continuing mastery of orchestral techniques and the progress made in terms of formal organisation and harmony, the total identification of the composer with contrasting dramatic situations is so impressive. The storm at sea which takes up the development and recapitulation is a superb piece of sustained invention that captures the effect of a tempest on a ship with quasi-realistic brio¹⁰⁵. Similarly, the way the storm dies down to silence (301-2) before the desolate coda is masterfully handled. The relative amount of exposure of the two main themes is carefully balanced. After a long (almost 100 bars) treatment of the 'feminine' second subject in the exposition, the rest of the piece is dominated by the increasingly grim versions of the first subject. Indeed the second subject only surfaces briefly twice (166-171 and 257-264) after the exposition. There is a gradual increase of speed from bar 4 to just before the end (unusually, the first group is slow), which lends the orchestral ballad a cohesive tempo structure as well. The 'hinges' between sections are reasonably well concealed: between the two groups in the exposition we find a characteristic semiquaver oscillation; the development starts with a jolt in a new time signature, but from then on the construction is seamless, due in no small measure to the process of thematic transformation. When the recapitulation starts at bar 216, the gentle first group melody is now a furious thing, making us ignore any sense of recall, rather it leads on naturally from the threatening development section. Thus the sonata form structure accommodates the poem's narrative quite happily and naturally.

¹⁰⁵ For further sea storms, see *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *The Wreck of the Hesperus*.

The Ship o' the Fiend was well received at its first performance:

The expectations formed by the success of his pieces performed at the Crystal Palace were fully realised. [...] Whether the young Scottish musician will be as successful in the domain of abstract music as he is in the delineation of national subjects remains to be proved; in the latter, the talent he has already displayed is so remarkable as to awaken very high expectations.¹⁰⁶

and Henschel, at whose concerts this premiere was given, wrote to the composer six months later, and, having written out the second subject at the top of his letter, asked

Is that right? It haunts me off and on ever since I heard it, and I wonder if you have a new orchestral piece in your desk which you should like to hear for the first time by the London Symphony Orchestra?¹⁰⁷

In the event, his next orchestral ballad *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow* was given its first public performance by August Manns and the Crystal Palace Orchestra on 13 October 1888. Unlike *The Ship*, it does not manage to combine so winningly a sonata form structure with an illustration of an ongoing narrative. Shaw did not mince his words:

[The concert] began with Mr Hamish MacCunn's overture *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow*, which has a good musical fight in the middle section, but is otherwise a predestined failure, since it is impossible to tell a story in sonata form, because the end of a story is not a recapitulation of the beginning, and the end of a movement in sonata form is. Mr MacCunn has chosen his subject like a schoolboy, and his form like a pedant, the result being some excellent thematic material spoiled, and another example held up of the danger of mixing *genres* in musical composition, a danger already quite sufficiently exemplified by the follies of Sterndale Bennett in overture composition.¹⁰⁸

Dowie Dens is much more orthodox than *The Ship* in its outlines. Indeed, as the opening music makes its reappearance unchanged at the start of the recapitulation after a pronounced caesura (177) it weakens the illustrative quality of the work, if not the structural. The poem's narrative tells of a feud between the heroine's (Sarah's) brother and her lover. Sarah urges her lover to stay at home on the morrow as she suspects foul

¹⁰⁶ *MT*, xxix (1 March 1888), 151. MacCunn, as we have seen (p41) had little interest in exploring absolute or 'abstract music'.

¹⁰⁷ Letter to MacCunn, 18 September 1888: uncatalogued in the Watt Library, Greenock.

¹⁰⁸ Shaw 1937, 82.

play from her cruel brother. Sure enough her brother has brought nine armed men with him for the duel on the ‘dowie houms of Yarrow’¹⁰⁹ all of whom her lover either wounds or kills with his sword. The evil brother then runs the lover through from behind (thus further confirming his cowardice). Sarah arrives and, grieving and greeting over her dead lover, dies of a broken heart.¹¹⁰ The source text is given below:

The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow.

[1] Late at e’en, drinking the wine,
 And ere they paid the lawing,
 They set a combat them between,
 To fight it in the dawing.

[5] As he gaed up the Tennie’s bank,
 I wat he gaed wi’ sorrow,
 Till down in a den, he spied nine
 armed men,
 On the dowie houms o’ Yarrow.

“What though you be my sister’s lord
 We’ll cross our swords tomorrow.”
 “What though my wife your sister be,
 I’ll meet them then on Yarrow.”

“If I see you all, ye’re nine to ane;
 And that’s an unequal marrow;
 Yet will I fight, while lasts my brand
 On the bonnie banks o’ Yarrow.”

“O stay at hame, my noble lord,
 O stay at hame, my marrow!
 My cruel brother will you betray
 On the dowie houms o’ Yarrow.”

Four has he hurt, and five has slain,
 On the bloody braes o’ Yarrow,
 Till that stubborn knight came him
 behind,
 And ran his body through.

“O fare ye weel, my ladye gaye!
 O fare ye weel, my Sarah!
 For I maun gae, though I ne’er return
 Frae the dowie dens o’ Yarrow.”

* * * * *
 As she sped down yon high, high hill
 She gaed wi’ dool and sorrow,
 And in the den spied ten slain men,
 On the dowie banks o’ Yarrow.

* * * * * *

¹⁰⁹ Yarrow is the river running out of St. Mary’s Loch – the region later immortalized by James Hogg, a statue of whom stands close to the south-west end of the loch.

¹¹⁰ Other versions of this ballad have the lover as a ploughman and the nine murderers noblemen who have also been courting Sarah. See e.g. ed. Child, Francis James, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York, Dover 1965) [reprint of original 1888-1898 publications], no.214.

She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair,
 She searched his wounds all thorough.
 She kissed them, till her lips grew red,
 On the dowie houms o' Yarrow.

She kissed his lips, she kaimed his hair,
 As aft she had done before, O;
 And there wi' grief her heart did break
 In the dowie dens o' Yarrow.

This joyless scenario inspires music that only in its final funeral march attains the tragic dimension of the words. Fortunately much of this work is brisk/vigorous or tender/emotional thereby providing the necessary contrasts required by sonata form.

The *Allegro comodo* first group shows MacCunn developing one of his favoured open-ended melodies into an imposing musical paragraph. There are three main motifs (a¹⁻³):

Figure 2.8 *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow*: bars 1-25, violin I.

The musical score for Violin I, bars 1-25, is presented in six staves. The key signature is G minor (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes the following annotations:

- Staff 1: Motif a1 (bars 1-4) and Motif a2 (bars 5-8).
- Staff 2: Motif a1 (bars 9-12) and Motif a2 (bars 13-16).
- Staff 3: Motif a2 (bars 17-18) and Motif a3 (bars 19-22).
- Staff 4: Motif a3 (bars 23-24).
- Staff 5: Variation of bar 17, labeled "bar 17 repeated" (bars 25-26) and "bar 17, new version" (bars 27-28).
- Staff 6: Further development of the bar 17 variation, labeled "bar 17 new version repeated" (bars 29-30) and "last two beats of bar 17 repeated and extended to a stream of semiquavers" (bars 31-34).



a¹ will be transformed the most throughout the ballad, its rising fifth and dotted rhythm being particularly ear-catching. Again it is possible to relate stages in the musical journey to the action in the ballad:

Table 2.3 *The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow*: tabular analysis.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Bars</u>	<u>Commentary</u>	<u>Ballad</u>
Exposition 1-105	First Group 1-25	E flat major: a cogently developed paragraph (see above)	[A warlike rhythm suggests male aggression and the throwing down of the challenge in verses 1 and 2]
	Transition 25-63	Full orchestral statement of motif (a ¹) from first group. The harmony in the first four bars indicates a spell of insecurity (E flat, D flat, b flat, C) as motif (a ¹) is developed sequentially with vigour. A tender variant of the melody arrests the progress on the dominant (37-40) Interrupted cadence B flat - C flat with (a ¹) on 3 horns (41-2). Harmony changes every two bars: G flat major, F dom 9 then the same again. Over an F pedal (49 -56) a crescendo using motif a ³ from the first group. One of MacCunn's favourite chords -	(continued)

		the dominant 11th - (in this case E flat/F) appears 53-6. Instead of leading directly to the second group, an augmented version of a ¹ is heard on Violin 1 underpinned by tragic harmony.	
	Second group 65-106	Pre-echoes of new theme in b flat minor in the murky scoring of horn, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon. The speed is now 'lento' and a solo oboe leads us into the major with the main melodic material. This is evidently from the same stable as <i>Mountain and Flood's</i> second subject but its continuation is treated more freely with dives into remote flat keys cf. <i>Ship's</i> second subject. There is no growth in dynamic in this section (as there had been in the other two works). 98-105 a final phrase combines  from 80 and 85 with a ¹ and a ³ to link to the development: this starts in B flat with use of motif a ³ in 'cellos accompanied by low strings, horns and bassoons. Moving through E flat minor and C flat major the music gathers up other instruments, increases the speed and volume.....	3. 'O stay at hame, my noble lord./ O stay at hame, my marrow! My cruel brother will you betray/ On the dowie houms o' Yarrow.' 4. 'O fare ye weel, my ladye gaye! O fare ye weel, my Sarah! For I maun gae, though I ne'er return/ Frae the dowie dens o' Yarrow.'
Development 106-176	106-114 114-130over a chord of G flat 7 which turns out to no-one's surprise to be an augmented 6th chord leading to a blaze of B flat major and a ¹ in augmentation on trumpet (110). The dotted rhythm of a ¹ generates two further ideas (horn 119) and violin 1 121-	[The fight as described in verses 5-7]

	131-161	2) as the music passes through C Major to F minor (123). Here motif a ² underscores expressive appoggiaturas in the violins. Using a ² and a ³ in a full orchestral treatment, a 4 bar passage from 131-134 is repeated up a tone. Sequences and rapidly changing keys push to a climax (145) in D flat with first group material on trumpets <u>combining</u> with second group material, very loud over a menacing side drum tattoo.	
	161-176	D flat turns out to be the Neapolitan of c minor (157) and a rhythmically diminished version of a ¹ (+cymbal crash) is heard on trombones and trumpets. In the following cathartic passage, C slips to C flat, the bass of the augmented 6th chord in the home key.	[The death stroke?] ‘Till that stubborn knight came him behind./ And ran his body through.’
Recapitulation 177-231	First Group 177-201	Exactly as in exposition. E flat major	
	Retransition 201-209	Low register. Only 8 bars long a ¹ and a ³ 2 bar sequence repeated up a tone 201-2/203-4. Heavy brass suddenly slow, state a derivative of the second subject. Perfect cadence into e flat minor.	[The appearance of part of the second subject points to Sarah’s sighting of the carnage. Verse 8]
	Second Group 209-231	Mournful version of second subject in the minor and in 4/4. 2 Horns, cello oscillation, pedal E flat and muffled drums suggesting the sorrow pouring out of Sarah as she holds her murdered husband	[The appearance of part of the second subject points to Sarah’s sighting of the carnage. Verse 8] 9. She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair,/ She searched his wounds all

		in her arms. Repeated with oboes added (221-231) 'sobs' 227-230. Imperfect cadence into...	thorough./ She kissed them, till her lips grew red,/ On the dowie houms o' Yarrow. 10. She kissedhis lips, she kaimed his hair,/ as aft she had done before, O;/ And there wi' grief her heart did break/ In the dowie dens o' Yarrow.
Coda 231-243	E flat <u>major</u> . a ¹ shared between strings and woodwind, then quietly radiant chorale version of a ¹ in brass with the whole orchestra joining in for the final chord.	

George Grove had listened to Manns rehearsing the ballad in preparation for its premiere.

He wrote to MacCunn:

I'm *delighted* with the overture. I have just heard it and spent 3 hours in the printing office trying to say something about it - I found it so hard to see the events that you told me of, or to see, beyond the two main subjects of the man-element and the woman, anything definite except his death and her death.¹¹¹

The programme is to a large extent delineated by the man-violence and woman-

tenderness linkages, as Grove suggests. It remains a very effective piece of music,

however closely or not one knows the story. The *Musical Times* critic was enthusiastic:

Mr. MacCunn has undoubtedly enriched the repertoire of native orchestral works. Here is a writer who never hesitates but plunges straight 'in media res'; who has got something to say, and when he has said it knows when to leave off. The overture is full of the 'fougue [fire, ardour] de vingt ans'.¹¹²

Drawing together the strands from these three orchestral works, written - as we have just been reminded - before MacCunn had achieved his 21st birthday, we may appreciate how far they share common characteristics, and, in view of his whole output,

¹¹¹ Letter to MacCunn, 9 October [1888], uncatalogued in the Watt Library, Greenock.

¹¹² *MT*, xxix (1 November 1888), 661.

we may regret that he wrote no further major essays in this genre. Reviewing the stylistic fingerprints noted above in connection with *Mountain and Flood* it is in the harmonic sphere that the most obvious developments take place. A greater range of chromatic chords is introduced into the two orchestral ballads, in particular augmented 6ths, dominant 7ths, 9ths, 11ths and 13ths, Neapolitan 6ths, augmented triads, half diminished ('Tristan') chords and progressions arising from modality. The characteristic Scottish tang of this last and the juxtaposition of unrelated chords - as in *Ship* 172-202 - become two hallmarks of MacCunn's mature style. In neither of the orchestral ballads does MacCunn make use of the melodies traditionally sung with these poems. His priority is to reproduce the poems' power and drama, in which he succeeds triumphantly.

Aside from an arrangement of the *Six Scottish Dances for piano* (Op. 28) by Guy Warrack, MacCunn's next purely orchestral outing is *Highland Memories* (Op. 30) from 1896. In the eight years that elapsed, MacCunn composed major choral cantatas, the opera *Jeanie Deans*, and was well advanced on his second opera *Diarmid*. In the light of so much -as we shall see - vivid orchestral accompaniment to vocal music, it comes as a considerable disappointment to find the composer demonstrating little sense of ambition in these three vignettes. The *Musical Times* reviewer at the first performance¹¹³ felt similarly let down but admitted that the pieces were 'very melodious and charming and characteristically Scotch.'¹¹⁴ All three are cast in ternary form and are scored for a chamber orchestra of double woodwind, two horns and strings, to which two trumpets are added in the final 'Harvest Dance'. Given the composer's thirteen-year sojourn in the capital up to that point, it is perhaps inevitable that the Scottish elements in these pieces

¹¹³ 20 May 1897, Philharmonic Society, conducted by the composer.

¹¹⁴ *MT*, xxxviii (1 June 1897), 385.

have become 'shortbread-tin Caledonian', lacking the immediacy and veracity of the three overture/ballads. The taste for a widespread and substantially invented Scots tradition had been fostered in the previous century by the Ossianic fabrications of James MacPherson. Sir Walter Scott in the *Edinburgh Review* (1805) rejected the authenticity of Ossian but asserted that the ancient Caledonian of the third century A.D. had worn the 'tartan philibeg' or kilt. Scott was the president of the Celtic Society of Edinburgh which had been founded by Colonel Stewart of Garth in 1820, and the two men masterminded the 'tartanization' of Edinburgh in preparation for the visit of George IV's visit in 1822. Nobody mentioned that the kilt was actually invented by an Englishman, Thomas Rawlinson, a Quaker industrialist from Lancashire, shortly after the Act of Union in 1707. By mid century the so-called Sobieski Stewarts had published their influential *Vestiarium Scoticum* and *The Costume of the Clans* which rationalised the system of clan tartans. The nationwide vogue for all things Scottish became, if anything, more pronounced in the later years of the century as hitherto inaccessible areas of the Highlands could be reached by railway, and ordinary folk were able to appreciate the type of scenery that had drawn their own dear Queen to Balmoral: Victoria's visits gave an official royal approval to Highland scenery, Highland cattle, John Smith the ghillie and Sir Edwin Landseer, her painting teacher and portrayer of the stag in 'The Monarch of the Glen'.¹¹⁵ Such musical equivalents as there were to this trend would be likely to find a receptive audience. Mackenzie had written *In the Scottish Highlands - 3 scenes for piano* (1880) and, orchestrally, apart from the two *Scottish Rhapsodies* mentioned above, continued with one of his best works *Pibroch* (1889) for violin and orchestra and the

¹¹⁵ See e.g. Prebble, John, *The King's Jaunt: George IV in Scotland, August 1822*, (London, Collins 1988); Trevor-Roper, Hugh, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland' in ed. Hobsbawm, Eric *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1983), 15-41.

Highland Ballad of 1893. While MacCunn was teaching at the Royal Academy, a student, Learmont Drysdale won the Charles Lucas Silver Medal for the composition of *Through the Sound of Raasay* (also known as *Overture to a Comedy*)¹¹⁶ and went on to create mostly Scottish inspired works, such as the cantata *Thomas the Rhymer* - similar in its subject-matter of faeric abduction of a human to MacCunn's *Bonny Kilmeny* - and the overture *Tam o' Shanter*. By 1896 MacCunn himself had of course found that his own compositional predisposition to things Scottish chimed very happily with his English audience's tastes. *Highland Memories*, like the *Six Scottish Dances*, may appear to smack of opportunism on MacCunn's part: they are superficially attractive, but not completely devoid of interest. The first two numbers are watery in inspiration, possibly evoking days spent with a rod - 'By the Burnside' and 'On the Loch'. The former starts with a typical triple measure pentatonic melody - really pentatonic this time and no added notes - with the apparently obligatory anacrusis. Scotch snaps and I - IV-I harmony complete the roll call for this type of melody found as second subjects in the other orchestral pieces. Phrasing is arranged in progressively smaller units, with plentiful use of sequence; here is the shape of the opening A section:

Table 2.4 *Highland Memories/ I: opening section.*

1 - 8	8 - 10	10 - 12	12-13	13 - 14	14 -15	15 - 16	16 - 24
1-4,5-8	2 bar sequence		1	bar	sequences		16-20, 21-24
a1	b					a2	

There is some suggestion of a babbling brook in the semiquaver oscillations of the B section, under which melodic fragments try to find a stable harmonic environment in

¹¹⁶ July 1890.

which to flourish. An attractive modulation to F major (33) delays the push homewards and a far too protracted anticipation on a dominant minor 9th chord (of D major). MacCunn seems unwilling to trust a single instrument to do the job, and weighs down the musical edifice with deadening doubling. 'On the Loch' is designed on the same lines but contains some delightful harmonic and instrumental touches, which place it on a higher level. The harmony in bars 9-16 has been singled out by Nicholas Temperley¹¹⁷ as anticipating the Impressionists; the use of half-diminished 7ths is indeed colourful even if the over-instrumentation and four-square harmonic rhythm necessarily lessen the impact. Some pleasing interplay between chords a major 3rd apart (C and E 22-26) looks forward to the closing bars (94-101) of the 'Harvest Dance'. A more lightly scored central section includes undoubled wind-writing, either as accompaniment semiquavers or as a real solo.

Figure 2.9 *Highland Memories/ II: 35-42.*

The musical score for Figure 2.9 is for the section 'Highland Memories/ II: 35-42'. It is written in 6/8 time and the key of D major (two sharps). The tempo is marked 'Andante Grazioso'. The score consists of three staves. The top staff is for woodwinds, with parts for Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet (Cl.). The middle staff is for strings, horns, and bassoons. The bottom staff is for bass. The woodwinds play a melodic line with grace notes. The strings play a rhythmic accompaniment of semiquavers. Dynamics include piano (p) and pianissimo (pp).

¹¹⁷ ed. Temperley, Nicholas, *The Athlone History of Music in Britain, The Romantic Age (1800-1914)* (London, Athlone Press 1981), 375.

In the 'Harvest Dance', MacCunn's thematic material irresistibly recalls a cross between 'Charlie is my Darling' and the second movement of Schubert's 'Great' C major symphony.¹¹⁸ *Mountain and Flood's* development modulation from E minor to C minor is re-run here (A minor to F minor: 1-33) and the only surprises in the central passage are the sudden 'wrong' chords in bars 36 and 44. Overuse of sequential patterns and an entirely predictable dominant build-up to the return of the 'A' material weaken this movement further. But perhaps we are being unduly censorious. By the end of the nineteenth century there was emerging a divide between art music and light music. Britain would go on to produce a legion of fine light music composers - Monckton, Caryll, Coates, Ketelbey, Farnon, Binge and Toye, to name but a few - who produced 'music of the sort that plumbs no intellectual or emotional stimulation, but lifts the spirits with ingratiating melodies decked out with consummate craftsmanship', as one recent Hyperion disc sleeve-note defines it.¹¹⁹ This type of music will later find a new and even larger audience through its use as theme tunes for radio and television programmes. MacCunn would spend the first decade of the new century conducting light musical plays

¹¹⁸ The second movement of Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony* also has something of 'Charlie..' in it.

¹¹⁹ *British Light Music Classics*, Hyperion CDA66868.

in London's West End. In *Highland Memories* he anticipates the character of the raw material he will work on in theatre pits.

In the catalogue of his works that MacCunn prepared in 1913 to be appended to the substantial biographical article in the *Dunedin Magazine*¹²⁰, he lists the following further pieces for full orchestra: '*Entente Cordiale*', *Mazurka*, *Harlequin*, *Columbine* and *Hornpipe*. As far as can be deduced, these are mostly instrumental numbers from shows that MacCunn was involved with, either as composer or conductor. '[L'] *Entente Cordiale*' was a dance for Winifred Hart-Dyke to be inserted into the show *The Earl and the Girl* (1904), presumably at some time after 8 April that year when the 'friendly understanding' between France and England was signed. *Mazurka* is likely to be the 'Dance, Tempo alla mazurka, un poco animato' to be found after the first chorus in Act II of *The Talk of the Town*. The structure of musical comedies being somewhat fluid, with numbers being taken out and others inserted, the printed scores are only approximate guides to the actual music performed. *The Talk of the Town* example is actually printed in the vocal score (p106-110) with MacCunn's name at the top. Again it was composed with Miss Hart-Dyke in mind. *Harlequin* and *Columbine* are two characters in the band of travelling players who visit Arthlington in MacCunn's unfinished light opera *Prue*; presumably these are their characteristic dances. It is not clear whether the *Hornpipe* is an orchestration of the piano piece of the same name, dedicated to Marmaduke Barton and published in 1912 by Augener in their *Graded British Piano Pieces (Grade IV)* series.

In the Special Collections of Glasgow University Library there are also a *Ballet for Royce* and a *Suite of Four Dances* neither of which appear in MacCunn's own list. Edward Royce was the choreographer for some of the musical comedies MacCunn

¹²⁰ Drysdale, Janey, 'Hamish MacCunn' in *The Dunedin Magazine* ii no.2 (March 1914), 65-75.

conducted. Given the date on the *Ballet* manuscript - May 1903 - it seems likely that this was written either for *The Earl and the Girl* or for *Little Hans Anderson*; both shows began their runs in December that year. A further possibility is that it was written for a show that involved Royce but not MacCunn. The *Ballet* consists of a 'Graceful Dance' and a 'Waltz' scored for the traditional 'Savoy' orchestral forces: 2 flutes, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, pairs of brass, timpani and a body of strings. The theme of its quadruple time first section is reworked as the central part of the 'Waltz'.

Figure 2.10 *Ballet*.

Graceful Dance

Violin

p

pizz arco

Waltz

p

f

The *Suite* is a composite item assembled by MacCunn towards the end of his life from various bits and bobs. The third item - a hornpipe in A minor - is still in its piano form, and is the same piece as the hornpipe mentioned above. A summary of the other items is given below.

1. *Prue*, ~~Duet Dance Columbine and Harlequin~~, and *Pantomine* [MacCunn's deletions] appear at the head of this piece, showing its derivation from MacCunn's abandoned comedy of rural life. 'Savoy' scoring.
2. is the 'Dance of Medway' from the *Masque of War and Peace* (1900) - a waltz for full orchestra in G.
4. Written on the same type of manuscript paper with markings which suggest a shared origin with no. 1, i.e. in both cases the title is written between two dashes, the Italian time indication is underlined straight at the top and wavey above the strings. The date at the end is September 1904, just when MacCunn was working on *Prue*. Nos. 1 and 4 could conceivably correspond to *Columbine* and *Harlequin* in the composer's catalogue. This is a march in D major. The overall key pattern for the *Suite* is therefore D minor, G major, A minor, D major - a satisfactory progression.

The style of these instrumental shavings from the master's table is indistinguishable from his first set of stage dances, those that make up Act III, scene 1 of the grand opera *Diarmid* (1897). They tickle the ear with their deft orchestration, attractive melodies and predictable harmonies and structures. It's all very professionally done, with the polish one would expect from a pupil of Parry's, but it does not engage the brain even less stir the soul.

The three early overtures / ballads turn out to be the last pieces and the only extant ones in which sonata form is used. Processes of motivic development are henceforth relegated to a supporting role as MacCunn concentrates on closed forms in cantatas, operas, shows and songs. Even in the operas where we might expect a fully developed system of transformable leitmotifs, we find limited homage paid to the Wagnerian ideal. Instead, MacCunn's facility and brilliance in the handling of the orchestra underpins dramatic effects in his theatrical works, while his willingness to adventure in the harmonic sphere lends the songs an emotional integrity. If we have now said farewell to sonata form movements for ever, it is perhaps not with a feeling of missing any cerebral manipulation of resources, but rather that the form was managed to such impressive dramatic effect.

CHAPTER 3

Choral Music I

1. Overview
2. Choral Ballads
3. A Note on the Partsongs

‘Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.
But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful song
Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,’
(from Alfred Lord Tennyson *The Lotos-Eaters* Canto VIII)

Choral Works I

1. Overview

The public demand for choral music was at its greatest during the last forty years of the nineteenth century: the number and ability of choral societies grew during this time as did the importance of the regional choral festivals at Birmingham, the Three Choirs, Norwich and Leeds. Publishers turned out thousands of vocal scores (Novello's buff-coloured covers were immediately recognizable), many of whose composers have now been entirely forgotten. Any composer wishing to make headway would ignore this huge market at his peril. In MacCunn's case, his interest in and love of the literature of his homeland found a convenient outlet in the secular cantata or narrative choral ballad and he quickly joined his outpourings to the already swollen river of the Victorian choral repertoire. Indeed, secular music was clearly MacCunn's preferred domain, for though he was a member of the Church of Scotland, there are only two musical expressions of his faith, one an immature setting of the *Jubilate (Psalm C)* and the other a rather mechanical version of *Psalm VIII* - both of little substance. There was little precedent for anthems written for the Scottish Church and none at all for oratorio, which on reflection, seems in Great Britain to be the preserve of the Church of England and, to a lesser degree, of Roman Catholicism.

The vast majority of MacCunn's accompanied choral works use Scottish subject matter as an incentive for inspiration. As we have seen, Border Ballads inspired the two orchestral pieces *The Ship o' the Fiend* and *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow* - both from 1888 - but towards the end of his life MacCunn produced the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* for chorus and orchestra (1913) which, after a perceived lull in his popularity, he hoped would go some way to restoring his reputation with the public. The narrative thrust of these traditional orally transmitted poems suited MacCunn's technical and creative apparatus admirably. When he went to the written ballads and narrative poems of Scott and Hogg, he relished their similar profusion of incident: *The Lay of the Last*

Minstrel (Scott 1888), *Bonny Kilmeny* (Hogg 1885) and *Queen Hynde of Caledon* (Hogg 1891). To complete the Scottish canon is a setting of Thomas Campbell's well-known poem concerning a pursuit and a tragic shipwreck - *Lord Ullin's Daughter* (1887) – and a version of James Hyslop's vision of a winged chariot collecting the bodies of a defeated army, *The Cameronian's Dream* (1889).¹²¹

As can be seen from the composition dates, MacCunn's choral works are grouped at either end of his career. (The chronological disposition of his 21 partsongs follows a similar pattern - a mass of activity up to 1893 and then a small late flowering of four very fine songs for women's voices and piano in May 1914.) In his autobiographical notes he mentions an abortive attempt at the age of twelve to write an oratorio¹²²; two years later he made the first of two attempts to set a translation of Krummacker's *The Moss Rose*,¹²³ and two weeks before entering the Royal College of Music he produced a setting of *Psalm C*.¹²⁴ During his time at the College he completed *The Changing Year* (1884), - a sort of choral *Four Seasons*¹²⁵ and *The Moss Rose* (setting 2) his first choral work of real promise and substance, for soprano, tenor and baritone soloists, chorus and orchestra.

Being neither a student work nor Scottish in derivation, *The Wreck of the Hesperus* (Longfellow) stands somewhat alone. It shares its subject matter (a ship-wreck) and its one-movement form with *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, but was conceived to be performed at the Coliseum with the accompaniment of "vivid magic lantern pictures, which were shown on the white iron curtain, synchronizing with the more dramatic

¹²¹ In 1913 he was commissioned by the London Missionary Society to write a work celebrating the centenary of David Livingstone's birth - another piece with a Scottish connection, Livingstone being born in Blantyre.

¹²² *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 264.

¹²³ A rudimentary E major block chord piece for SATB and piano.

¹²⁴ 6 April 1883 - on the front cover MacCunn has later dubbed it 'a very execrable bit of trash'. *GB-Gu* MS MacCunn 20.

¹²⁵ *GB-Gu* MS MacCunn 19. MacCunn has created motto themes for each season. 'Winter' is complete, and some of 'Spring' is extant. After a stern piano introduction and tenor recitative, the music of 'Winter' alternates between c minor [male chorus - "Wind blew the gales across the midnight sea..."] and C major [mixed chorus - "Hearts far away beside the glowing fire were trembling true to him that dared the storm..."]. This is the first in a succession of sea storms in MacCunn's works.

moments of the music”.¹²⁶ Its date, 1905, isolates it from the other works as well. Nor is it quite an occasional piece; MacCunn *did* produce several of these to order for special occasions: *Psalm VIII* for choir and organ was first given on 1 May 1890 at the opening ceremony of the 2nd International Industrial Exhibition at Meggetland in Edinburgh,¹²⁷ *The Masque of War and Peace* (13 Feb 1900) was part of an entertainment to aid the widows and orphans of Her Majesty’s Household Troops during the Boer War, and both *The Pageant of Darkness and Light* (1908)¹²⁸ and *Livingstone the Pilgrim* (1913) were commissioned by the London Missionary Society.

MacCunn composed most of the cantatas of the late 1880s and early 1890s with two Scottish choirs in mind: the Glasgow Choral Union and John Kirkhope’s Choir in Edinburgh. The Glasgow choir was in fine form at this time, being skilfully trained by chorus master Joseph Bradley¹²⁹ and enjoying the guest conductorship of August Manns on his busman’s holiday away from the Crystal Palace every December and January. (Manns on his home patch gave the premiere of *Lord Ullin’s Daughter* (18 February 1888) and was thereafter keen to secure the first performances in England of other choral works.) Kirkhope’s Choir were frequent performers at Paterson’s series of concerts and were praised in the press for their tone quality and the clarity of their diction. John Kirkhope was a well-known businessman and a keen amateur who had gathered around him a choir of about fifty voices. On his retirement in 1917, Tovey took it over, but failed to capture the allegiance of the singers, and it disbanded two years later. It seems that MacCunn had agreed to write a choral piece for the Norwich Triennial Musical Festival in 1890 but this came to nought and he conducted *The Ship o’ the Fiend* from his back catalogue instead.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Drysdale, Janey, ‘Scottish Composers’, *The Dunedin Magazine*, ii no.2 (March 1914), 71.

¹²⁷ There was a repeat performance on 3 May 1890.

¹²⁸ Both *The Masque* and *The Pageant* are hybrid works containing dance, oration and spectacle and are discussed elsewhere.

¹²⁹ The *Glasgow Herald* noted “the immense improvement...in precision, accuracy of intonation and above all in intelligent phrasing”, ‘Choral-Orchestral Concerts’, 19 December 1888, 14.

¹³⁰ Letter from the Honorary Secretary 9 April 1889, *US-CHH* A.P. Watt papers no. 11036.

A table of basic information concerning the choral works is presented below:

Table 3.1 MacCunn's Choral Works.

Date	Work	Text	Forces	First Performance	Notes
- 30 April 1882	<i>The Moss Rose</i> (setting 1)	From the German of Krummacher	SATB & piano		
- 6 April 1883	<i>Psalm C</i>	Book of Psalms	T solo, solo quartet, chorus and organ.		
1884	<i>The Changing Year</i>	? James MacCunn Sr.	SATB and piano		Only 'Winter' and the first seven pages of 'Spring' survive.
July 1884	<i>The Moss Rose</i> (setting 2)	Krummacher translated J.S.C. Braynard	S,T, Bar solo, chorus and orchestra	10 December 1885, West Theatre, Royal Albert Hall. Cond. MacCunn, solos by Miss Drew, Mr. Stubbs & Mr. Price	
- 21 March 1886	<i>Bonny Kilmerny</i> (Opus 2)	James Hogg – from <i>The Queen's Wake</i> & an epilogue by Dr. Moir. Words adapted by James MacCunn Sr.	S,T,Bar solo, chorus and orchestra	15 December 1888, Queens Street Hall, Edinburgh. Agnes Larckcom, Iver McKay, Bantock Pierpoint, Kirkhope's Choir, cond. MacCunn	Orchestral parts at premiere rendered by a string quintet and harmonium. Performed at the Crystal Palace 8 March 1890
1887	<i>Lord Ullin's Daughter</i> (Opus 4)	Thomas Campbell	Chorus and orchestra	18 February 1888, Crystal Palace. Cond. Manns	Dedicated to the Glasgow Choral Union. Also at the Crystal Palace 29 March 1889. Cond. Manns
1888	<i>The Lay of the Last Minstrel</i> (Opus 7)	Sir Walter Scott, adapted by James MacCunn Sr.	S, M-S, T, Bar solo, chorus and orchestra	18 December 1888, City Hall, Glasgow. Madame Nordica, Grace Damian, Iver McKay, Andrew Black, Glasgow Choral Union, cond. Joseph Bradley	Commissioned by the Glasgow Choral Union. Many performances in the West of Scotland followed the premiere; in England at the Crystal Palace 16 Feb 1889, same soloists as premiere except Marian MacKenzie was the M-S. Cond. Manns
-12 June 1889	<i>The Cameronian's Dream</i> (Opus 10)	James Hislop	Bar solo, chorus and orchestra	27 January 1890, Queens Street Hall, Edinburgh. George Henschel, Kirkhope's Choir, cond. MacCunn	2 nd performance 30 January 1890, City Hall, Glasgow. Henschel, Glasgow Choral Union, cond. MacCunn

-6 April 1890	<i>Psalm VIII</i>	Book of Psalms	Chorus and organ	1 May 1890, 2 nd International Industrial Exhibition, Meggetland, Edinburgh. Edinburgh Choral Union, cond. MacCunn	Repeat performance on 3 May 1890 there.
-31 October 1891	<i>Queen Hynde of Caledon (Opus 13)</i>	James Hogg. Words adapted by James MacCunn Sr.	Hynde (S), Wene (S), Uisnar (T), Eric (B), Chorus and Orchestra	28 January 1892, City Hall, Glasgow. Madame Fillinger, Emily Squire, Henry Piercy, Andrew Black, Glasgow Choral Union, cond. MacCunn	At Crystal Palace Saturday Concert 5 March 1892
1905	<i>The Wreck of the Hesperus</i>	Longfellow	Chorus and orchestra	28 August 1905, Coliseum, London. Coliseum choir and orchestra cond. MacCunn	"Dedicated to my friend Walter Slaughter"
1913	<i>Livingstone the Pilgrim</i>	Rev. C. Sylvester Horne	Narrator, S, Bar solo, quartet drawn from the chorus, chorus and organ	19 March 1913, Royal Albert Hall. Cond. MacCunn	
- June 1913	<i>The Jolly Goshawk</i>	Border Ballad	Chorus and Orchestra	19 April 1921, Victoria Hall, Sheffield. Sheffield Amateur Musical Society cond. Sir Henry Wood.	Dedicated to Mrs. John Pettie
- June 1913	<i>Kinmont Willie</i>	Border Ballad	Chorus and Orchestra	19 April 1921, Victoria Hall, Sheffield. Sheffield Amateur Musical Society cond. Sir Henry Wood.	Dedicated to Professor John MacCunn
-June 1913	<i>Lamkin</i>	Border Ballad	Chorus and Orchestra	19 April 1921, Victoria Hall, Sheffield. Sheffield Amateur Musical Society cond. Sir Henry Wood.	Dedicated to "my father"
-June 1913	<i>The Death of Percy Reed</i>	Border Ballad	Male Chorus and Orchestra	25 March 1925, Queen's Hall, London. Barclay's Bank Musical Society cond. Herbert Pierce	Dedicated to Professor William Paton Ker

Within the choral canon, subdivisions into cantata type may be conveniently made. *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, *The Wreck of the Hesperus* and the *Four Scottish Traditional Ballads* are written solely for chorus and orchestra, are in one continuous movement, and tell an incident-packed story. The chorus members, following a well established formula used by others such as Stanford in *The Revenge*, *The Battle of the Baltic* and *Padraig Crohoore*, play the part of narrator and of individual characters, but always within the context of a collective voice part, not as a soloist. Thus the sopranos voice the concerns of the eponymous heroine in *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and both tenors and basses sing the part of the father, and so forth. In many ways these choral ballads are the most successful in MacCunn's output: they do not outstay their welcome and are more cohesive as musical units than the multi-movement works. Into this latter category fall five pieces: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Bonny Kilmeny*, *The Cameronian's Dream*, *Queen Hynde of Caledon* and *Livingstone the Pilgrim*. *The Lay* and *Hynde* are subtitled 'dramatic cantatas', *Kilmeny* a cantata and *Cameronian* a ballad. Despite the various nomenclatures, each tells a story and each employs soloists and chorus in a sequence of movements. The soloists in *Kilmeny* are narrators, with only one song (soprano) for the titular heroine herself. *Lay* and *Hynde* use named characters, though in the *Lay* the singers have to interpret more than one role. *Cameronian* has one soloist only - the dreaming soldier. The five movements of *Livingstone the Pilgrim* (for soprano and baritone soloists, chorus and organ) are separated one from another by spoken narrations. The final section is a hymn to be sung by the audience/congregation, following the examples of the Bach *Passions*, or more recently, Stainer's *Crucifixion*, and prefigure similar moments in Britten's *St. Nicholas* and Leighton's *Laudes Montium*.

Before any of the above appeared we may consider with benefit MacCunn's first mature choral composition *The Moss Rose* (setting 2), written during his second academic year at the Royal College. The poem chosen was written by Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacker (1796 - 1869), a German clergyman who spent a good proportion of his life

in America. The poem partakes of the Victorian passion for fairies and the belief in the existence of a parallel, unseen world of the spirits as manifest in the paintings of Paton, Dadd and later Arthur Rackham, in the poetry of Scott and Tennyson and in the whole cultural industry spawned by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹³¹ Its atmosphere is similar to parts of George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, a novel greatly valued by MacCunn's teacher Parry. In Krummacher's verses the angel of the flowers falls asleep under a rose and then wishes to repay the rose for the sweet shade it has provided; he (sex unsure but the tenor sings the lines) throws a veil of moss over the rose 'whose texture slim reveals the beauty it but half conceals.' This attractive piece of whimsy had inspired other composers as well: there are songs by Edward Bunnett (1870) and Charles King Hall (1880) and later there would be a part-song by A.W. Moss from 1911. It anticipates later works in its 'fairy' subject matter - e.g. river and mountain sprites (*Lay...*), chorus of spirits (*Kilmeny*), choral ballet of gnomes, hobgoblins and fairies, (*Diarmid*), wind and foam spirits (*Breast of Light*) and would chime with the growing popularity of this genre in both choral and orchestral genres.¹³²

Musically *The Moss Rose* marks a huge step forward from the four-square, harmonically ossified compositions from his childhood; MacCunn, it should be remembered, was as yet only 16, but here is his first orchestrally accompanied choral work, and one that shows huge confidence in the handling of its forces and a greatly expanded sense of ambition. The technical scope of the cantata may be as yet somewhat attenuated - the choral texture is predominantly homophonic (with the soloists representing the Angel (tenor) and the Rose (soprano) and additional narrative duties being entrusted to a baritone) - but a streak of original imagination is revealed in the

¹³¹ Nor would this interest in fairy matters expire in the early 20th century: to take two examples, Barrie's *Peter Pan* was premiered in 1904 and the famous photographs of the Cottingley Fairies began their long reign of deception in 1917.

¹³² The genre of the fairy world was widely deployed by British composers, notably in Elgar's *Grania and Diarmid*, Stanford's *A Fairy Day*, Coleridge-Taylor's *The Forest of Wild Thyme* and Cowen's suite for orchestra, *In Fairyland*.

harmonic and structural arenas which, in their striking effects, lend the music a distinctive forward-looking attribute. The orchestral introduction seems to pay homage and at the same time offer a challenge to no less a personage than Wagner. MacCunn uses a four note chromatic motif - akin to the opening of *Tristan* – and harmonises it with a remarkable series of barely related chords:

Figure 3.1 *The Moss Rose: 1-8.*



Within later choral phrases the music moves easily between apparently remote keys (in this case, the slip up a semitone from E flat to E represents the overall key scheme of *The Moss Rose* in microcosm – see the **Table 3.2** on page 86).

Figure 3.2 *The Moss Rose*: 40-48.

In yon - der gar - den rich with gems of

gold and sil - ver ru - by blue bey - ond the skill of

pain - ter's art, The an - gel of the sun - set flew

pp

f *p*

The key scheme for the whole work does not attempt to establish a hierarchy of closely related tonalities, but modulates in the baritone recitatives and orchestral interludes that link the main sections.

Table 3.2 *The Moss Rose*: key scheme.

Section	Bars	Key
1. Chorus	1-68	E flat major
Baritone recitative	69-77	unstable
2. Tenor solo (Angel)	78-120	F major
Orchestral interlude	120-132	unstable
3. Soprano solo (Rose)	133-148	A major
Orchestral interlude + baritone solo	149-179	unstable
4. Chorus	179-229	E major

The music is in no way unified by the key-scheme; indeed the positioning of modulations in the hinges between sections emphasizes the fracturing of the work into four miniatures thereby militating against any sense of organic growth. E major in the final triumphant chorus appears as a transformed version of E flat at the start and could conceivably reflect the transformation of the rose by its mantle of moss, an effect reinforced by the palpable increase in ‘tension’ created by the upward move from A major in the previous section to its dominant. This closing section anticipates the forthright qualities - and to some degree the melodic shape - of Parry in heroic mode, but with the important difference in the lack of inner part-writing and conspicuous appoggiaturas in the orchestral accompaniment.

Figure 3.3 Parry *Blest Pair of Sirens*: VS p15 soprano.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a soprano part. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of several notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a dotted quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F#4, a dotted quarter note E4, and a quarter rest. The lyrics 'That we on earth, with un - dis - cor - ding voice' are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody with a quarter note D4, a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, a dotted quarter note A3, a quarter note G3, a quarter note F#3, a dotted quarter note E3, a quarter note D3, a dotted quarter note C3, and a quarter rest. The lyrics 'may right - ly an - swer that me - lo - dious noise;' are written below the notes.

The Moss Rose: 180-184 soprano.

(Oh) hap - py rose the fair - est flow'r that bloss - omed first in ³ E - den's Bow'r

The cohesion of the music is brought about by re-iteration of ideas and, in a process probably gleaned in part from Schumann and Liszt, by motifs sharing the same original gene pool. The *Urmotif* is the chromatic four-note figure remarked on earlier. This is transformed - to some degree unconsciously - to infiltrate later motifs.

Figure 3.4 *The Moss Rose*: transformation of motif 'a'.

1 orchestra a

11 soprano a1

where sleeps the an - gel

16 soprano a 2

86 tenor a inverted

Whose hand is waved and dew dis - tills

O fond - est ob - ject of my

133 orchestra a inverted

care

The four tiny miniatures created by the key scheme¹³³ each anticipate fundamental structures and traits exploited by MacCunn in later works.

1. Chorus. Two verse strophic then ‘development’ of **a2** in a flat minor then in g minor (another semitone slip, but downwards this time). Repetition of motifs in different keys is typical of this composer – see the choral opening of *Lord Ullin’s Daughter* – and may be used as a substitute for real exploration and development of the material, lending the music a concision much remarked upon by commentators in the late ‘80’s and early ‘90’s. The subsections in this opening are linked by anticipations and echoes, as well as by the motif **a**.

2. Tenor solo. This 3-verse modified strophic form using **a inverted** is a miniaturized preview of later solo songs in which the middle verse strays into remoter harmonic regions¹³⁴. The repetition of final lines is also characteristic.

Verse 1: ‘O fondest object of my care, still fairest found where all are fair’

Verse 2: ‘For the sweet shade thou giv’st to me, ask what thou wilt, ‘tis granted thee’ [x2]

Verse 3: Orchestral postlude, followed by **a inverted** link to

3. Soprano solo. The **a inverted** motif - now in 4/4 time - generates an orchestral accompaniment to the two vocal phrases, before relapsing into its former triple measure. Such basic motivic transformation forms an important structural buttress in cantatas and operas. The following baritone recitative includes references to **a** and to **a1**.

4. Chorus. A peroration in ternary form, with intricate string patterning in the B section comparable to textures in the orchestral accompaniment to the opera *Diarmid*. A finely managed climax at the end posits a surprise G sharp major chord on the word “flowers” before a rise to a top ‘B’ in the soprano part – cf. ‘in endless mom of light’ and another striking mediant major chord just before the end of Parry’s *Blest Pair of Sirens* - and

¹³³ See Table 3.2 on page 86 above.

¹³⁴ E.g. ‘Tell her, O tell her’ or ‘Oh would that I again could see’ from *Jeanie Deans*.

rhythmic augmentation into the final perfect cadence. Similar final bars are to be found in many songs and individual movements in the cantatas¹³⁵.

The soloists in *The Moss Rose* (setting 2) are soprano, tenor and baritone, the lighter voice types that MacCunn will tend to favour in future cantatas.

2. Choral Ballads

By the time *Lord Ullin's Daughter* received its first performance MacCunn had already experienced his first popular success with the reception of *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* at the Crystal Palace on Bonfire Night 1887. He had also mutated his Christian name James into the Scots equivalent Hamish to emphasise his heritage in the land of the Sassenachs. George Bernard Shaw was delighted with the new choral piece: '...the naiveté with which Mr. MacCunn has gone to work in the simplest fashion is his great merit'¹³⁶. But later he would rail against the composer for following *Ullin's* template too exactly in a later work:

As to Mr Hamish MacCunn's *Cameronian's Dream*, which was also performed under the composer's baton, I must frankly say that a man may go on setting ballads in that way for a lifetime without making any real progress. Any ardent young musician can pick up those tricks of being solemn on the trombone, pastoral on the oboe, and martial on the side drum easily enough nowadays. My comment on the *Cameronian's Dream* is that of the Sheffield gentleman at the Garrick Theatre: "I've heard that before"; and I may add,[...], that I have heard it quite often enough. The fiery chariot business at the end, with the ridiculous post-horn flourishes on the cornet, supported by a mechanical accompaniment which is as empty of poetic meaning and as full of prosaic suggestion as the tintinnabulation of an electric alarum, will probably end its days in ashes on Mr MacCunn's hearth, when he has come to see that when we all applauded *Lord Ullin's Daughter* so heartily, we never intended him to make a habit of it.¹³⁷

Certainly Shaw has a point: if we concentrate on *Lord Ullin's Daughter* as a prime example of the choral ballad then we will not be doing a disservice to the later works in

¹³⁵ E.g. 'When the first summer bee' or 'O Caledonia! stern and wild' from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

¹³⁶ Shaw, George Bernard, *London Music in 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, Constable 1937), 48.

¹³⁷ Shaw, George Bernard, *Music in London 1890-94* ii (London, Constable 1949), 82.

this sub-genre. Thomas Campbell (1777-1844), the Glasgow-born author of the poem, was instrumental in the founding of University College, London in 1826. Earlier he had studied law but was attracted away to a literary career. Time spent as a tutor on Mull gave him a feeling for the Highlands expressed later in poems like *Lord Ullin's Daughter*. The fourteen-stanza poem tells of a pair of lovers - the Laird of Ulva (a small island off Mull's west coast) and Lord Ullin's daughter - fleeing from her father and his posse. They take a boat across Loch Gyle but are drowned in the stormy waters as Lord Ullin watches, helpless and grieving on the shore.

Now that MacCunn has left the fairy garden behind him and stepped into the poetic, not to say nostalgic domain of the Highlands, his music exudes that same self-confidence that shone from *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*. Indeed the main theme of *Ullin* (henceforward referred to as **u¹**) is in the same mold as the overture's second subject: triple measure, quasi-hexatonic with a vigorous dotted rhythm:

Figure 3.5 *Lord Ullin's Daughter*: 3-6 - **u¹**



The presence of hexatonic melodies, with their characteristic absence of the leading-note, in MacCunn's music encouraged a harmonic vocabulary with a greater emphasis on the use of the subdominant. Indeed, this fondness for the absence of the leading-note may well have been conducive to MacCunn's widespread use of and evident delight in the dominant eleventh, an important and attitudinising sonority in the composer's broader style. There are several examples in *Ullin*, for example on page five, system three of the

vocal score. Also, like the overture melody, its open-ended character permits different continuations to be attached: the first phrase is repeated, partially or completely and then the music breaks into sequences or other passage-work. One recognises this type of melody if one attempts to remember and sing back the *end* of the *Land of Mountain and Flood* theme: it is well nigh impossible to do so.

After an orchestral introduction the choral story telling of *Ullin* begins. Up to rehearsal letter **D** in the score is a satisfying and closed ternary form. In *The Changing Year* a melody was stated by altos in C, tenors in G and by full choir back in C.¹³⁸ Here the first phrase of **u**¹ is passed between the male-voice parts successively in B flat, D and F majors before the tenors round off the musical sentence with two new phrases ‘Oh, I’m the Chief of Ulva’s Isle/ Oh I’m the Chief of Ulva’s Isle, and this Lord Ullin’s daughter.’ Each phrase has been separated by short orchestral interludes. After the more dramatic middle section (between rehearsal letters **B** and **C**) in the relative minor, the opening returns for full choir, modified, and with no orchestral interludes this time; this tutti texture with marching even quavers in the bass is familiar from *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*.¹³⁹ Triple measure does not return until the final bars of the piece with the recall of **u**¹.¹⁴⁰ From letter **D** to this moment is taken up with two subsidiary themes **u**², a motif connected with the father, Lord Ullin (page 11 ‘But not an angry father’, page 16 and even page 4 ‘his horsemen hard behind us ride’ (all page numbers in this piece refer to the Vocal Score) – **Figure 3.6 overleaf**)

¹³⁸ At the words ‘Hearts faraway beside the glowing fire were trembling true to him that dared the storm. Love breathed a prayer that quelled the winter’s ire and happy home rejoiced with greetings warm.’ See also the comments about *The Moss Rose* on page 88 above.

¹³⁹ See bars 60-71.

¹⁴⁰ This is not as perfunctory a ‘rounding off’ as in *The Wreck of the Hesperus*.

Figure 3.6 *Lord Ullin's Daughter*: VS p11 ss1-2 - u², soprano.

The image shows a musical score for a soprano part. It is written on a single staff in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. The tempo/mood is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with accents (>) over several notes. The lyrics are: "But not an an - gry fa - ther, not an an - gry fa-ther."

and, more substantially, u³ (page 11 'the boat has left the stormy land', see also page 12 and page 18),

Figure 3.7 *Lord Ullin's Daughter*: VS p11 ss2-4 u³, bass.

The image shows a musical score for a bass part. It is written on two staves in G minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. The tempo/mood is marked *f* (forte). The first staff is labeled "Basses" and contains the lyrics: "The boat has left the storm - y land, A". The second staff contains the lyrics: "storm - y sea be - fore her." The melody features a mix of eighth and quarter notes with accents (>) and a long note with a fermata in the first staff.

references to u¹, and MacCunn's stock-in-trade agitated storm techniques - tremolando, chromatic scales, *perpetuum mobile* figurations and unstable harmony. There is little polyphonic depth in this music even if the imitations between choir and orchestra might lead one to suspect otherwise e.g. page 10 'Their trampling sounded nearer', 'I'll meet the raging of the skies' (both u¹ derivatives), page 11 'But not an angry father', page 17 'Oh my daughter!' The transition to the coda (page 22) and the restatement of u¹ is stylishly done, changing from minor to major, 4/4 to 3/4, and becoming progressively softer to the end.

The same experiments with harmony, in particular the juxtaposition of unexpected chords, as at the start of *The Moss Rose* (setting 2) and in *The Ship o' the Fiend* bars 186-202 are found here in eight colourful bars (page 9):

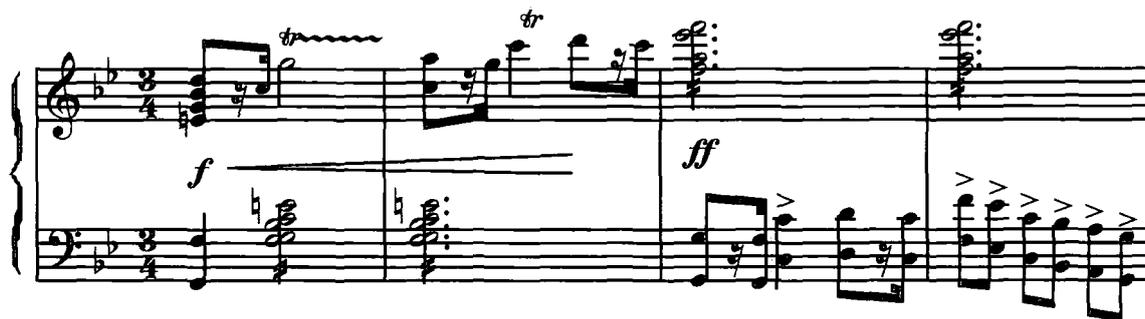
Table 3.3 *Lord Ullin's Daughter*: VS p9 ss1-2, harmonic scheme

By this the storm grew	g (i)
loud apace, / The	e flat (vi)
water wraith was	A (II)
shrieking,	D flat (flat Vb)
and in the scowl of	D7 flat 9 (V7, flat 9)
heaven, each face / Grew	E flat (VIb)
<u>dark</u> as they were	Aug 6 th on E flat (VI aug 6)
speaking	D (V)

The rigid harmonic rhythm (one chord per bar) is typical of the composer, especially in ‘purple’ passages; the word ‘dark’ in the seventh bar is emphasized by a simultaneous false relation (C sharp/ C natural) between soprano and alto. Elsewhere the unprepared use of flattened seventh chords - another MacCunn hallmark - occurs in **u**³ page 11 system 2 (C minor / B flat major/ F minor7/ G7)¹⁴¹, while the Neapolitan chord appears in several places in a threatening context. A short pattern of 4-3 and 7-6 diatonic appoggiaturas (page 3 system 4) shows that some of Parry’s influence had rubbed off on his former pupil. Appoggiaturas and suspensions of a more yearning Wagnerian hue are evident in periods of dominant preparation (e.g. page 5 systems 2-4) while the following hyperdominant seventh/ninth – dominant seventh progression – favoured by Sullivan - was common currency in late nineteenth-century British music:

¹⁴¹ Precedents for the use of unprepared flattened seventh chords outside the Celtic tradition include Beethoven in his ‘Eroica’ symphony (movement I bar 557 at the start of the coda) and Liszt in the Sonata in b minor (in the *grandioso* theme).

Figure 3.8 *Lord Ullin's Daughter*: VS p5, s4.



Even though the subject matter of doomed lovers is hardly original, it is handled in a vigorous and exciting way with virtually no sentimentality. MacCunn was at the height of his powers in 1888 - in many ways his *annus mirabilis*. By the end of the year he would have seen three of his major choral pieces and two overtures having their first performances. He must also have been relishing his first full year of freedom from the Royal College. His fully formed orchestral technique, after several years of immature inchoateness, seemed to coalesce into a more homogeneous stylistic vehicle, and in *Ullin* it accompanied a comparably accomplished choral scheme to illustrate vividly Campbell's ballad. MacCunn craftily disguises the potentially monotonous iambic ballad metre by employing up-beats of different length and by altering the stress of some lines e.g. 'One lovely *arm* she *stretched* for *aid*, and *one* was *round* her *lover*' (p. 15) - the first two words having their stress reversed. The preferred choral texture, like that of *The Moss Rose*, is homophony with occasional basic imitation, notably when Lord Ullin begs the lovers to come back 'Across this stormy water' (page 16 using u^2) and his words are shared in canon between the two male voice parts.¹⁴² This manner of artifice shows a tangible step forward from *The Moss Rose* and at the same time the cantata as a whole, with its youthful freshness and winning spontaneity (that, arguably, would never be bettered within this genre) could realistically be seen as a persuasive choral companion to *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*.

¹⁴² See also VS page 4 'his horsemen hard behind us ride.'

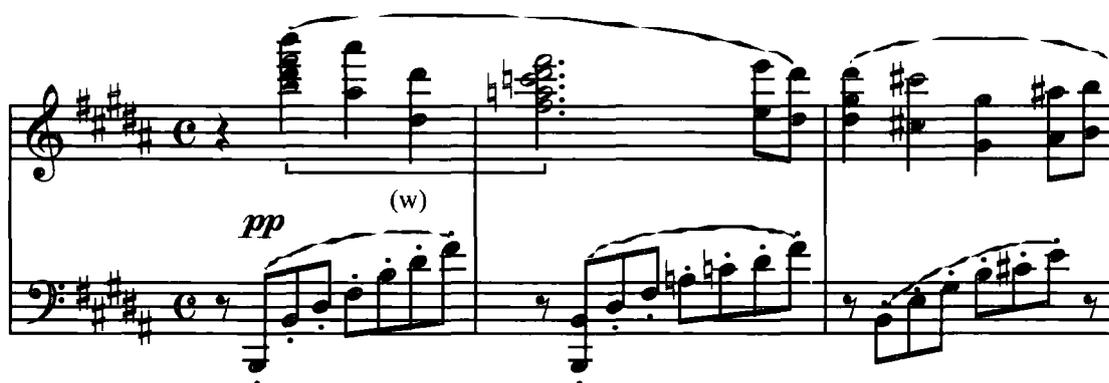
By 1905 MacCunn was heavily committed with his conducting work, but was nonetheless able to compose a short choral work *The Wreck of the Hesperus* for Oswald Stoll and the chorus and orchestra at the newly opened Coliseum. Stoll and his architect Frank Matcham had shared an ambition to build the largest and finest ‘People’s palace of entertainment’ of its age. *Hesperus* was given twice a day¹⁴³ in a mixed bill which also featured such acts as Lavater Lee and his performing mules, Frank Maura the Mexican equilibrist and The Three Merrils – American comedians on wheels!¹⁴⁴ While the music was being played, magic lantern slides were projected onto a screen, illustrating the most dramatic parts of the story. The music was dedicated to ‘My friend Walter Slaughter’. Slaughter had written the music for *Little Hans Anderson*, a rather attractive show by all accounts, conducted by MacCunn, which merited more than its 27 matinée performances at the Adelphi (December 1903 - January 1904). MacCunn had previously set words by Longfellow in two pre-RCM songs, ‘If thou art sleeping’ (27th February 1882 - a part-song) and ‘Stars of the Summer Night’ (1 March 1883). Other composers had been attracted by Longfellow’s verse. Sullivan and Stanford had both set *The Golden Legend*, while Stanford, as a student had written theatre music for *The Spanish Student*, and Elgar, who also set ‘Stars of the Summer night’ went on to write *The Black Knight*. Around the turn of the century Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, one of Stanford’s star pupils, had won huge popular success with his cantata *Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast* (1898); audiences and performers were attracted to it through the enormous popularity of Longfellow at that time together with the cult of the exotic and the free spirited romanticism of the Red Indian. It was a canny move on MacCunn’s part to cash in on this market and it paid off: after the four month Coliseum run, a special choir was sent throughout the country to perform *The Wreck of the Hesperus* with magic lantern slides, which they did for nearly a year.

¹⁴³ at 3pm and 9pm.

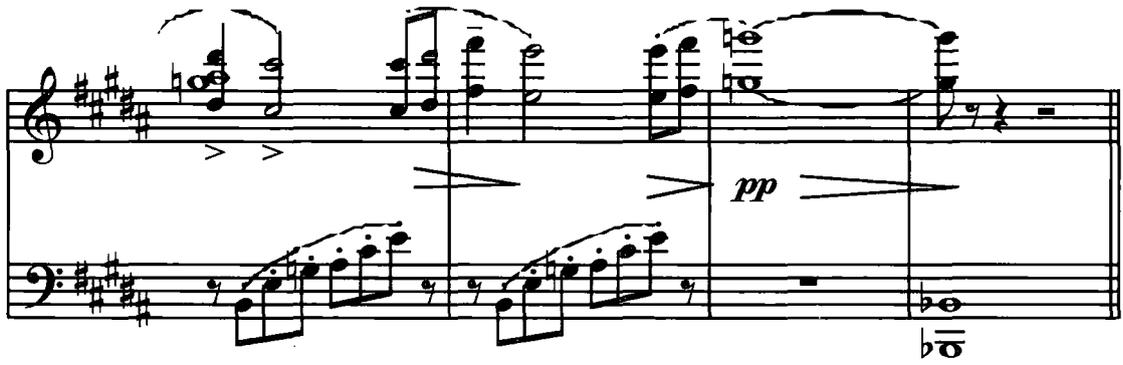
¹⁴⁴ There were also more upmarket spots from the opera singers Alice Esty (the original Effie Deans in MacCunn’s first grand opera) and by the *basso profundo* Lempriere Pringle.

The ballad is unashamedly manipulative of the reader's/audience's emotions, telling of the skipper of a schooner who lashes his little daughter ('Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax, her cheeks like the dawn of day') to the mast during a terrible tempest. The vessel is utterly destroyed on the reef of Norman's Woe and the whole company perish - 'At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach/A fisherman stood aghast, /to see the form of a maiden fair/lashed close to a drifting mast'.¹⁴⁵ The techniques used by MacCunn here have not moved on appreciably from *Ullin* seventeen years earlier; an opening 4-note motif *w* (C flat, B flat, E flat, G) which reappears in various forms throughout, again loosely holds the music together. Neither here nor in *Ullin* can the transformation of motifs be said to be truly Lisztian; the processes used are simply not sufficiently thoroughgoing, organic and truly structural. The poem does allow an opportunity for that staple of the operatic repertoire - the prayer (H to J). To point up its significance, it is the only piece of unaccompanied singing in the work; the part-writing is replete with 'pathetic' incidental chromaticisms, and the post-prayer orchestral interlude imbues the opening motif *w* with sentimental power.

Figure 3.9 *The Wreck of the Hesperus*: VS p20, ss1-3.



¹⁴⁵ Longfellow's tragic poem had much in common with Coleridge Taylor's earlier setting of Buchanan's chilling poem *Meg Blane* of 1902 which concludes with the sinking of a shipwreck and the drowning of the main protagonist.



There is little evidence of MacCunn being influenced by developments in German music at the time, there is certainly no place in his music for nightmarish astringency of utterance associated with Expressionism: however, we shall see in the four late songs for women's voices and piano a Straussian smoothness of harmonic progression, and here in *The Wreck* the motif **w** bears a striking resemblance to an important idea from Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. (and before that, to Wagner's 'Freia' motif, second limb).

Figure 3.10 Schoenberg *Verklärte Nacht*: 75-6 violin.



The threefold petition of the father by the daughter (**B** – **C**), each time pushed up a tone, inescapably recalls the son's agonising cries 'Mein Vater, mein Vater' in Schubert's 'Erlkönig', while at **C** the motif 'w' is in an identical melodic form to the Schoenberg example above.

Throughout, the orchestration is professionally if somewhat heavily done. What appears as straightforward triplet quavers in the vocal score (**D** 'Come hither, come hither my little daughter') are spread between the string parts in a fairly complex way. The storm music at **B** is conventional but undeniably successful with tremolando strings

underpinning staccato woodwind quavers. In fact, the strings hardly stop playing throughout, allowing little independence for wind or brass - only in the ante-penultimate verse (M) 'At daybreak, on the bleak sea beach' do they play by themselves to emphasise the change of atmosphere. The music here is some of the most affecting MacCunn ever wrote: with a predominantly high tessitura and an intimate chamber music texture with women's voices supported by sustained chords and a delicate quaver cantilena. Taken as a whole, this is music designed for a large audience in broad emotional brush-strokes. The *Musical Times*, having acknowledged its audio-visual performance in London, remarks that

[The music] is quite independent of pictorial accessories, and well able to stand on its own merits. While duly illustrative of the text, the composer has eschewed complexities and written with directness of expression that is happily in consonance with the simple pathos of the incident. A fairly trained choir will find no difficulty in securing an effective rendering of the work, nor need the choir be large.¹⁴⁶

Unsurprisingly both *Ullin* and *Hesperus* enjoyed many outings by amateur choirs in the early years of last century, but the flow has all but dried up in the last fifty years. Even less performed were MacCunn's last major compositions, the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* (1913), which, if all were given, would last more than an hour. There is a solid case to be made for performing them separately, if the orchestral scores and parts could be found: each contains vivid and striking moments, but the similarity of subject matter and its musical treatment means that a complete performance would, in all truth, prove wearisome to twenty-first century ears and concert programming. The orchestra required is the standard Romantic one with a large percussion section including such exotica as a stage 'crash' rattle and a piece of clanking and jingling steel chain. MacCunn knew exactly the percussion effects he wanted; he had specified a muffled bell in *The Wreck* and on the autograph of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* had been very precise

146 *MT*, xlvi (1 Dec 1905), 800.

in his wishes: ‘When the *grosse caisse* has an “sfp” thus [at the start of a trill] I want an accent only at the beginning of the roll - not a smash like a cannon shot. The “shivering roll” on the cymbals is to be played by a large soft drumstick vibrating very quickly. Strachan played it properly at Glasgow.’¹⁴⁷

If we look at one of the ballads, *The Jolly Goshawk*, we find little that suggests a new direction: structural cohesion has loosened still further, MacCunn’s ear for telling dramatic and emotional miniatures is as sharp as ever, and certain moments hint at the limited appropriation of more recent harmonic advances. The narrative concerns a Scottish chieftain who sends his love a letter using a tame goshawk to deliver it. The maiden lives in England where her father forbids her any contact with the chieftain. She gets her father to agree to her being buried in Scotland if she should die. With the help of a sleeping draught and a spell cast by an old witch-wife she appears to die, is carried over the border and miraculously wakes up to meet her lover ‘at the fourth church in Scotland’, he having been alerted to her ploy by the returning goshawk. This then is a north country *Romeo and Juliet* in miniature with a happy ending brought about by an efficient avian messenger. The audience is aware of which character is speaking by their association with specific voice parts i.e. the chieftain’s words are put in the mouths of basses (as are the father’s later on), the hawk’s are voiced by tenors, the maiden’s by sopranos and the witch’s by altos. A variety of musical styles are employed – recitative, arioso, ternary form aria, romantic song, funeral cortège, patriotic anthem – and the key structure is similarly heterogeneous. Certainly there are substantial passages in D major at either end of the work but between, the music ranges widely in a seemingly ‘stream of consciousness’ fashion. **Table 3.4** overleaf summarises the tonal areas.

¹⁴⁷ RCM Add. MS.4236.

Table 3.4 *The Jolly Goshawk*

Verse [pages in VS]	Key	Comment
1 – 5 [4 – 7]	D major	Rollicking 6/8 converse between chieftain and hawk (bass & tenor)
Orchestral interlude [8 – 9]	F sharp as dominant of b	
6 [9 – 10]	b →	Recitative
7 [10]	F sharp	Hexatonic arioso in two phrases (soprano)
8 [11-12]	F sharp → D flat → F	Ladies' narrative
9 [12-13]	F	Tenor. F alternating with D flat and C flat to establish it as dominant of B flat
10 – 14 [13-16]	B flat →	ROMANTIC SONG (SOPRANO), full chorus <i>a cappella</i> , accompanied 6-part writing
15 [16-17]	Unstable	Bass recitative (father)
16-18 [17-19]	f	Small ternary form choral narration with Dorian inflections.
19-21 [19-21]	Unstable	Grotesque witch music (alto) and recitative, which keeps slipping back to half diminished chord.
22-23 [21-22]	a (C)	Brothers and sisters. English folk-song style
24 [22-23]	Unstable → G ⁷ →	Bass recitative (chieftain)
25 [23-24]	B	ROMANTIC SONG (TENOR)
26 [24-27]	A flat → a flat	Male chorus, galloping.
27 [28-30]	b → A flat → C [c]	Funeral cortège
28 [30-31]	E flat → E	Chorus narration
29-30 [31-32]	unstable → D	Recitative and arioso
31-34 [33-36]	D	The maiden awakes, patriotic anthem

The table shows that eleven of the possible twelve notes are used as key centres (G is omitted). We can group together areas of tonal likeness (shaded in the table above). The first eight verses share a D/b/F sharp tonality – sharp keys, b the relative of D, F sharp the dominant of b. Verses 8-18 move flat-wards emphasizing an F – B flat axis. From the funeral procession (verse 27) to the end, the opening b/D tonality is re-established, albeit with short intervening episodes in unrelated keys. Verses 10 and 25 (ROMANTIC

SONG in table) tell of the maiden's love tokens and her escape plan, and share the same melodic material and lyrical outline in B flat and B respectively. MacCunn's melodic gift comes to the fore here, but, as we shall see in other works, he does not wallow in emotion for any length of time; it is on to the next incident in the story. When the maiden's brothers and sisters prepare the shroud and coffin in verses 22-3 they sing their lines to an eloquently invented folk melody, which in its modality and shape seems to belong to the English rather than the Scottish tradition.

Figure 3.11 *The Jolly Goshawk*: p21 ss2-4 tenors.

The musical score consists of two staves of music in treble clef, 8/8 time signature, and common time (C). The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The melody is characterized by a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The lyrics are: "Her bro-thers went to a room, To make to her a bier; The boards were a' of the ce-darwood, The edg-es o' sil-ver clear." The second staff continues the melody with similar rhythmic patterns. There are several accents (>) placed over notes in both staves.

This may not have been a conscious decision on the composer's part, but it is at least apt, as the maid has 'died' south of the Border. Other short scenes pass by on the colourful way to the conclusion: there is the almost inevitable unaccompanied moment (verses 11-12) when the maiden petitions her father about the funeral arrangements, followed by an episode of rich six-part writing describing what should happen at each of the four churches in Scotland. It is regrettable that such memorable melodic material cannot be revisited in some form in the penultimate funeral scene: the structure of the words – mentioning the four churches again – is crying out for restatement, and it would give the listener an additional, much needed formal signpost. Another stock scene in MacCunn's



illustrative canon involves galloping horses e.g. in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Diarmid*. Here (verse 26) the male chorus take a common time pattern straight from *Jeanie Deans*,¹⁴⁸ and mutate it into an urgent compound time. In the final bars of this section the modality turns from major to minor, which in MacCunn's music often presages a modulation. Here, as the sound of galloping horses dies away, a C flat – we are in A flat - is purposefully implanted in our minds. After a long silence, the funeral music starts up in B minor. Elsewhere, MacCunn modulates by using conventional progressions within the prevailing tonality, by using sequence, by playing on the ambiguity of chords such as the augmented sixth, and by leaping straight into a new key. The present modulation is really one of these last, except that the preparation of the 'B' ('C flat') softens the shock. Within individual sections, the key is likely to wander away from the prevailing tonality. As if to signal its intent, the opening phrases stray immediately, before pulling back via sequential patterns. Experiments with harmony are isolated and short-lived, e.g. a sequence of augmented chords (VS page 5 systems 1-2) – essentially the same process as found in *The Ship of the Fiend* 'hell' episode (bars 190-6) from 25 years earlier - or three unrelated minor chords F, B and D (page 17 system 4 and page 18 system 4). Oscillating between two harmonically charged chords *is* a novel trait (see the example overleaf), perhaps influenced by the two-bar phrases of Debussy or by comparable sequences (complete with avian flutterings) in Dvořák's symphonic poem *The Wild Dove*. A resolute use of chords an augmented fourth apart (page 13 system 2) permeates the only recitative given to the father (page 16 system 4 – page 17 system 1).

¹⁴⁸ See *Jeanie Deans*, start of Act IV scene ii.

Figure 3.12 *The Jolly Goshawk*: p12 ss1-4 tenors.

The image shows the first four measures of a musical score. The top staff is for Tenor, and the bottom two staves are for Piano. The Tenor part begins with a rest in the first measure, followed by a half note 'You're' in the second measure. The Piano accompaniment consists of a steady, chromatic eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand, with 'V' markings above the notes. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'p misterioso'.

The image shows the next four measures of the musical score. The Tenor part continues with the lyrics 'bid-den to send your love a send, For he has sent you twa; [And'. The Piano accompaniment remains consistent with the previous measures, featuring the same chromatic eighth-note patterns in both hands with 'V' markings.

In its chromatic richness and slow, regular harmonic rhythm, the father's short appearance recalls the Wagnerian progressions of the Constable's music in *Jeanie Deans* – another cameo role. Davie Deans' music in the same opera was underpinned by deliberate – usually slow – changes of chord; thus are two father/authority figures characterised in MacCunn's works. In other recitatives in *The Jolly Goshawk* the half-diminished chord comes into its own to add emotional richness to the narrative and to push the music into new, more tonally dissolute areas.

Aside from the re-iterated “love token” music in verses 10 and 25, and the return to the home key at the end, there are few meaningful motifs to weld the structure together. A loosely knit assembly of motifs that emphasize the interval of a fifth, suggest

some continuity in the discourse:

Table 3.5 *The Jolly Goshawk*: use of ‘5th’ motif.

p. 8	orchestral interlude
p.12	verse 9 ¹⁴⁹
pp.16-17	verse 15 (Father)
pp.17-19	verse 16 – 18 Dorian mode narration (‘The lady’s gane to her chamber’)
pp.28-30	Opening of <i>Andante maestoso</i> theme.

Word-painting and other apt musical description help to bring the story alive: semiquaver vibrations for the hawk’s wing movements (pp. 8-9, 12-13)¹⁵⁰, grotesque octave leaps for the witch wife (pp. 19-20), ‘scornful’ augmented chords as the maiden reveals how she has duped her brothers (p. 34).

Writing of the first performance of the *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* at the Victoria Hall, Sheffield, the correspondent of the *Sheffield Evening News* remarked:

The vocal parts abound in difficult changes of key tonality, - that such difficulties can be overcome by so fine a chorus as the Amateur Musical Society was amply shown by last night’s performance - but they also contain many highly effective unison passages and many delightful melodies. The chorus gave a magnificent performance [...] which must have given great pleasure to Mrs MacCunn, the widow of the composer, who was present.¹⁵¹

The Musical Times observed: ‘The constantly changing speed, tonality, and character of the music, and its unflagging dramatic interest give a good deal of scope to an imaginative choir.’¹⁵² And, one might add, any one of the *Four Traditional Scottish Border Ballads* would present a similarly exciting challenge to adventurous choral societies today.

3. A Note on the Partsongs

In his own catalogue drawn up in December 1913, MacCunn lists eight published

¹⁴⁹ See **Figure 3.12** on the previous page.

¹⁵⁰ See **Figure 3.12** on the previous page..

¹⁵¹ *Sheffield Evening News*, 20 April 1921, 21.

¹⁵² *MT*, lxii (1 June 1921), 441.

partsongs together with an unpublished setting of Ossian for male voices.¹⁵³ Eight further manuscript works are posited in the Glasgow University Special Collections. After he catalogued his compositions, he wrote four partsongs for female voices and piano in May 1914; these pieces, some of the last he wrote, turn out to be little gems in the form, rethinking as they do his solo song sensitivity in terms of a vocal trio.

All twenty-one works in this genre are most definitely partsongs and not glees nor Pearsallian madrigals¹⁵⁴. They conform to Michael Hurd's definition as:

a setting of words to be sung either by a group of soloists or by a choral group; [...] the upper part tends to dominate, so that the overall impression is of a harmonised song, even though the accompanying parts may themselves be lively and independent; [...] its formal shape is determined only by the dramatic or atmospheric needs of the words – the most likely outcome involving some form of verse repetition.¹⁵⁵

All partsongs, bar those late songs written for women's voices, were written in the ten years between 1883 and 1893, with the majority of items appearing in short spells of intense activity e. g. September/October 1886. Publishing outlets were Augener for two settings of his friend William Black and Novello for the rest. Although MacCunn's melodic gift is as evident as ever, his formal conservatism may blunt the impact of some of these songs: the four verses – all musically identical - of 'Another glass before we go' are laid out to cover twelve pages; presumably MacCunn was being paid by the page. In other songs, strophic layouts may be modified for the final verse or may be replaced by a ternary structure. Unusual phrase lengths can arise from the pattern of words e. g. the first phrase of 'It was a Lass' is 2^{1/2} bars long – or from the composer's desire to break

¹⁵³ 'Star of Descending Night' from *The Songs of Selma*. This manuscript is not in Glasgow University Library, and no longer appears to be extant.

¹⁵⁴ There is a so-called madrigal in the opera *Jeanie Deans* at the start of Act IV. A chorus of Immortals in *Diarmid* is for unaccompanied men's voices puts one in mind of a glee (cf. an *a cappella* chorus (mixed) of Spirits in the cantata *Bonny Kilmeny*). The incorporation of a madrigalian partsong in late Victorian opera was far from an unusual occurrence. The fine examples from Sullivan's operettas come to mind. Also numbers in Barnett's *Fair Rosamund*, Loder's *Raymond and Agnes* and Macfarren's *She stoops to conquer*.

¹⁵⁵ Hurd, Michael, 'Glees, madrigals and partsongs' in Temperley, Nicholas (ed.), *The Athlone History of Music in Britain, The Romantic Age (1800-1914)* (London, Athlone Press 1981), 254.

the four-bar tyranny e. g. the climactic final six bar phrase of 'I've been roaming'.

Harmonically, the norms of late Victorian music are adhered to, with a concentration on salon-style appoggiaturas and auxiliary notes in keeping with their modest ambitions. On occasion this concentration can yield apparently eccentric clashes (marked with an asterisk in the example below).

Figure 3.13 'It was a lass': p2 s3.

Soprano
And sought him, if she would or no, and sought him if she

Alto
And sought him, if she would or no, And sought

Tenor
And sought him, if she would or no, And sought him,

Bass
And sought him, if she would or no,

Dynamics: *f*, *mf*, *p*. An asterisk (*) is placed above the Soprano line in measure 5.

would or no, and sought...

him if she would...

if she would or no...

Ah well a day!...

Dynamics: *p*.

In another place it is hard to disentangle the harmonic thinking (at the asterisk again).

Figure 3.14 'In the Primrose Time of the Year': p4 s2.

The image shows a musical score for five voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass. The music is in G major and common time. Each part has the same lyrics: "To give good wel-com-ing to the Spring, In the prim-rose time of the year!". The score includes dynamic markings (*f*, *rall e dim*, *p*) and a specific performance instruction marked with an asterisk: "* *rall e dim*". The Soprano part has an asterisk above the first measure of the phrase "In the prim-rose time".

The most successful of this early group are those in which we anticipate the strophic or near-strophic repetitions with satisfaction rather than with nonchalant acceptance. Thus for the present writer, the bright and boisterous Shakespeare setting 'O Mistress Mine' and the emotional 'O where art thou dreaming' (Moore)¹⁵⁶ stand out above the rest.

If these early partsongs are competently if somewhat stereotypically handled, the four late trios for female voices and piano are on a much more exalted level. In the absence of documentary evidence it is impossible to say whether the publisher Novello's stipulations or a particularly talented group of singers propelled MacCunn's muse to take flight. The harmonic quirks, which marked the composer out in youthful days, have been subsumed into something altogether more homogeneous. The stream of augmented chords

¹⁵⁶ Anthologised in Hillier, Paul (ed.), *English Romantic Partsongs* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1986).

familiar from the ‘hell’ episode in *The Ship o’ the Fiend* resurface in ‘On a faded violet’ (‘a shrivell’d, lifeless, vacant form’), but any sense of danger is absent, to be replaced here by a mild feeling of unease. In ‘Night’, after a short piano interlude responding to the words ‘While the balmy breath of the summer breeze / Comes whisp’ring down the glen’ and redolent of Debussy’s *Arabesque No. 1*, the remaining two pages are basically a hugely extended quasi-Straussian cadence. When the resolution comes, it is onto an augmented chord which passes via another typically Straussian sidestep to A minor before slipping onto the tonic D flat chord to end.

Figure 3.15 ‘Night’: p7 ss 2-3.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Night' on page 7, systems 2 and 3. It features four staves: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, and Piano. The vocal parts (Soprano 1, Soprano 2, and Alto) are in treble clef and sing the lyrics 'love - ly then, is love - ly then!'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and includes dynamic markings such as *rall.*, *sf p*, and *pp*. The score is written in a key signature of three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor) and a common time signature.

This relationship between tonic and flat submediant minor is touched upon again in the opening phrase of both ‘On a Faded Violet’ and the Longfellow setting ‘Whither?’ Here MacCunn is at his most suave and urbane, the thirty-plus years in London having worn away some rough Caledonian corners. As if to reinforce the point, ‘O my love, leave me not’, the fourth of these vocal trios, is an arrangement of a pentatonic Gaelic melody with

'hummed' lower parts and the sort of rich piano figuration found in the almost contemporary piano piece 'In the Glen'. This is lush stuff, especially when it is compared with the austere settings of Scottish Songs in the album of 1891. In all four songs, the management of voices and accompaniment is of the highest order, making them hugely satisfying for performers and listeners alike.

CHAPTER 4

Choral Music II

1. Works involving soloists
2. *Livingstone* and two pageants

‘Adieu dear maids of Scotia wide,
Thy minstrel’s solace and his pride,
The theme that all his feelings move
Of grief, of pity and of love.’
(from James Hogg *Queen Hynde*, lines 1558-61)

Choral Music II

1. Works involving soloists.

If the single movement choral ballads show MacCunn's precocious ability to match dramatic situations with vivid music, then, when the canvas is expanded to encompass soloists, chorus and orchestra within a multi-movement scheme, a quasi-operatic event takes place. In general, the distance between cantata/oratorio and opera is often not very great; one could not seek for a more dramatic/operatic scene than, for instance, the portrayal of Pentecost in Elgar's *The Kingdom* ['In Solomon's Porch'] and conversely we may consider the many prayers and hymns in Grand Opera which would not be out of place in oratorios¹⁵⁷. Coleridge-Taylor even wrote a 'cantata-operetta' called *The Gitanos* (1898). This short work for women's voices and piano was his response to the publisher Augener's request for works which could both be sung on the concert platform and performed on the operatic stage. So we should not be surprised at MacCunn's confidence in tackling his first real opera *Jeanie Deans* (1894) given the many fine songs, scenes, concerted pieces and choruses in these dramatic cantatas that precede it.

A pattern is established in *Bonny Kilmeny* (1886) but is most successfully carried through in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1888) - a treatment of Sir Walter Scott's ballad. The original poem is extensive, with an introduction and six cantos each containing upwards of thirty verses. As is common in the works of the bard of Abbotsford¹⁵⁸, there is a framing device in the character of the 'Last Minstrel' who sings the story, but he plays no part in MacCunn's setting. As with *Bonny Kilmeny* and *Queen Hynde*, James MacCunn, the composer's father, chose and arranged (and sometimes rewrote) the words

¹⁵⁷ Or indeed in cantatas: see the comments made about *The Wreck of the Hesperus* on page 96 above.

¹⁵⁸ And in much nineteenth century fiction: see for example the Novellen of Theodor Storm.

from the original. In the *Lay MacCunn* Snr. provides a prefatory written argument in the score for reproduction in a concert programme, which fills in narrative spaces between the chosen stanzas. This is very necessary here, otherwise there would be some bewildering non-sequiturs for the audience. Like a true 'border ballad' the *Lay* deals in the traditional themes of feuding and love; a supernatural element is also present in the power of the Mighty Book belonging to the great wizard Michael Scott¹⁵⁹. The Scottish Knights are waiting in the Buccleuch family home, Branksome Hall, ready to repulse an attack by the English Borderers. Lady Buccleuch's daughter Margaret is in love with Lord Cranston against her mother's will - a family feud exists between the houses of Cranston and Buccleuch. Having consulted with the Spirits of Mountain and River, Lady Buccleuch sends her most valiant knight, Sir William of Deloraine, to ride to Melrose Abbey to wrest Michael Scott's Mighty Book from his tomb, whose possession will provide a defence against the invaders. On his way back from Melrose, Deloraine interrupts a dawn tryst between Margaret and Cranston. The knights engage and Deloraine is wounded. Late in the evening of the same day Margaret sees the sky turn red with 'the beacon blaze of war'. The English have crossed the Border and are laying siege to Branksome Hall. Lady Buccleuch offers Deloraine as her champion in single combat with their noblest knight. Anxiety arises about Deloraine's fitness to fight, but the agency of the Mighty Book is at work. Deloraine appears on the scene and slays Sir Richard Musgrave, the English champion. When the Scottish knight reveals himself to be Cranston not Deloraine - who by magical influence has entered Branksome Hall unseen

¹⁵⁹ Michael Scott is a legendary figure in Scots folk-law and a major character in James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man*. The characteristic shape of the Eildon Hills behind Melrose ('Trimontium') is supposed to have resulted from Scott's power in breaking one huge mountain into three.

and dressed himself in Deloraine's armour - the houses of Cranston and Buccleuch are reconciled and all join in a final patriotic song¹⁶⁰.

A fairly complicated plot then, made more so by MacCunn Senior's compression and elision e.g. in the sung words there is no mention of the outcome of the encounter between Cranston and Deloraine; later on we *do* learn that Deloraine is wounded, but the unmasking of Cranston in the final combat with Musgrave, still seems baffling even given the magical powers of the Book. *The Musical Times* went so far as to suggest that 'the shortcomings of the composition were due to the scrappiness of the libretto. All development and continuity are precluded by the way in which the story is cut up into a number of very short scenes'¹⁶¹. In spite of this narrative confusion James MacCunn still retains Scott's words for the majority of his adaptation and presents his son with many fine opportunities to respond to the great themes of battle, love and the supernatural. *Lord Ullin's Daughter* showed us MacCunn in predominantly agitated mode as Ullin's forces pursued his errant daughter and her lover; here the scenario is more varied. The bellicose scenes depend for their impact on compound rhythms or triplets in simple time signatures related to the beat of galloping horses' hooves, for example Part I, no. 1 reiterated in Part II, No.2, page 80 (in the Vocal Score). Deloraine's passage to Melrose and back uses similar methods of description: Part I, no.5; Part II, no.2; Part II, no.6. At the other extreme, the love scene between Cranston and Margaret - one of the happiest lyrical inventions in the whole of MacCunn's output - opens Part II. The ternary form structure sees the tenor soloist and the chorus narrating the love scene (Cranston and Margaret do not voice their own emotions here - perhaps they should). While some might argue that

¹⁶⁰ *The Lay* is the source of the ringing line 'Land of the Mountain and the Flood'.

¹⁶¹ *MT*, xxx (1 March 1889), 151.

the inclusion of the chorus reduces the scene's intimacy, MacCunn's sensitive layout of his voices and the quality of the music itself makes this criticism redundant. The opening A section *is* for tenor alone, his four-phrase sentence showing close internal logic in the development of a single pattern.

Figure 4.1 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: pp57-59, Tenor part and harmonic outline.

The figure displays a musical score for the Tenor part, consisting of four staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8. The score is divided into four measures, each starting with a measure number (1, 6, 11, 16) and ending with a structural label (L1, L2, L3). The harmonic outline is provided below the notes for each measure. Brackets labeled 'x' and 'orchestral echo' indicate specific musical features.

Measure 1 (L1): D: I, IV, I, Ic, V7, I. A bracket labeled 'x' spans measures 7-8.

Measure 6: IV, A:III, vi, ii7, V, I. A bracket labeled 'x' spans measures 7-8. A bracket labeled 'orchestral echo' spans measures 9-10.

Measure 11 (L2): I7d, F: I, dim 7, I, IV b (x), ii7, V.

Measure 16 (L3): I, 17, IV7 = D: aug 6th, Ic, V7, I.

L¹ modulates to the dominant via the sudden C sharp to F sharp minor progression (bars 7-8): the melody reaches higher and is lengthened within its four-bar ring fence. A rich tertiary modulation to F in sentence **L²** sets up the augmented sixth pivot chord to bring us back to the tonic and a phrase **x** heard as in the original **L**. When this section is repeated at the end, both tenor and the chorus sing, lending a sense of emotional amplification. The central section is for chorus alone - the characterisation of male and female protagonists are nicely delineated in the music:

Figure 4.2 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: p61, bass.

Bass

f

He was state - ly, young and tall;

3

Dread - ed in bat - tle loved in hall

p

and she, when love, scarce told, scarce hid,

Lent to her cheek a live - lier red;

The perceptive *Glasgow Herald* reviewer at the first performance was quick to recognise the composer's qualities, particularly in the nocturnal scene at Melrose Abbey:

In the scene [...] in which Deloraine, at the witching hour of midnight, defies heaven and hell in the execution of his lady's behests, Mr. MacCunn has put his whole strength, and it is no more than the truth when we say that here the intensity of imaginative power and

graphic force of delineation will bear comparison with the best work produced by men of ripe experience and unquestioned genius.

...a scene full of weird, picturesque and fascinating effects in tone-painting
...even the most sceptical could hardly fail to recognise in the author of the midnight scene in the abbey a composer by the grace of God.¹⁶²

The scene is certainly a remarkable achievement for a young man of twenty, still very much absorbing the influences of greater composers. The texture of the opening (VS page 41 – see **Figure 4.4** on page 118 below) with its octave doublings and low tessitura recalls the Brahms of the *German Requiem* (no.2 ‘Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras’) or certain piano pieces (e.g. *Intermezzo* Opus 117, no. 2 bars 27-30 or *Variations and Fugue on a theme of Handel*: variation 6), while the compound time transformation at the end (page 56) is comparable in effect to the sweetly lilting seventh variation from *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*. Agitated passages of tremolando strings and running semiquavers were a *lingua franca* in the 19th century: Loge’s music from *Die Walküre* comes to mind on page 50, or moments from Dvorak’s *Spectre’s Bride*¹⁶³ on page 51. At another place (page 48 system 3 – page 49 system 1) ‘When the huge stone sunk o’er the tomb...’ the melodic shape of Liszt’s *Faust* symphony / I / main theme, appears to combine with Wagnerian harmony from the ‘Magic Fire’ music

Figure 4.3 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: p48 s3, basses and harmonic outline.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Bass and Harmonic outline. The Bass part is written in a bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some accidentals. The Harmonic outline part is also in a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, showing a series of chords represented by block letters (G, F, E, D) with accidentals (b, #) indicating the specific notes of the chords. The lyrics 'When the huge stone ...' are written between the two staves.

¹⁶² ‘Choral-Orchestral Concerts’, *Glasgow Herald*, 19 December 1888, 7.

¹⁶³ e.g. parts of the *Allegro con fuoco* movement no.6: ‘And on he went with rapid gait’.

To the standard Romantic orchestra employed for the *Lay*, MacCunn has added a piccolo and a double bassoon for this scene, as he seeks to broaden the pitch spectrum at either end. At the outset the strings play in octaves while brass (down to tuba), bassoon and double bassoon sustain (see example overleaf). When the Mighty Book is pilfered from the Michael Scott's tomb, the wizard frowns - a huge discord for full orchestra (C, G, Bb, Db, F), bass drum roll and rushing semiquavers for flute and piccolo (page 48 system 2 – see **Figure 4.5** on page 119 below). The aftermath of the theft, when Deloraine and the Monk hear “strange noises on the blast” adds to the ‘Loge’ music shrieked staccato notes from the woodwind, sudden interjections from the heavy brass and a ‘shivering cymbal roll with a soft muffled drumstick’; dynamic levels surge and recede (‘Loud sobs and laughter louder ran’ pages 50 – 53 – see **Figure 4.6** on page 120 below). None of this is particularly groundbreaking but it is well executed and effective, comparable indeed - as the *Herald* critic noted - with the best work of ‘men of ripe experience’.

The *Lay* is divided into two halves of respectively seven and ten numbers (see **Table 4.1** on page 121). This would not represent two halves of an evening concert - the piece is less than an hour long - but it does invite the composer to essay a quasi-operatic finale in the centre of the work. The Melrose Abbey scene certainly fits the bill. Aside from the chorus in this work there are four soloists - Soprano (Lady Buccleuch), Mezzo (Margaret), Tenor (William) and Baritone (Cranston). Minor characters, the Monk, Nature Spirits and even a narrator are shared between the male soloists. This slightly awkward apportioning of parts comes about through the nature of Scott's narrative poetry itself. His stories are heavily populated, making their ideal outlet the opera rather than the

Figure 4.5 The Long of the Last Minstrel: "the dead man frowned".

Handwritten musical score for measures 109-112. The score consists of multiple staves with complex notation, including various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several instances of crossed-out or heavily scribbled-out sections, particularly in the upper staves. The notation is dense and appears to be a working draft or a highly detailed manuscript.

Handwritten musical score for measures 110-112. This section continues the musical notation from the previous page. It features multiple staves with complex notation, including various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *sf* (sforzando). The notation is dense and appears to be a working draft or a highly detailed manuscript. There are some annotations and markings that suggest a specific performance style or interpretation.

Table 4.1 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

PAGE (VS)	FORCES	TEXT	NOTES
Part I			
No.1 1-10	Orchestral Introduction and Male Chorus	<i>Nine-and-twenty knights of fame</i>	F major Galloping rhythms. Two verses of male chorus
No.2 11-15	Choral (SATB) Recitative	<i>But he the chieftain of them all</i>	D flat major ABA, with a lyrical central section.
No.3 16-22	Soli – River Spirit and Mountain Spirit – and Chorus	<i>Sleep'st thou brother?</i>	B flat major Chorus enter at the end to present a harmonised version of <i>But no kind influence deign they shower on Teviot's tide and Branksome's tow'r / Till pride be quelled and Love be free.</i>
No.4 23-26	Lady Buccleugh	<i>Sir William of Deloraine</i>	B major to E major, then unstable Recitative
No.5 27-35	Chorus	<i>The clatt'ring hoofs the watchmen mark</i>	A minor More galloping rhythms before a choral recitative <i>When Melrose he reached, 'twas silence all....</i>
No.6 36-40	Monk, Deloraine	<i>Who knocks so loud?</i>	A minor – C minor – C major Dialogue between Monk and Deloraine then dramatic monologue describing the terrors of disturbing the dead.
No.7 41-56	Chorus, Monk	<i>Before their eyes the wizard lay</i>	B flat minor Climactic finale to Part I: large-scale and ambitious. Reprise of opening music at the end.
Part II			
No.1 57-66	Tenor and Chorus	<i>The wild birds told their warbling tale</i>	D major Lyrical highlight
No.2 67-74	Chorus	<i>Hark, hark! who comes</i>	G minor – D minor Galloping triplets, then recitative.
No.3 75-77	Margaret	<i>True love's the gift</i>	F sharp major Aria then recitative.
No.4 78-83	Chorus	<i>No, 'tis the beacon-blaze of war</i>	B minor – F sharp major Bellicose, loud chorus.
No.5 84-92	Lady Buccleugh and chorus of English and Scottish knights	<i>Why 'gainst the truce of border tide</i>	G major Scottish knights echo Lady B's melody 90-2
No.6 93-99	Choral recitative	<i>Now is the hour</i>	D minor – A flat major – D minor Cranston to the rescue
No.7 100-1	Chorus	<i>'Tis done</i>	G minor Short chorus (recitative)
No.8 102-110	Lady Buccleugh, Cranston, Margaret and Chorus	<i>For this fair prize</i>	E flat major Reprise of motifs associated with main characters. Chorus effect closure with reprise of music from 21-2
No.9 111-2	Cranston	<i>Breathes there the man</i>	Unstable – from A flat to dominant of G
No.10 113-8	Chorus	<i>O Caledonia</i>	Stirring recitative leading into patriotic chorus [C major] mostly homophonic – over a busy orchestral accompaniment in latter stages.

cantata. Macfarren in his cantata based on *The Lady of the Lake* (1877) and Corder in his *The Bridal of Triermain* (1886) must have laboured hard with their librettists in resolving this difficulty. One other possible solution would be the excision of minor characters altogether or even elision of two minor personages into one.

With so much incident in the *Lay*, MacCunn is careful to give the audience clear aural signposts to guide them. Not only do the principal characters each have a personal musical motif, but also references to the supernatural - the Cross, the Mighty Book - are flagged up by a memorable modal motif. Whether coincidentally or not this motif bears a striking resemblance to the main theme of another demonic work *The Ship o' the Fiend*.

Figure 4.7 *The Ship o' the Fiend/ The Lay of the Last Minstrel: thematic relationship.*

p25

The figure shows two musical staves. The top staff is a vocal line for Lady Buccleugh, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody begins with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a dotted quarter note B4, and finally a half note G4. The lyrics are: "Lady Buccleugh: And the Cross of Blood - y red....". The bottom staff is a trumpet line from *The Ship o' the Fiend*, starting with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes G4, A4, B4, and C5, followed by a dotted quarter note B4, and finally a half note G4. This melody is a transposition of the vocal line above.

Lady Buccleugh: And the Cross of Blood - y red....

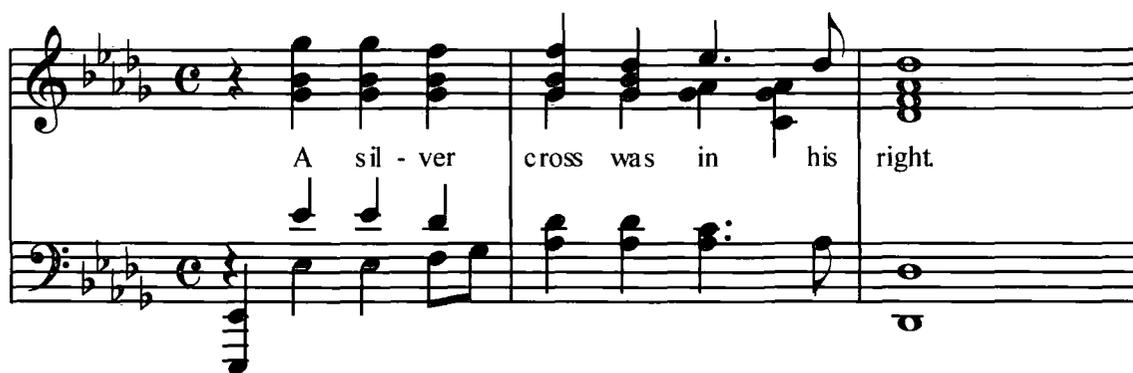
The Ship o' the Fiend, rehearsal letter I, trumpet 1

There are other reprises throughout the work: the Mountain Spirit's prophecy (starting at 'Arthur's slow wain his course doth roll – p19 s4) that there will be no happy outcome 'till pride be quelled and love be free'¹⁶⁴ is of course restated when that outcome

¹⁶⁴ see the example on page 125 below.

is in sight, both in diminished rhythm (page 106) and in its original form (page 109). The imposing picture of Michael Scott in his tomb with a silver cross in his right hand is set (page 43) to a typical MacCunn progression including a complex dominant chord: this foreshadows - with no very good reason¹⁶⁵ - the 'Land of the Mountain and the Flood' motif in the closing chorus (pages 111,114, 117, 118).

Figure 4.8 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: p43 s3- p44 s1.



Cranston is described as 'dreaded in battle, loved in hall' (page 61) to a rising triplet arpeggio. At the denouement when the chorus are looking for a substitute champion to fight Musgrave, a similar pattern is used for their query (page 94). More than that, in a rare instance of meaningful orchestral leitmotif, the new champion is revealed to be Cranston to the listener before the chorus get to know: Cranston's main motif is played (page 96) followed by the Magic Book idea - revealing the hero and the agency of his transformation. One might almost see Cranston's motif itself as a transformation and extension of Deloraine's, thereby mirroring the narrative (see **Figure 4.9** overleaf)

¹⁶⁵ Unless the Scottish cross of St. Andrew is being alluded to.

Figure 4.9 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: pp96-97.

p96 Cranston's Motif

[\"Lord William of De - lor raine\"] -

p97 Magic Book

Whereas MacCunn's repertoire of motifs quickly becomes evident to score-follower and to listener, a family likeness between many themes may be less apparent. Whether this is conscious or not, hardly matters; it produces a greater coherence across the substantial performing time. The family likeness concerns a rising 4th plus 2nd at the start of phrases. This runs throughout the work from the opening male chorus to the quasi-ostinato accompaniment to the final chorus 'O Caledonia! stern and wild'. It could be argued that an ascending stepwise melody preceded by a dominant-tonic leap is a commonplace in all music, but there *does* seem to be more to it here (see **Figure 4.10** overleaf).

Figure 4.10 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: motivic cross-relations.

See also p3 "Nine and twenty knights of fame...
p80 in F sharp

Orch Forest spirit: Sleepst thou broth - er?

p19 Mountain Spirit:
Ar - thur's slow wain his course doth roll, In ut - ter
dark - ness doth roll a - round the pole:

p23
Lady Buccleugh Sir Wil - liam of De - lor - aine.

p72
Chorus Gal - lant Wil - liam of De - lor - aine!

See also pp85, 87, 97 - 98

p32

Chorus These sounds u - pon the fit - ful gale

p55

Chorus: Be - fore the Cross was the bo - dy

p113 Orch

laid

A subset of this pattern features a *descending* 4th followed by a rising 2nd continued downwards in sequence like a bolt of musical lightning. This is frequently used in the first half of the *Lay* only.

Figure 4.11 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: motivic cross-relations.

4 2

pp1 - 2 Orch

p16 Orch

p16 Mountain Spirit

Mer - ry elves their mor - ris - pa - cing



In terms of the amount of words apportioned to them, the chief personages are Lady Buccleuch - a meaty challenge for a high soprano - and the Monk. The chorus reports much of the action involving the main figures, of course. Cranston, Margaret and particularly Deloraine are given little to do, but the tenor soloist appears as narrator in addition to the River Spirit, and, as we have already seen Cranston = Monk = Mountain Spirit; taken together the male soloists have enough to do. But it is the chorus who are given the opportunity to shine here, and rightly so, as MacCunn designed the work with a particular chorus in mind - the Glasgow Choral Union. Twelve of the seventeen items involve them, acting as emotionally involved narrator for the most part, but once as rival English and Scottish armies. The male chorus are given a number of their own (as had the female singers in *Bonny Kilmeny*) but otherwise it is a mixed-voice sound, predominantly homophonic in texture. Although two movements are labelled 'Choral Recitative' they are simply choruses that push the action onwards. This *parlando* style for chorus has many precedents in earlier cantatas¹⁶⁶, in the anthems of S.S.Wesley¹⁶⁷ and

¹⁶⁶ e.g. Sterndale Bennett's *The May Queen* - the chorus answer the Queen (no.9) when she enquires who the brawlers are, and in no.8 comment in the recitative dispute between suitors.

¹⁶⁷ e.g. *Blessed be the God and Father* : 'Being born again.....'

even in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* ('Where be oi, and what be oi a-doing?'). If we consider the first of the choral recitatives (no.2) it is in three clear sections: the first and third contrast *a cappella* singing with orchestral passages, but the central passage is much more lyrical, containing one of those characteristic phrases - suggesting unrest - in which unrelated chords follow each other one bar at a time (p 13 s2). In other places the chorus enjoys a variety of treatments: the vigorous galloping rhythms associated with William of Deloraine,

Figure 4.12 *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: p27 s2.

p27 *f*

Chorus basses The clat - t'ring hoofs the watch - men mark

the 'strange noises on the blast' at Melrose, the sensitive accompaniment to the tenor narrator during the lovers' tryst and the stirring patriotic song at the end, stand out as being particularly memorable.

In the *Lay*, as in all his multi-movement cantatas MacCunn is unwilling to write extended movements with the music drawn out through word repetition as say Dvořák does in *The Spectre's Bride*. The Melrose Abbey scene is perhaps the exception as it gives itself time to create a potent atmosphere. Other numbers are in ternary form or are through composed. As the *Musical Times* critic put it: [MacCunn] goes to the extreme of

saying his say once (and very well sometimes), but before his hearers have time to feel an interest in the movement, it is over.’¹⁶⁸

December 1888 was an important month for MacCunn. The *Lay* was given for the first time by the Glasgow Choral Union on the 18th, conducted by Joseph Bradley. Earlier in the concert the composer had directed *The Dowie Dens of Yarrow* within a programme of curiously heterogeneous items.¹⁶⁹ The next evening he was entertained at dinner by the Glasgow Society of Musicians; 150 gentlemen were present. Five days earlier across in Edinburgh, MacCunn had conducted the first performance of *Bonny Kilmeny* at the Queen’s Street Hall. But *Kilmeny* bears the early Opus number 2: a recently purchased autograph at Glasgow University Library does indeed show that it was completed a long time previously, on 21st March 1886 when he was still at the RCM.¹⁷⁰

James Hogg’s ‘Kilmeny’ is one of seventeen poems in *The Queen’s Wake* (1813) in which is imagined a gathering of bards set by Mary Queen of Scots at her homecoming from overseas to compete for the prize of a harp. ‘Kilmeny’ has sometimes been viewed as one of the most beautiful and mysterious of poems in the Scots or any language. It tells the story of a pure maid who goes walking and disappears, returning only after a long time to tell of how she was taken to a place on the borders of heaven, and granted a vision of the future of Scotland and mankind.¹⁷¹ This simple narrative means that James MacCunn could condense and rearrange the text in consecutive form so that it is

¹⁶⁸ *MT*, xxx (1 March 1889), 151.

¹⁶⁹ Chorus ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ (Hecht), Aria ‘Where the sun’ (Mackenzie), Aria ‘Che faro senz’ Euridice?’ (Gluck) Air ‘Thou may’st learn to hate me’ (Mozart), Air ‘Rage thou angry storm’ (Benedict), Processional March and Chorus from *La Reine de Saba* (Gounod).

¹⁷⁰ As a young man starting his composing career he does go through the Opus numbers in order, though neither his own list of his output (compiled in 1913) or many of the works themselves make a great show of these numbers. From the ones we have, there are many holes and some duplications.

¹⁷¹ A twentieth century equivalent might be Peter Weir’s haunting film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, set in 1900 about Australian schoolgirls who disappeared in the outback; it was supposedly based on a true story.

intelligible through the music alone. An epilogue - a poem by a Dr. Moir - has been added 'the sentiment of which (being elegiac verses on a beautiful girl) is singularly in sympathy with the story of Kilmeny in its eulogy of pure, perfect, and spiritualised womanhood.'¹⁷²

The cantata is mostly narrative, with two songs for specific characters, the reverent fere (i.e. companion) – a baritone, and Kilmeny's own song (for soprano), the centrepiece of Part II. Stylistically speaking, MacCunn's lyrical freshness combines with a wide-eyed delight in the music of Wagner to produce a piece that is always attractive without ever quite reaching the heights of the *Lay*. Part of the problem relates to the undramatic nature of the poem: MacCunn loves incident, lots of it with plenty of variety, to stimulate his responses. Here there is prettiness and mystery but few opportunities for opposition and contrast. Rather, in its pastoral and benignly supernatural atmosphere, it is the natural successor to *The Moss Rose*.

The skein of interrelated themes/motifs we appreciated in the *Lay* is present in *Kilmeny* but the core material is restricted to three themes, each with one memorable aspect, melodic, harmonic or rhythmic. In the opening chorus "Bonny Kilmeny went up the glen", a melodic shape including a rising 7th is virtually the first thing we hear. This anticipates the initial shape in Margaret's aria from the *Lay* ('True love's a gift') and, in *Kilmeny's* orchestral prelude, is stated in a rhythmic form identical to the opening of Liszt's piano piece 'Sursum corda' (1877) from the third year of *Années de Pèlerinage*.

¹⁷² Preface to the Vocal Score.

Figure 4.13 *Bonny Kilmeny*: p1 s1 orchestral prelude & altos p1 s4, motif a.

The figure consists of two musical staves. The top staff is an orchestral prelude in 3/4 time, marked *pp*. It features a melodic line in the treble clef and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass clef. The bottom staff is a vocal line in 3/4 time, marked *pp*, with the lyrics "Bon - ny Kil - men - y went up the glen" written below the notes.

In the orchestral interlude in no.2 (Tenor solo “Her brow was like the lily flower”), the second theme **b** starts by alternating tonic and dominant harmony before landing straight onto a ninth chord – a MacCunn hallmark.

Figure 4.14 *Bonny Kilmeny*: p7 ss3-4, motif b.

The figure shows two systems of piano accompaniment in 3/4 time, marked *Con moto* and *p*. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a harmonic accompaniment. The second system is similar but includes asterisks (*) above and below the staves. Both systems feature numerous triplet markings (indicated by the number '3') over the notes.

The rhythmic third motif **c** is heard at the start of no. 3:



These three ideas are so immediately recognisable that the presentation of a small fragment should be enough to place it in the listener's mind e.g. 'a' at the start of Kilmeny's aria no.11. Now these motifs are in no way leitmotifs, they are hardly even representative motifs as we found in the *Lay*, merely structural pillars.

Staying with Kilmeny's aria we see MacCunn's already sure touch in constructing a dramatic *scena* on his first attempt.

Table 4.2 *Bonny Kilmeny*: Kilmeny's aria (VS pp60-7)

Key	Words	Commentary
A flat	INTRODUCTION	'a' derivative
	'I have come from the land of love & light./ Where there is no sun, nor moon nor night.'	'a' in accompaniment. Vocal line moves from a monotone up to the dominant note.
	'Where the rain never fell & the wind never blew/ Where the dawn never broke & the cock never crew'	Melody line of open sounding 4ths and 5ths over regular repeated quavers.
	INTERLUDE	'a'
	'But the river.....I ne'er might ken'	Broad Romantic melody ending with hints of 'a' and 'b' on p62 ss2-3
E	'They led me far.....what mortal ne'er had seen,'	Pastoral episode with drones and 'horn 5ths'. Introduction of dotted rhythms in accompaniment leads to...
E flat	'And I saw.....'	CLIMAX 1 using broad Romantic melody .
C (=V in f)	'I looked and saw.....'	Melody line of 4ths and 5ths as before
D flat	'Twas neither sea, nor land aright But the presence.....'	Pastoral music again. Dotted rhythms as before - extended
	'Or the linked flame...'	CLIMAX 2 on aug 6 th chord in A flat (home key)
	3 BARS SILENCE	
unstable	'I came to warn you'	Beautiful recitative, hushed after 'a' derivative in orchestra.
	'That all whose lives are free from stain shall bloom in beauty when time is gaen.'	Final vocal phrase over what is in effect an elongated chord V in E but moves from that key to G and back.
e flat	POSTLUDE AND LINK	'c' and the same harp arpeggios that had ushered Kilmeny into the mystic land earlier, in no.3.

The closing recitative section of this *scena* is a good early example of how MacCunn has absorbed Wagner's harmonic procedures and, in particular, his expressive use of appoggiaturas.

Figure 4.15 *Bonny Kilmeny*: p66 s1 – p67 s2.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a vocal and piano piece. The first system is marked 'Lento' and 'recitativo pp'. The vocal line (Soprano) begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics 'I came to warn ye maid - ens'. The piano accompaniment features a 'pp' dynamic and includes a prominent appoggiatura on the first measure. The second system is marked 'p' and continues the vocal line with the lyrics 'fair, The lov'd of heav'n the spi - rits'. The piano accompaniment continues with a 'pp' dynamic and features a similar appoggiatura on the first measure. The score is written in a key signature of three flats and a 3/4 time signature.

S
care, That all whose

pp

S
lives are free from stain shall bloom in beau - ty when time is

f rit.

pp

Adagio

S
gaen.

(harp arpeggios)

Masterly is the way in which he controls the voyage away from E flat and back again, establishing subsidiary key centres – B and G – en route. Wagner’s influence is felt in other numbers and in other areas. In the baritone aria ‘Long have I searched the world wide’ (no.5), there is an inevitable tang of *The Flying Dutchman* prelude, with its shared key, time signature, atmosphere and subject matter – a supernatural being seeking the ideal woman. In the tenor solo no.2, alluded to above, there is a desire to avoid, or at least postpone, the perfect cadence, a trait that has resonances in Wagner’s later music dramas;

here again the placing of appoggiaturas is telling: from rehearsal letter D (page 9 of the Vocal Score) there is a flow of continuous music for 20 bars before a resolution onto a discord with the tonic at its base, a final 'proper' cadence coming three bars later.

The Scottish reception for this work was decidedly cautious - but then his fellow countrymen had hardly welcomed *Land of the Mountain and the Flood* with open arms the previous year.¹⁷³ Of *Kilmeny* the *Musical Times*' critic noted that 'the work suffers from a want of declamatory variety in the soli' and, as we had noted in connection with the *Lay* 'an absence of breadth in working out the choruses'.¹⁷⁴ The first performance was praised for its standard of execution, and the work was published the following year by Patersons of Edinburgh. Roy Paterson ran the concert series at the Queen's Street Hall and appears to have required of hopeful composers that for first performances a reduced orchestration should be made - in *Kilmeny*'s case for string quartet, piano and harmonium - before countenancing a full elaboration. This may have been because the canny publisher wanted to test the audience reaction before giving the go-ahead for scoring and part-copying/printing and the concomitant expenses involved. Certainly he was satisfied with the results and looked forward to presenting and publishing a further cantata *The Cameronian's Dream*: 'If [the cantata] pleases me and will suit our Scotch market and be about the same length as *Kilmeny* [...] then I will give Mr. MacCunn 200 guineas for the entire copyright'.¹⁷⁵ Again came the stipulation that the accompaniment should initially be for piano and harmonium; two weeks later Paterson appears to have changed his tune

¹⁷³ See 'Choral-Orchestral Concerts', *Glasgow Herald*, 19 December 1888, 7.

¹⁷⁴ 'Music in Edinburgh', *MT*, xxx (1 Jan 1889), 28.

¹⁷⁵ Letter to A.P. Watt (literary agent), 22 April 1889, in *A.P. Watt (literary agents) papers, US-CHH MS 11036*.

It has also occurred to me that Mr. MacCunn writes so charmingly for orchestra that I think it might be best in the first instance for him to write it for voices and orchestra, and we could get it transcribed for vocal score by someone else.¹⁷⁶

It was the orchestration of *The Cameronian's Dream* that attracted the greatest approval at early performances; for the *Scotsman* critic it was its only merit: 'To those who had glanced over the piano score [...], the actual performance must have come as a pleasant surprise. Without the orchestration the work is empty and colourless.'¹⁷⁷

James Hyslop's words do not make great poetry, with their anapaestic tetrameters and unvarying rhyme scheme. His subject is, however, an important one in Scottish History: the death of Richard Cameron, leader of the strict Covenanting folk, the Cameronians, at the battle of Airds Moss in July 1680. Cameron's men numbered 63, and the 120 troopers led by Bruce of Earlsall comprehensively overran them. Most of the Cameronians fled, but the leader and eight of his followers were killed. The 'dreamer' here revisits in his mind the stone memorial to the fallen, visualises the battle, and has a vision of the bodies being raised up to Heaven by seraphs in dazzling flying chariots.

Baritone soloist - George Henschel at the first performance - and chorus alternate in the telling of this tale: they combine for the call-and-response finale. A Wagnerian influence is even more pronounced here than in *Kilmeny* or the *Lay*, and at certain moments has a specific reference point. As the Cameronians hear Earshall's men approach (no.3) the 'Ride of the Valkyries' dotted triple rhythm is clearly heard understring tremolandos. Even more explicitly the same rhythm and arpeggio pattern is

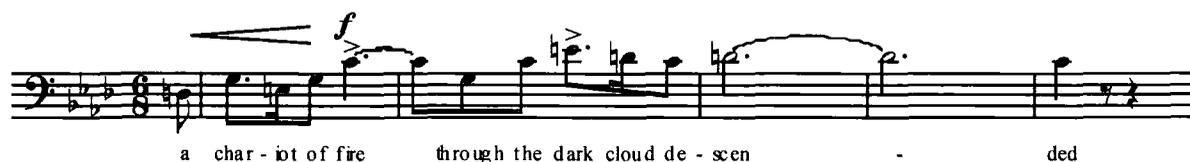
¹⁷⁶ Letter to A.P.Watt (literary agent), 6 May 1889, in *A.P.Watt (literary agents) papers*, US-CHH MS 11036.

¹⁷⁷ 'Amusements', *The Scotsman*, 28 January 1890, 5.

used when the baritone sings ‘a chariot of fire through the dark cloud descended’

(no.5).¹⁷⁸

Figure 4.16 *The Cameronian’s Dream: no. 5, baritone solo.*



But MacCunn's response here is mechanical, with a simple chord sequence that is striving – in vain – for monumentality; very different from the thrillingly envisaged battle scene earlier on. He was evidently more at home with this earthy/earthly material than with intimations of immortality.¹⁸⁰

The earlier numbers of *The Cameronian's Dream* comprise an initial framing device and a pastoral scene. Firstly, the dreamer of the title (baritone) relates how the phantoms of sleep came upon him. His initial phrase will be one of the very few ideas to make a re-appearance later on – in no. 3 at the words 'the horsemen of Earls Hall around them were hovering'. The pastoral scene is cast in the comforting key of F, as was the start of *Kilmeny*. As with the opening of *Ullin* a vocal phrase is immediately repeated in a different key: in the second stanza of no. 2, women's voices sing 'And far up in Heaven in the white sunny cloud, / The song of the lark was melodious and loud' in F, then the men take over in A. The opportunity for word painting is not lost; MacCunn posits a semiquaver pattern high up on the violins. Strangely, a similar invitation to onomatopoeic representation later on – at the words 'the whistling of plovers and bleating of sheep' – is not taken up. A small detail at the end of this scene is the little canonic postlude; the introduction of these rather Schumannesque contrapuntal moments – they are no more than that – will be a significant stylistic factor in short interludes and postludes in the opera *Jeanie Deans*.

In the analytical notes for the Crystal Palace Concerts 1890-1891¹⁸¹ the commentator notes

¹⁸⁰ cf. *Kilmeny* 'Chorus of Spirits', *Diarmid* 'Chorus of Immortals'. Is it ever possible to portray heaven in the arts? Even in the literary realm, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the least successful part is generally considered to be 'Paradise'.

¹⁸¹ Pages 332-6.

...that the work does not end in the same key as it commences, the commencement being in d minor and the finale in C major, an innovation on established custom occasionally resorted to by Mr. MacCunn's predecessors.

As the composition is a decent length with a variety of situations being depicted, whether it conforms to a 'closed' tonal structure is not of the utmost relevance. What is more important is that the relationships between juxtaposed keys are comprehensible to the listener, and that there is some symmetry in their structure. This there certainly is in the six sections of *The Cameronian's Dream*.

Table 4.3 *The Cameronian's Dream*.

1.	D minor	baritone
2.	F major	Pastoral scene
3.	B minor (unstable)	baritone
4.	F minor	Battle scene
5.	F minor to C	baritone
6.	Cmajor	Souls to Heaven

With D as a tonal centre we visit the relative major of D minor, and the relative minor of D major. As F begins to assume a greater importance in the Battle Scene (no.4) and its aftermath, it is an easy step to its dominant C. Thus this sequence of keys makes audible sense to the listener. None of the multi-movement cantatas provide a tonal homecoming at the end, whereas all the single movement works do.

The critical mood of overall disappointment with *The Cameronian's Dream* - typified by the *Musical Times*' reviewer - 'In spite of many beauties, the work is somewhat beneath the standard we feel almost as a right to expect from Mr. MacCunn'¹⁸² - is continued when the fourth and last of these early Scottish cantatas, *Queen Hynde*, appeared. It has close links with its predecessors, presents its composer prolonging his acquaintance with the music of Wagner and - most importantly it rehearses many of the

¹⁸² *MT*, xxxi (1 March 1890), 165.

themes and schemes in preparation for the opera *Diarmid* (1897). To deal with these topics in order: *Queen Hynde* (1824) is a huge epic narrative poem by James Hogg, author of 'Kilmeny'. It takes as its starting point the myth of Scotland's origins to be found in James MacPherson's *Ossian* poems, but avoids its source's melancholy solemnity by being very funny - particularly when Wicked Wene is on-stage. MacCunn Senior filleted this 'Ossian with jokes' into a cantata with four scenes and four main characters: Hogg's original runs for 200 pages and has a huge cast list including a major part for St. Columba. The story concerns Queen Hynde, who held court at Beregon (thought to be just north of modern-day Oban), and her attempts to avoid capture by Eric, the Norse invader, in the absence of her lover Aidan. Needless to say, Aidan returns in the nick of time disguised as the minstrel Uisnar, he kills Eric and general rejoicing ensues. The similarities with the *Lay*'s narrative are obvious: matriarchs threatened by invaders, disguised heroes, battles and happy endings. The chorus again has plenty to do, including a choral recitative (cf. *Lay*), a female voice number as a prelude to Scene 2 (very attractive cf. the opening of *Kilmeny*), two bellicose male choruses 'The Black Bull of Norway' (cf. *Lay*, *Diarmid*) and a heavy-handed 'Chorus of Spirits' (again!) in three verses, the first two unaccompanied with orchestral interludes, the third with choral parts in augmentation ringing out chorale-like against triplet/semiquaver orchestral passage work. The largely negative review in the *Glasgow Herald*¹⁸³ accused James MacCunn's adaptation of the poem as being at least partially responsible for this last item's failure:

The conventions of sentiment and language tend naturally to the correspondingly stereotyped convention of an unaccompanied chorus, which even a very good rendering did not make interesting.

¹⁸³ 'Choral Union Concert', *Glasgow Herald*, 29 January 1892, 7.

Regrettably, we can also see MacCunn senior's hand in the title of Wene's interminable waltz song 'I love to trill the whole day long'! The most successful piece in *Queen Hynde* occurs at the end of the second scene: Uisnar tells his story - identical to that of Aidan - in an 'improvisation' which in its main melody and use of a harp accompaniment recalls the bardic lay of national legend .

Figure 4.18 *Queen Hynde*: VS p56.

N^o 9.

Andante molto espressivo e ben sostenuto.

UISNAR. *p*

PIANO. *p* *pp*

con Ped.

- is - - - nar lov'd a gen - - - tle maid, a

gen - - tle maid of..... high..... de - gree.....

The musical score is for 'Queen Hynde', No. 9. It is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The tempo is 'Andante molto espressivo e ben sostenuto'. The piece features a vocal line for Uisnar and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a harp-like accompaniment with a 'con Ped.' (with pedal) instruction. The lyrics are: '- is - - - nar lov'd a gen - - - tle maid, a gen - - tle maid of..... high..... de - gree.....'. The score is marked with dynamics *p* and *pp*.

This beautifully scored rhapsodic piece has a suitably free structure that uses the above melody whenever his love Hynde is alluded to, forming a quasi-rondo structure. Episodes recounting his adventures in war, his despair at news that Hynde had taken another lover and his relief at finding the news to be false are inserted between the love music. The approach to the final statement of this music is inspiringly handled, so that we the audience also sense Uisnar's (Aidan's) elation.

Figure 4.19 *Queen Hynde*: p66 ss2-3.

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Queen Hynde'. It consists of two systems of three staves each. The top staff in each system is a bass clef line, and the middle staff is a treble clef line. The bottom staff in each system is a bass clef line. The first system includes dynamic markings *f*, *poco rall.*, *poco rall.*, and *f*, and the instruction *And*. The second system includes the instruction *con motu più animato e con passione* and the lyrics: 'that his gen - tle maid was true, And'. The bottom staff of the second system features sixteenth-note passages with sixteenth rests, marked with the number '6'.

Half-diminished chords from the Prelude are heard twice in the course this

'improvisation'. This Wagnerian sound together with sequential patterns that slip easily

in and out of remote keys will characterise much of the slow music in *Hynde* describing tension, anguish or love.

Figure 4.20 *Queen Hynde: Prelude.*

The image displays a musical score for the prelude of Queen Hynde, consisting of four systems of music. Each system is written for piano and includes both a treble and a bass clef staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The first system begins with a *ppp* dynamic marking. The second system starts at measure 6. The third system starts at measure 11 and features a *pp < >* dynamic marking. The fourth system starts at measure 15. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Scotland will be threatened by Norsemen again in MacCunn's Celtic opera *Diarmid* (1897): many of the episodes in *Hynde* seem to establish a template for the opera but in all cases the opera is more impressive by dint of its larger canvas, greater ambition and a surer hand on the creative tiller. If we compare the love duet (Hynde/Aidan) with the similar item of Act 4 in *Diarmid* we can see how far the composer has progressed. In *Hynde* the Queen sings the same melody for rejoicing in her love as she did in Scene 1 when lamenting the departed lover. This may be a structural ploy but it does not work psychologically, especially when the phrase itself is so unmemorable: there is little feeling of culmination or closure. In *Diarmid* the Act 4 duet contains the most radiantly passionate music in the opera, a large-scale, post-coital paean to nature, full of sated sensuality, forest murmurs and real emotion; it represents one of those exciting moments when one feels the composer becoming carried away with his creation.

In both subsections of the choral genre, early works - *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* - establish a pattern for later pieces, but these later works do not necessarily surpass the original models in quality. It does indeed seem as if MacCunn, like Mendelssohn, produced some of his greatest music before he was 21. Great hopes were kindled for the opera that MacCunn was beginning to work on by 1892. The *Glasgow Herald* critic at the premiere of *Queen Hynde* summed up the composer's creative position at that time with considerable perspicuity:

An interval of some years has elapsed in which nothing that came from MacCunn's pen touched the level of his earliest and best work, and meanwhile expectation has been fed by assurances that the composer is tensely engaged on his *magnum opus*, an opera, for the successful production of which his talent seems to promise special qualifications. It is therefore to be hoped that the new dramatic cantata, a form of composition the popularity of which is significant both of our national languid interest in opera and our willing acceptance of a compromise that adapts for concert uses dramatic material that rightly

belongs to the stage, has been produced in the intervals of rest from work of more absorbing interest and more permanent value.¹⁸⁴

2. *Livingstone* and two pageants

With the sense that MacCunn is moving towards his natural ambience – opera – we may with benefit examine three works which postdate the operas but fall into a halfway house between being staged and unstaged. Moreover, they show us the composer responding to specific commissions, writing occasional music – which may in part transcend the demands of the particular event. MacCunn's first experience of writing for a special event was not successful, and its premiere was fraught with difficulties. This was a setting of Psalm 8, written for the opening of the Second Industrial Exhibition at Meggetland, Edinburgh; Bishop Dowden, who was to have led the prayers after the Duke of Edinburgh's address, was nowhere to be found at the vital moment, so the Edinburgh Choral Union conducted by the composer launched into the *Psalm* to cover an awkward pause. The organ was not in a fully finished state, and the organist had difficulty seeing the conductor, having apparently set the mirror at the wrong angle. Of the music, the critical establishment was universally damning, citing bad part-writing, wild transitions of key and an entirely unidiomatic organ part as its chief faults.¹⁸⁵ The Scots at the time were looking forward to the opening of the Forth (Rail) Bridge later in the summer of 1890, and were thus feeling in a confident mood as hosts of this exhibition. A decade later and the talk round the dining tables was altogether gloomier:

Nov.14th [1899] 13 P.P. We have had Sir William Ingram [*Illustrated London News*] and Hamish MacCunn to lunch today. We have really not had any news for about a week; we are all anxiously waiting to know what is to happen next. The Boers are still behaving

¹⁸⁴ 'Choral Union Concert', *Glasgow Herald*, 29 January 1892, 7.

¹⁸⁵ *MT*, xxxi (1 June 1890), 358.

shamefully about the white flag. The English will not easily forgive them that; it is such a mean and cowardly thing to do.¹⁸⁶

So wrote Hilda, daughter of the painter Orchardson in reaction to the deceit practised by the Boers at the Battle of Elandslaagte (21 October 1899). MacCunn's further occasional pieces would all be connected with foreign campaigns of one sort or another: English missionaries bringing Christianity to undeveloped parts of the world, Livingstone's work in Africa, and first of all a morale-boosting entertainment in aid of the Soldiers' Widows and Orphans' Fund at the time of the Boer War, *The Masque of War and Peace* presented on 13 February 1900 at Her Majesty's Theatre.¹⁸⁷ Within a witty script by Louis N. Parker are incorporated fourteen musical numbers – solo songs, choruses, dances and ceremonial music. The 'plot' concerns personifications of geographical features, Roman Gods and abstract concepts who, while acknowledging the progress of the War so far, look forward to a time of peace and prosperity. A table of the musical numbers and their interpreters gives a sufficient idea of the storyline:

1. An agitated Chorus of Towns and Hamlets of the Thames is calmed by the appearance of Father Thames.
2. Dance of Medway, his tributary.
3. Chorus 'The waves shall toss' and entrance of Neptune
4. Neptune's Song 'Oh I've heard nowt of the War' [contains the line 'Your soldiers in khaki to the land of the darky I bore in an elegant way.']
5. Chorus 'War' and entry of War [solemn march]
6. Entry of Rumour, Song 'Rumour, what hast thou seen?' and Chorus 'O the men of the Household Brigade.'
7. Glory's Dance
8. Entrances of Victory, Rebellion, the Arts of Peace etc.
9. Pity's Song
10. Entry and Dance of Prosperity
11. Song 'Are you coming Mr. Atkins?' [i.e back from the War]

¹⁸⁶ Gray, Hilda Orchardson, *The Life of Sir William Quiller Orchardson* (London, Hutchinson 1930), 206.

¹⁸⁷ For further performance details see Chapter 1, page 19.

12. Stately Dance (Gavotte)
13. Madrigal Chorus 'Come smiling Peace'
14. Finale [based on 'There's no place like home'] (Grand Chorus)

The opening chorus, with its memorable opening progression from the home minor chord (F) to a Dorian subdominant - B flat major, is set out on a large scale and is partially reprised at no. 5. From as early as page 7 of the vocal score MacCunn includes quotations from other works and other well-known national tunes. Here, as we are dealing with a great river, there is a snatch of the Prelude to *Rheingold* in E flat, suitably enough. Later on, the snippets will include 'We sail the ocean blue' (*HMS Pinafore* Gilbert and Sullivan -no. 3), 'Thine be the Glory' (*Judas Maccabeus* Handel –no. 8) and 'There's no place like home' (nos. 9 and 14). There are many more, and part of the fun for the audience on this occasion must have been spotting them. Parker and Tree assembled a cast that included many society ladies renowned for their beauty rather than their musical ability: a treat for the eyes, then, if not always for the ears. *The Masque* was one third of the tri-partite charity evening – and the *Musical Times* critic esteemed MacCunn's contribution as superior to either Sullivan's march *Great Britain, Her Colonies and Dependencies* or Rose's incidental music to the series of *tableaux vivants*, *A Dream of Fair Women*. Even in an occasional piece like this it was the composer's dramatic perception and experience that was especially praised. The same critic hoped that the vocal music would be remodelled to form a cantata (it didn't happen) and the dances would be heard in the concert room ('The Dance of Medway' would be recycled as a movement in the composite *Suite* for orchestra).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ *MT*, xli (1 March 1900), 185-6.

During the composer's lifetime the orchestral and choral works under discussion were widely performed in this country and abroad: for instance, *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* found its way to Düsseldorf, *Lord Ullin's Daughter* was heard in Washington D.C, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* made its way to New York and to Melbourne, possibly under the baton of Hamish's youngest brother, Andrew, who had settled out there. But no piece of his was heard by such a large number of people in these years as *The Pageant of Darkness and Light*. MacCunn agreed to write the music for this on 21 February 1908¹⁸⁹. There was thus a very short time between the contract being signed and the performances: this substantial commission from the London Missionary Society was produced at the great 'Orient in London' Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall for six weeks, between 4 June and 11 July 1908.

A large theatre was specially built in the hall, and the performers, including principals (professionals), a large professional orchestra, and a professional chorus of sixty, numbered eight hundred in all. The libretto was by Mr. John Oxenham, the production being by Mr. Hugh Moss; and the work itself was quite as long as an opera, and was in six episodes.¹⁹⁰

John Oxenham was the pen name of William Arthur Dunkerley (1852-1941), a prolific writer of novels and poetry. During the Great War he wrote a collection of poems *All's Well: some helpful verse for these dark days of war* (1916). One of his war poems is reputed to have sold more than 8 million copies. After its London run, his and MacCunn's *Pageant* was much performed in America where upward of 670,000 people saw it in Boston, Chicago and other smaller cities.

The six episodes mentioned above are ordered as follows:

¹⁸⁹ See *The Times*, 22 Feb 1908, 12.

¹⁹⁰ Drysdale, Janey C., 'Scottish Composers: Hamish MacCunn', *The Dunedin Magazine*, ii no. 2 (March 1914), 71.

North an Indian camp in the far North West (of the American continent)

South the outskirts of Ujiji where Livingstone is resting after long journeyings.

East Scene 1: a city in India

Scene 2: outskirts of a town

West a coral beach in Hawaii

Final Procession and Tableau

In each episode a picture of 'primitive' life is portrayed with all its barbarism and superstitious beliefs, into which missionaries, or other instruments of God, enter to ameliorate the situation and convert the natives. In 'North', for example, the Indian chief and his wife are in distress at the loss of their little daughter, who strayed from the line of march three days ago. Esquimaux traders come to the encampment to sell their wares; the medicine man incites the braves to kill them and take their goods. Just as they are about to do so, a missionary enters. He brings the Chief's daughter, whom he found straying in the woods. In this way he gains the Chief's goodwill and a hearing for his message. Such storylines permit MacCunn to explore exotic local colours in his music as well as writing hymn-like passages and songs of thanksgiving. Thus in 'North' the scene opens with quasi-Indian scales, while 'Eastern' ambience is conjured up in a later scene through juxtaposing chords a diminished fifth apart. Victorious outpourings in song have made their appearance in many of MacCunn's previous works – e.g. *Lay, Cameronian, Queen Hynde, Jeanie Deans* and *Diarmid* – so the challenge for the composer here is neither new nor great. In 'South', Livingstone's men 'break into a song of thanksgiving' after the great missionary has rejected Stanley's offer to return to England. The missionary party at the end of 'East' scene 2 'break into a jubilant chant' when the custom of Suttee is done away with. In 'West' Queen Kapiolani leads a paean, having vanquished the volcano goddess Pélé. (During this scene the direction 'Commencement of Panorama' is encountered in the score; presumably this would have been a slide show or cyclorama of

the Hawaiian landscape.) At other points the use of a *cappella* writing is reserved for moments of especial spirituality: The Message of the Father ('South') or The Hymn from within the Mission House ('East' scene 1). Aside from choral and solo items, considerable use is made of melodrama. Livingstone's soliloquy in 'South', for example, is delivered over *bouche fermée* choral writing and later over the orchestra. To draw the various strands together at the climax of the Pageant there is a Grand Procession of the four points of the compass; each has a portion to sing in turn, a similar scheme to the opening chorus of MacCunn's unfinished opera *Breast of Light* where the sprites of the Four Winds give voice one after the other. A quartet of solo voices then sings the words 'In Christ there is no East or West, in him no South or North' to a newly composed tune by MacCunn. The evening finishes with 'the whole great fellowship' singing one verse of the Old 100th 'All people that on earth do dwell'. What is particularly striking about *The Pageant of Darkness and Light* is the scale of the undertaking. This is a huge score and the musico-dramatic gestures contained within are similarly designed to make an impression on large audiences. It is unlikely that this piece will be performed again: the orchestral score is missing for one thing; for another, the time for performing a particular pageant is very specific, and this lends the enterprise, however substantial, an ephemeral quality.

The London Missionary Society extracted the Livingstone episode ('South') from this *Pageant*, which suggests that it might have had a life separate from the work as a whole. The famous meeting with Stanley portrayed therein took place in 1871; two years later Livingstone was dead. He had been born at Blantyre in 1813: when the centenary of his birth fell in May 1913, MacCunn was again approached by the Missionary Society to

celebrate it in music. His composition *Livingstone the Pilgrim* with words by Rev. C.

Sylvester Horne raised the curtain on a packed evening at the Albert Hall on 19 May.

7pm

Cantata rendered by the united chorus of 800 voices conducted by Mr. Hamish MacCunn, assisted by Mr. C. Strong and Mr. Leonard Snow. Soloists Master John Child and Mr Stewart Gardner. Quartette – Members of the choir of St. Michael’s, Cornhill E.C., Organist Mr. H Wharton Wells FRCO, Narrator – Alexander Watson

7.30pm Prayer. Reading of Scripture

7.40pm Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Messages and pictures.

8.10pm Address by Lord Balfour of Burleigh

8.30pm Address by Sir Harry H. Johnston

8.45pm ‘For all the saints’ Hymn

8.50pm Address by Rev. R. Wardlaw Thomson

9.10pm Benediction

9.10-9.15 Pictures¹⁹¹

The five musical numbers in *Livingstone...* are linked by spoken narrations covering respectively his birth, his calling in Africa, his faith and his death. MacCunn’s picture of the Dark Continent in ‘Darkness Prevailing’ (no.3) reuses his battery of harmonic devices for suggesting unrest and danger. The harmonic outline of the organ prelude is given below:

Figure 4.21 *Livingstone the Pilgrim*: no.3, opening.

- a passage replete with the by now customary leaps onto remote chords together with augmented aggregations. The high point of this short cantata is the soprano solo number

¹⁹¹ Programme for the event pasted into the cover of the score in *GB-Gu Special Collections Ca15-w.39*.

‘To the eternal hills’ (No.4) - a paraphrase of Psalm 121 - with its lilting 12/8 pulse and eloquent vocal line. Again the introduction is noteworthy in its representation of the progression from darkness to light – not just in the movement from minor to major, but also in the way in which the value of the augmented chord changes from the emotive to the decorative.

Figure 4.22 *Livingstone the Pilgrim: no.4, opening.*



A telling vocal phrase uses the ninth chord found in many of MacCunn’s works to highly expressive effect (‘My ev’ry need supplies’). The final hymn for massed voices, ‘Surely he cometh’, is a bracing and vigorous setting of words from St. Paul adapted by Frederick W.H. Myers, comparable to, if less sentimental than, the contemporary ‘Old Rugged Cross’ by Bennard.

The people who commissioned MacCunn to write the two pageants and *Livingstone* recognised that he possessed the right credentials to communicate dramatic

situations to a mass audience. These skills that he developed in his early Scottish cantatas would be further honed in the two grand operas he composed in the 1890's, *Jeanie Deans* (1894) and *Diarmid* (1897).

CHAPTER 5

Opera I: *Jeanie Deans*

The Genesis of the Opera

From Novel to Libretto: Joseph Bennett's adaptation of Scott

Stylistic Forbears

Characters

Musico-Dramatic Structure

A Note on Orchestration

Contemporary Reaction to Early Performances

'In the bonny cells of Bedlam,
Ere I was ane and twenty,
I had hempen bracelets strong,
And merry whips, ding-dong,
And prayer and fasting plenty'

(from Sir Walter Scott *The Heart of Midlothian* Chapter XXIX)

The Genesis of the Opera

The untimely death of Carl Rosa on 30 April 1889 from peritonitis robbed the English operatic establishment of one its most ardent champions. Indeed given the various abortive national opera schemes that foundered towards the end of the century – chief among them being D'Oyly Carte's Royal English Opera House in Cambridge Circus – practically the only outlet for the production of serious English opera was through the Carl Rosa Opera Company. Rosa had died while on holiday in France; when his funeral took place at Highgate Cemetery the cortège route was lined by some 20,000 people. Among those who attended the service were composers who had been commissioned by him to write operas: Goring Thomas (*Esmeralda* and *Nadeshda*), Mackenzie (*Colomba* and *The Troubadour*), Stanford (*The Canterbury Pilgrims*) and Cowen (whose *Thorgrim* would be premiered in April 1890). MacCunn was also there; one of the last things Rosa had done before his death was to commission an opera from the young Scot who was finding such widespread fame with his orchestral works and cantatas. The commission was effected on 11 April 1889, but both MacCunn and his agent A.P. Watt knew that it was coming and were searching around for a suitable subject.

This morning I saw Rosa at the ('Paul Jones') theatre, and afterwards I saw Wilson Barrett¹⁹² at the 'Princess' Theatre', & told him (Barrett) that 'Glenco' will not do. Barrett understands that 'Glenco' is finally 'off' as far as I am concerned, and *he does not like* 'Waverley' and refuses to take it up. Rosa said today that if Barrett will not take up 'Waverley', we must get someone else who will. With that view I entirely agree. Now Mr. Le Gallienne¹⁹³ might write, along with me, a very good 'Waverley' indeed, but I can clearly see that Le Gallienne (as Barrett's private secretary) has to take care that he does not – so to speak – tread on Barrett's toes. I had an interview with Le Gallienne, and find him very intelligent & enthusiastic, & he likes 'Waverley'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Wilson Barrett (1846-1904) actor, manager, playwright.

¹⁹³ Richard Le Gallienne (1866-1947) man of letters, contributor to *The Yellow Book*, and associated with the *fin-de siècle* group of aesthetes.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from MacCunn to A.P. Watt, 15 March 1889 in A.P. Watt papers, US-CHH MS 11036.

The important *Dunedin Magazine* article, based on MacCunn's autobiographical notes, sheds more light on his choice of subject and collaborator:

Then he began to work on a libretto by Mr. Andrew Lang, on the subject of Mr. Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* but this also was abandoned, the ending being too much of a 'horrible tale'. The next suggestion by Mr Rosa was the subject of *Waverley*, and a scenario was duly prepared by Mr. Joseph Bennett [replacing Le Gallienne], the well-known librettist and critic of *The Daily Telegraph*. This scheme also fell through, but at last they hit upon an agreeable subject in *The Heart of Midlothian*.¹⁹⁵

Correspondence between MacCunn and Joseph Bennett started in 1888 with the composer sending a score of *The Ship o' the Fiend* to the writer following the urging of George Henschel.¹⁹⁶ The subject of *Waverley* comes up in May/June 1889 as well as a song cycle project.

30/5/89 21, Albion Road, South Hampstead N.W.

Dear Mr. Bennett,

I hear from friend Lyall that you have started on 'Waverly' [sic]. When can I come and have a chat with you about it? I was very sorry to be prevented from coming on that Sunday after poor Rosa's funeral, and since then I have been in a terrible mess with moving into this house. [from his previous residence at 49, Ladbroke Road, Notting Hill, W.]¹⁹⁷

26/6/89

Dear Mr. Bennett,

Might I beg of you to tell me if you have any of the 'Waverly' libretto in hand yet? [...] There is another idea of which I have been thinking, viz. I want to write an album of, say, six lyrics. Have you any songs for setting, and, if so, could I have a look at them? [...]¹⁹⁸

MacCunn worked quickly on the *Cycle of Six Love Lyrics Op. 9* as it would become, and by the 10th August that year was trying to finalise publication with Novello. The opera project was shelved for two years or more but the first inkling of the *Heart of Midlothian* (as opposed to *Waverley*) libretto came early in 1892:

¹⁹⁵ Drysdale, Janey C., 'Scottish Composers: Hamish MacCunn', *The Dunedin Magazine*, ii no.2 (March 1914), 68.

¹⁹⁶ Letter 13th Feb. 1888 *US-NYpm* MFC M133.B4716 (1).

¹⁹⁷ *US-NY pm* MFC M133.B4716 (2).

¹⁹⁸ *US-NY pm* MFC M133.B4716 (3).

14/3/92

My dear Mr. Bennett,

I understand that the Carl Rosa folks are delighted with your scenario of 'Jeanie Deans', and I write to ask you how you are getting on. Have you commenced it yet? And if so, can you let me see some of it? Of course I know that your work must be done alone, and without any criticism or interference or suggestion (just as mine has to be done) but I should, (when you have anything definitely put into shape) like to get an idea of the general 'run' and atmosphere of the words and scenes.¹⁹⁹

By June 1892 MacCunn was able to report:

I'm sorry I cannot come to see you this afternoon, as I am 'up to my eyes' in making a 'fair copy' of the first act and cannot leave the bit I'm at. [...] I am very anxious to get the 3rd and 4th acts as soon as possible, and look forward keenly to seeing them.²⁰⁰

In December 1893 Cuthbert Hadden stated that 'at the time of writing, Mr. MacCunn is working very hard to complete his opera *Jeanie Deans* which the Carl Rosa Company will produce in Glasgow in the early spring.'²⁰¹ At the end of the full score MacCunn appends the date and place of completion – 28 September 1894 Greenock – together with the dedication '...to my most dear mother'.

From novel to libretto: Joseph Bennett's adaptation of Scott

Bennett reduces a 500 page Romantic novel into a workable libretto by concentrating on seven key moments in the story. This distillation is skilfully done but it requires some detailed background material in the opera programme to make full sense of the drama.

The Heart of Midlothian is the nickname given to the Tolbooth or city jail in the centre of Edinburgh where two scenes in the opera take place. The action unfolds in 1736 at the time of the Porteus riots. Captain John Porteus, the blustering captain of the city guard, fired upon a crowd at the execution of two popular smugglers, Wilson and

¹⁹⁹ *US-NY pm* MFC M133.B4716 (9).

²⁰⁰ *US-NY pm* MFC M133.B4716 (14).

²⁰¹ Hadden, J. Cuthbert, 'Scottish Composers and Musicians. 1. Hamish MacCunn', *Scottish Musical Monthly*, i no. 3 (December 1893), 55.

Robertson; four onlookers were killed, eleven wounded. He was sentenced to death for murder, reprieved by Queen Caroline, and expected a full pardon, but the mob took him out of the Tolbooth and brutally hanged him. According to Scott, whose version of these events has been widely praised for its accuracy, Wilson created a diversion at the original hanging to allow Robertson to escape. Half way through the novel (Chapter 33) Robertson is revealed as George Staunton, heir to the Willingham Estate in Lincolnshire. Throughout the opera this character is known as Staunton with reference to his inheritance coming only at the last moment of dramatic rescue. Although Staunton is the romantic interest for Effie, Jeanie's love - Reuben Butler –has been completely excised from the opera. Jeanie is 10 years older than Effie, and they are in fact half sisters, Davie Deans, their father having remarried in the meantime. Jeanie is portrayed as only moderately attractive, but resourceful, honourable and brave. Effie is a beauty, 'the lily of St.Leonard's', but morally weak and drawn to danger. On the final page of the book Scott draws the following moral in which the differences between the two girls' characters are crystallized:

READER - This tale will not be told in vain, if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendour, can never confer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission, and, like the ghosts of the murdered, for ever haunt the steps of the malefactor; and that the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.

The choices made and methods used in Bennett's fashioning of the seven tableaux are detailed in the table overleaf.

**Table 5.1 *Jeanie Deans*: opera and novel.
Dramatis Personae**

Davie Deans	(a Cameronian)	baritone
John Dumbie	(Laird of Dumbiedykes)	baritone
Jeanie Deans	(daughter of Davie Deans)	soprano
Effie Deans	(daughter of Davie Deans)	soprano
Madge Wildfire	(an outcast)	soprano
George Staunton	(alias Robertson, lover of Effie Deans)	tenor
Janet Balcristie	(housekeeper to Dumbiedykes)	contralto
John, Duke of Argyll		tenor
Queen Caroline	(Consort of George II)	mezzo-
soprano		
Lady Suffolk	(in attendance on the Queen)	mezzo-
soprano		
A Constable		bass

Villagers, Soldiers, Rioters, Magistrates, Guards, Ladies of the Court, Mounted Retainers etc.

Opera Narrative	Scott's <i>Heart of Midlothian</i> and Bennett's adaptation of it.
<p>Act I Outside Davie Deans cottage at St. Leonard's, near Edinburgh. Local countryfolk on their way home from work are overtaken by the Laird of Dumbiedykes, who is persuaded to join them in song ('I love a lass' [i.e. Jeanie]) and dance.</p> <p>All are convinced that Davie Deans, father of Jeanie and Effie and a rigid former Covenanter, is safely away milking, but he enters, and roundly condemns such ungodly behaviour.</p> <p>Jeanie returns home from her evening tasks to find Dumbiedykes waiting for her and on the point of declaring his feelings for her – but his courage fails him at the last moment.</p>	<p>The admiration Laird Dumbiedykes has for Jeanie is mentioned in Chapter 9 together with the girl's lack of interest in him. Scott characterises him as 'a man of slow ideas and confused utterance.'</p> <p>The dance that starts the opera is bound to upset Davie Deans, Jeanie's father.</p> <p>'The word <i>prelate</i> or even the word <i>pope</i>, could hardly have produced so appalling an effect upon David's ear; for, of all exercises, that of dancing [...] he deemed most destructive of serious thoughts and the readiest inlet to all sort of licentiousness;' (Chapter 10).</p> <p>The remainder of the first act's action can be seen to derive from a mere two pages of text towards the end of chapter 10. These well filled pages include Effie's converse with both Jeanie</p>

<p>Jeanie, left alone, sees her half-sister Effie approaching the cottage. Effie, having been working and living in the centre of Edinburgh has come home to St Leonard's, - an area to the west of Arthur's Seat and the King's Park - a walk which would take about twenty minutes then and now. She looks ill and is evidently troubled in mind; she has been seduced, has had a baby, which was taken away from her while she was ill after the birth. Two policemen appear to arrest her on a charge of child-murder. Davie emerges from the cottage, first to defend Effie and then when he understands the charge, to curse her in spite of her protestations of innocence. Effie is led away to prison in Edinburgh.</p>	<p>and Davie, her arrest, and Davie's cursing of his daughter. In the opera Effie is still present to witness her father's rage; in the novel Davie faints, Effie is removed by the police and Deans' oaths are heard by the assembled villagers.</p>
<p>Act 2 Scene 1 Nicol Muschat's Cairn</p>	<p>The meeting between Staunton and Jeanie at Muschat's Cairn is detailed in Chapter 15 of the novel. The physical setting is described at length at the beginning of the chapter, its grisly history (the site of murders - in particular Nick Muschat's murder of his wife - and duels) has already been alluded to in Chapter 11 and in Scott's own footnote.</p> <p>'It is situated in the depth of the valley behind Salisbury Crags, which has for a background the north-western corner of the mountain called Arthur's Seat, on whose descent still remain the ruins of what was once a chapel, or hermitage, dedicated to Saint Anthony the Eremite. A better site for such a building could hardly have been selected; for the chapel, situated among the rude and pathless cliffs, lies in a desert, even in the immediate vicinity of a rich, populous and tumultuous capital.</p> <p>These ruins are still visible today; one can well imagine a Scottish 'Wolf's Glen' scene being set in such an area.²⁰²</p>
<p>A storm is brewing above Salisbury crags.</p>	<p>In the opera an approaching storm mirrors these</p>

²⁰² In Ian Rankin's recent Rebus novel *The Falls* the central murder is committed in this very place. Bennett plays up the possible haunted nature of the place in the line he gives Wildfire "Under the stones they buried his [Muschat's] bones, /but his spirit they never can bind."

The weird figure of Madge Wildfire appears. She was once a servant in George Staunton's father's household, and had an illegitimate child by Staunton. The death of the child loosened her grip on reality, and thrust her into a wandering gypsy-like existence in which she remains attached to Staunton in his criminal alias as Geordie Robertson. She acted as midwife to Effie, and may (although this is never clarified) have killed Effie's child in a moment of madness. Jeanie has been sent an urgent message to come to Muscat's Cairn on Effie's behalf. Madge, greets her with a mysterious song, then retires, leaving the frightened Jeanie alone.

Staunton appears and tries to force Jeanie to say that Effie told her of her pregnancy. According to Scottish Law of that time, if the mother-to-be did not try to hide her condition, then the death penalty could be avoided. But Effie has not spoken of it to Jeanie, and Jeanie will not perjure herself in saying that she did, in spite of verbal and physical threats.

Madge, who has been keeping lookout, returns to warn Staunton of the approach of constables on his trail, and changes clothes with him so that the law officers pursue her instead. Staunton escapes.

violent happenings to heighten dramatic effect, in the novel the moon shines clearly with no hint of inclement weather. In exchanges between the protagonists Bennett does not reproduce Scott's words exactly but paraphrases their meaning.

Bennett introduces the Madge's character to us by using Scott's words for her opening folk-song ('I glance like the wildfire through country and town...' Chapter 16, 'I'm Queen of the wake and the Lady of May....' Chapter 31).

Towards the end of Chapter 15 Madge is heard in the distance singing 'one of those wild and monotonous strains so common in Scotland.' This appears with Scott's original words towards the end of the tableau (VS pages 86-7), alerting Staunton to possible danger. Stanza two of this song comes right at the end of the scene (VS pages 90-1) and reflects the exchange of costume which has allowed Staunton to escape the approaching posse. Madge appears in Staunton's hat and cloak and sings:
'Come lend me thine horns, said the hind to the stag,
/ What for? what for? quoth she..../
The huntsmen will follow the antlers so brave,
/ And thou may'st escape them said she!'

	<p>The words and the dramatic conclusion to the scene are Bennett's invention, but the idea of swapping costumes will reappear (this time following Scott's original) in the very next scene.</p>
<p>Act II Scene 2. The common cell in the Tolbooth prison on the night of the Porteus riot.</p> <p>Effie is discovered alone singing to herself of happier times: her mind is beginning to give way under the pressure of her experiences. She is interrupted by other prisoners who make the most of their time together, before their socialising is cut short by the turnkey who moves them back to their cells, overlooking Effie in the general melée. The noise of approaching rioters led by Staunton, is heard: they are intent on breaking into the prison to capture Captain Porteus. The rioters burst into the prison, and Effie and Staunton are reunited. The strain proves too much for Effie and she collapses, her mind wandering again. She insists on remaining in prison until her name is cleared. As his men capture Porteus and drag him off to be hanged, Staunton is forced to follow them and abandon Effie.</p>	<p>Scott places the events of the Porteus riots at the start of his novel, and the first we hear of Effie (Chapter 5) finds her in prison already for the crime of killing her child. From Chapter 8 Scott indulges in a great flashback, detailing the circumstances of the Deans' children's upbringing and presently (Chapter 10) providing the subject matter for Act I. Bennett rearranges Scott's narrative in chronological order (as MacCunn Snr. did with <i>Kilmeny</i>), so this scene is set in the Tolbooth and contrasts Effie's plight with the violent happenings leading to the lynching of Captain Porteus. Scott (reproduced by Bennett) has Staunton disguise himself as Madge Wildfire, thus carrying on the exchange of costumes idea from the previous scene. Most of the raw material is found in Chapter 7. Bennett has elaborated on the source to engineer a <i>scena</i> for Effie alone, structured around two fine arias - one nostalgic, the other a lullaby, - a prisoners' chorus (heard twice), a rioters' chorus and a love duet. This is imaginatively carried through, the insertion of a duet between Staunton and Effie filling in the necessary emotional background between the characters.</p>
<p>Act III Scene 1 The Condemned Cell in the Tolbooth It is the day after Effie's trial and the judge has passed a sentence of death on the</p>	<p>The main business of this section involves Jeanie's visit to her sister, another meeting</p>

<p>hapless woman. Jeanie visits her and is upbraided for refusing to lie on oath at the trial. Jeanie is desperate to help and resolves to go to London to plead her case before the Queen. Staunton, disguised as a minister, is shown in, and tells Effie he will mount a rescue on the day of her execution. However, Effie holds to her hope of receiving pardon from the Queen.</p> <p>Jeanie reveals her plan to Staunton who urges her to approach the Court in London via John, Duke of Argyle.</p>	<p>between Staunton and Effie (in Bennett - though not in Scott) and Jeanie's resolution to go to London to petition the Queen for Effie's release. In Scott Jeanie makes <i>two</i> visits to Effie once before and once after the trial. In the first (Chapter 20) they discuss Staunton and the question of Jeanie's reluctance to tell an untruth to save Effie's life comes to the fore. The action of the trial is described in Chapters 21-24 and although Scott avers at the start of Chapter 23 'It is by no means my intention to describe minutely the forms of a Scottish criminal trial...' his legal training is put to good use in the following twenty odd pages! Jeanie does not get Effie off at the trial and her second visit to her sister is an understandably frosty affair (Chapter 25). Bennett conflates the two meetings and inserts a second duet between Effie and Staunton, which advances the action very little.</p> <p>Bennett ends the scene with the glow left by Jeanie's determination on obtaining regal intervention. The recommendation Jeanie receives from Staunton to seek out the Duke of Argyle in London comes from a much later part of the novel - Chapter 34.</p>
<p>Act III Scene 2 The Courtyard of Dumbiedykes' house. It is early morning. Jeanie has come to borrow money from Laird Dumbiedykes, having negotiated the vinegary housekeeper Mrs Balchristie. Dumbie offers money on condition that Jeanie becomes his wife - he is as ever convinced that money is a cure-all and it might buy him love. When Jeanie rebuffs him he relents, and gives her the money anyway with no strings attached.</p>	<p>A distillation of Chapter 26 of Scott's novel provides a lighter interlude after the Tolbooth gloom. Bennett sticks closely to Scott in this tableau, indeed there are parts where he virtually reproduces Scott's words. Apart from a brief appearance at the work's close, this is the last we hear of Dumbie, though later in the novel we learn that he sacked Mrs Balchristie for stealing, and that he got married himself to the Laird of Lickpelf's daughter (Chapter 43).</p>
<p>Act IV Scene 1 An arbour in Richmond Park.</p>	<p>This scene is derived from chapters 36 and 37. Chapter 36 contains a description of Richmond Park, chapter 37 the interview with the Queen. Only at the end of chapter 37 does this noble personage reveal herself to be the Queen though this does not really sink into Jeanie's mind until</p>

<p>Queen Caroline is being entertained by a group of court ladies, and is expecting a visit from the Duke of Argyle.</p> <p>He arrives with Jeanie. Together with Lady Suffolk (her lady-in-waiting and the King's mistress) the Queen listens to Jeanie's story. Jeanie does not realise that it is the Queen she is pleading before, having been told merely that a "great lady" may approach the King on her behalf. Her plea for a pardon for Effie touches the Queen's heart.</p>	<p>the start of chapter 38 when Argyle confirms it. The operatic characters of Lady Suffolk, Queen Caroline and Argyle are very much as they are in the book. Bennett invents a madrigal, sung by the ladies of the court under the trees of Richmond Park. It is the middle panel in a scene-setting triptych: orchestral introduction-madrigal-Handel minuet with melodrama. The sung dialogue is also fairly close to Scott's original, and even includes the reference to the Scottish punishment for adultery - which upsets Lady Suffolk, uniting as she does 'the two apparently inconsistent characters, of her husband's [i.e. the King's] mistress, and her own very obsequious and complaisant confidant.'</p>
<p>Act IV Scene 2 The gallows outside the Tolbooth</p> <p>The crowd gathers to watch the hanging, including members of Staunton's criminal gang and Madge Wildfire, who entertains the crowd by singing folksongs. She urges Staunton to proceed with his plan to delay the execution. Effie is brought out of prison and face to face with her father, who now comforts and pardons her. As she ascends the gallows Staunton gives the signal and the crowd surges forward. The soldiers bring in reinforcements to control the mob as Jeanie arrives with two pardons, one for Effie and a second for Staunton whose father's death means that he inherits the title Baronet of Willingham. General rejoicing.</p>	<p>Bennett has engineered a rescue-opera type ending: will Jeanie arrive with the pardon in time to save Effie? What about the outlaw Staunton? In Scott once Jeanie has been assured of her sister's pardon she writes three letters to relay the news: one to Staunton, lying ill abed at the rectory near Grantham, one to her father, and one to her husband-to-be Reuben Butler. Three days later Argyle turns up at Jeanie's lodgings in London to confirm that a pardon has been sent to Edinburgh on condition that Effie leaves the country within a fortnight. In fact we learn later (chapter 42) that three days after her release Effie and Staunton eloped in a boat from Portobello. Bennett omits any incident from the last 100 pages of the novel, whose narrative takes place in the 'Highland Arcadia' of the island [sic] of Roseneath.²⁰³ This is a sensible decision. Once the principal action of the novel has passed, the lengthy Roseneath coda busies itself with tying up loose ends and various remarkable meetings/coincidences; basically all the main characters turn up on the banks of the Clyde at some point and, for the reader, there is an inevitable feeling of anticlimax.</p>

²⁰³ Roseneath is a peninsula across the loch from Helensburgh. The Marquis of Lorne, later the Duke of Argyll, had a house there. This has now been demolished to make way for a mobile home park.

Stylistic Forbears

Jeanie Deans is by no means the first opera on a Scottish subject. There had been a huge opera industry based on the romances of Sir Walter Scott, starting even when the Laird of Abbotsford was still living. Bishop (1786-1855) produced *The Knight of Snowdon* (1811, based on *The Lady of the Lake*), *Guy Mannering* (1816), *The Antiquary* (1820), *Maid Marian* (1822, based on *Ivanhoe*), and indeed, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1819). The first Italian Scott opera was Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*; later Bellini based *I Puritani* on *Old Mortality*. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* was only the latest of eight versions of this story up to 1835 while there were at least 14 operas based on *Ivanhoe*, including versions by Marschner (*Der Templer und die Juden*) and Sullivan.²⁰⁴ Scottish subjects other than those derived from Scott tended to focus on the character of Mary Stuart: e.g. Mercadante's *Maria Stuarda* (1821) or Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* (1834). Verdi's *Macbeth* (1847) stands alone, the Shakespeare play having been shunned by opera composers since. Neither was *Jeanie Deans* the first opera by a Scottish composer. To take only the nearest to MacCunn's work in date, Alexander Mackenzie composed *Colomba* (1883) and *The Troubadour* (1886) for Rosa, and Learmont Drysdale's unfinished *The Vikings* dates from 1892 - when both he and MacCunn were at the Royal Academy of Music, as student and professor respectively.

Musically, *Jeanie Deans* accommodates many of the operatic stock-in-trades - a prayer (or two), a curse, a mad (or at least fey) character, a storm, a breathless escape at the end, and a reconciliation. We are thrown into the action *in media res*. A movement away from the use of a distinct overture is typical of opera at this time: Verdi's *Il*

²⁰⁴ The appeal of *Ivanhoe* can be seen as part of the wider Victorian vogue of medievalism; this medieval romance had been one of the inspirations for the 'Young England' political movement who sought to recreate a feudal hierarchy to restore the 'proper' relationship between gentry and peasantry.

Trovatore and *Otello* waste little time in involving the singers and the audience in respectively a duel and a sea storm.²⁰⁵ Where there is a separate piece of orchestral music, it tends to be a short scene-setting prelude (e.g. Verdi's *La Traviata* or Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*). The scene-setting in *Jeanie Deans* is carried out both before and after the curtain rises: a long dominant preparation is akin to the gathering note at the start of a Scottish reel, and when the curtain rises that reel is happening in front of our eyes. Conceived in seven tableaux that fit into four acts (1+2+2+2), the idea of the first act as a shorter prelude had been used before in Stanford's opera *Savonarola* (1884) and might ultimately be traced back to the Wagnerian scheme in *The Ring* with *Rheingold* as the prelude.

The plot allows for normal arias for the main figures, but, rather surprisingly, Jeanie herself has no aria as such; her longest spell of singing is in the Court scene (Act IV Scene 1) where she pleads her sister's case in a three-section dramatic *scena*. Around the many small musical gems there is a fair amount of more routine material: string tremolandos, diminished seventh chords, and recitatives that rarely attain that happy melodic gift shown in the orchestral works and the songs. As to the general progress of each act there is little sense in which this is a number opera. There are perhaps three extractable songs, (Dumbiedykes' song in Act 1 and the two songs Effie sings in Act II Scene 2) which are not extended items, the first two being simple ternary form pieces, and the third a lullaby in two verses. Nothing remains of the traditional *cavatina - tempo di mezzo - cabaletta* structure from Italian opera. If anything, we can see the cross-fertilisation of MacCunn the songwriter with his persona as a dramatic musician; nothing

²⁰⁵ For an example from the Rosa stable we need look no further than Cowen's *Thorgrim* whose 'Introduction and Chorus' of Warriors anticipates a similar pattern in *Diarmid*.

in these operatic arias shows greater ambition than his songs. Similarly, the madrigal in Act IV follows a straightforward two-verse structure in the manner of most of his 21 part-songs. There *are* instances of MacCunn producing a structure of greater breadth, notably the duet between Effie and Staunton in Act II Scene 2 (VS pages 117 – 131) where a succession of different microstructures build inexorably in moments of Wagnerian emotion (pages 126-127) and rhythmic agitation (pages 128-9) to a wholly convincing macrostructure.

A larger scale concept is to be found in the structuring of other tableaux. The opening of the first act unfolds against the backdrop of Scottish dances, and Dumbiedykes' song 'I love a lass' (p11) continues the bucolic theme rather than interrupting it. There is a precedent for this in the opening of Verdi's *La Traviata* where Violetta's welcoming of her guests is underpinned by a sequence of lively orchestral dances. Later examples might include Act III Scene 1 of *Peter Grimes*, with the Moot Hall dance band providing the backdrop, or the series of Scottish dances in Thea Musgrave's *Mary Queen of Scots*. There are two unifying factors in Act II Scene 1: Madge Wildfire's weird folk-tunes and the approaching storm. It is not unusual for composers to introduce preformed melodies (either ready-made or composed) as a structural buttress. For example in Act I of Massenet's *Werther* the children practise and perform a carol that reappears later in the act, and Schmidt and Johann sing a drinking song 'Vivat Bacchus' (which also comes back in Act II). Other instances might be the 'Willow Song' in *Otello* and the 'Song of the Veil' in *Don Carlos*. The operatic storm is a much used cliché - to herald the onset of tragedy in *Rigoletto*, as the first thing we hear in *Otello* and later to mirror the turbulent state of Peter's mind in *Peter Grimes*. MacCunn

uses the storm as a heightener of tension, a further element in the depiction of the accursed spot, Muschat's Cairn. While in Verdian territory, it is possible that MacCunn was influenced by the Italian in his use of a short calm interlude to raise the level of expectation in the audience. Shortly after the *Rigoletto* Act IV quartet, Verdi inserts a dozen bars of stillness - low, open harmonies on the strings with a solitary oboe note.²⁰⁶ In the last scene of *Jeanie Deans* there is a sudden reduction in dynamic, and eight semibreve chords are heard as Effie is brought from the prison (p237). Perhaps this is related to procession of semibreves underlying the constable's first entry, illustrated on the next page (**Figure 5.1**); guards and officers of the law again enter at this point in the finale. MacCunn is not indifferent to large-scale musical planning - particularly in the first two acts - but only later in the opera does he start to consider the unifying nature of coherent key schemes.²⁰⁷

Much has been made by the critical establishment of MacCunn's admiration of and indebtedness to Wagner. The lazily made alignment of the two composers' music needs to be revised and downplayed but not discarded. The species of chromaticism one finds in *Jeanie Deans* shows the inheritance as much of Gounod as of Wagner. For short bursts MacCunn creates the sort of complex texture involving inner part-writing, appoggiaturas and 'continuous' harmonic discourse associated with the German (e.g. pages 126-7 as Staunton is trying to get Effie out of prison). But the use of augmented chords and half-diminished ('*Tristan*') chords has more to do with MacCunn's own

²⁰⁶ 'The dialogue is preceded by an orchestral motif which is to play quite a prominent part in the scene but whose dramatic as distinct from musical function no commentator has ever been able to explain.' Budden, Julian, *The Operas of Verdi* (London, Cassell 1984 vol. 1), 505-6.

²⁰⁷ See p182ff. below.

vocabulary of strong or agitated emotions than any part in the ongoing musical narrative
e.g. the Constable in Act I pages 38-9 and the agitation thereafter.

Figure 5.1 *Jeanie Deans*: VS pp38-9 **Effie (1)**

[names and numbers in bold refer to recurrent motifs: see below, pages 196-200]

Allegretto sostenuto **FIRST CONSTABLE**

We seek Euphemia Deans

who stands accused of murdering her child...

Allegro agitato **EFFIE**

O Jeanie, save me! save me!

Jerome Mitchell points out how a characteristic MacCunn gesture is similar to a Wagnerian one. At the end of a lengthy tirade or angry exchange Wagner will lead the voice up to its highest point and replace the orchestral continuum with single chords and rests to point the final cadence. Mitchell compares the end of Sieglinde's monologue from *Die Walküre* with Jeanie's ejaculation at the end of the Court scene ('Thank God, and you! O Father! Effie! Saved!') pages 220-1).²⁰⁸ More generally there are a lot more rests in MacCunn's recitative/arioso than in Wagner's. There *are* motifs associated with each character, but these do not undergo transformation in the manner of leitmotifs. Even when MacCunn combines three of the motifs associated with Effie in the orchestral prelude at the start of Act III Scene 2, the effect does not enrich our psychological

²⁰⁸ Mitchell, Jerome, *The Walter Scott Operas* (Alabama, University of Alabama Press 1977), 100-1.

understanding of the personage any more than telling us 'Here is Effie and she is miserable'.

Figure 5.2 *Jeanie Deans* Act III Scene 2 prelude: p132 Effie (1) and (3) + 'neurotic' rhythm.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system is marked 'Andante moderato' and 'pp'. It features a complex, syncopated rhythm. A bracket under the first two measures is labeled 'uneasy rhythms from Act II Scene 2 lullaby'. Above the first staff, four measures are labeled 'Effie (1)'. The second system begins at measure 4 and also features 'Effie (1)' labels above the first staff. The third system begins at measure 7 and features 'Effie (3)' labels above the first staff. This system includes dynamic markings 'sf', 'p', and 'pp'.

The narrative pacing compared with Wagner's music dramas is, unsurprisingly, carried through at a much faster rate in *Jeanie Deans*.

MacCunn uses both genuine Scottish melodies and imitations in his score.

'Rattlin' roarin' Willie' is the initial dance tune, heard immediately after the curtain goes

up. In Act III Scene 2 Dumbie reprises the tune, but in a deliberate tempo, with the Mixolydian flattened 7ths sounding rather doleful at this slower speed. A second dance ‘Tullochgorum’ is interrupted by the old Cameronian Davie Deans (p21)²⁰⁹. Shortly after Jeanie has entered, a snatch of fiddle music is heard offstage; the melody is reminiscent of ‘The Soldier’s Joy’ and is employed to emphasise through contrast the weighty events about to happen onstage. Jeanie’s entrance is presaged by an eloquent hexatonic melody played by the oboe (page 23). This, the first of several folksong imitations, cleverly marks Jeanie out as someone special, possessing admirable moral qualities: the melody possesses an open-air quality and a confidence – both in its outline, its structure (A, B, A¹, B¹, quasi-echo) and the accompanying simple pedal-based harmony.²¹⁰

Figure 5.3 *Jeanie Deans*: p23 Jeanie (1)

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Oboe, showing a melody in G minor with a flattened 7th (F natural). The melody is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features two triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above the notes). The middle staff is labeled 'outline of tremolando string chords' and shows a series of chords in G minor, marked with a pianissimo (*ppp*) dynamic. The bottom staff shows a simple harmonic accompaniment with a pedal point on the G note in the bass line.

²⁰⁹ ‘Tullochgorum’ had been arranged by MacCunn in his *Songs and Ballads of Scotland* 1891, 194.

²¹⁰ A variant of this melody is heard at the start of Act IV Scene 1. This is the mode of writing labelled **Jeanie (1)** in the table on pp198-200 below.

Ob.

The first system of music features an Oboe (Ob.) part in the upper staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with two triplet markings (3) over groups of notes. The lower staves show a string accompaniment with a wavy line underneath, indicating a tremolo effect.

Ob.

The second system of music continues the Oboe (Ob.) part. The upper staff has a 'rit.' marking under a group of notes. The lower staves show a string accompaniment with a '(strings played normally)' marking. There are also 'rit.' markings in the lower staff and some dynamic markings like 'p.' and 'f.'

This almost sounds like a *echt* Scottish tune, but starting each phrase with an identical upbeat is not very typical of the vernacular. Jeanie's vocal lines will lack the nervousness of her sister's; they are more sustained and sure-footed, suggesting a rock on which to lean. Two of the three songs Madge Wildfire sings in Act II Scene 1 are not so much distinctly Scottish in their musical make-up but are more all-purpose folk-like with their four line structure and strophic repetition. The first song ('I glance like the wildfire....pages 60-1 and page 68) includes chromatic runs and Neapolitan inflections -

which come into art-song territory – but also an opening Aeolian phrase which is more like the real thing.

Figure 5.4 *Jeanie Deans*: pp60-1, vocal line.

MADGE WILDFIRE

I glance like the wild - fire through coun - try and town; I'm
 seen on the cause - way I'm seen on the down. The
 light - ning that flash - es so bright and so free Is scarce - ly so
 blithe or so bon - ny as me.
 [Harmony: E flat G ! B flat]

Phrase lengths are elongated in the second song, whose first verse describes Nick Muschat’s murder of his wife (page 64, see also page 90); Madge stretches out the words ‘wife’, ‘hangman’, ‘life’, as if her mind is distracted as she sings. A third snatch of song (‘When the gled’s on the blue cloud’ pages 86-7) is pentatonic, and accompanied by the same sort of soft tonic – dominant harmony found at Jeanie’s entrance.²¹¹ Madge is evidently well known for her songs, as she is bidden to sing in the final scene and obliges with two further strains: a beautiful ballad (p224) in A flat minor which is later cranked

²¹¹ See Figure 5.3 on pages 172-3 above.

up to A minor (p227) and B minor (p231),²¹² and a mostly hexatonic melody referring obliquely to Jeanie's interview with royalty (pp228-9). Indeed the words sung in these songs tend to have relevance to the action of the opera, and are not just there for local colour; Madge is evidently a more astute woman than we might initially assume. In addition to real folk tunes and imitations there is the consistently rustic music given to the Laird Dumbiedykes, particularly in his entrance aria 'I love a lass'.

Characters

Unlike many nineteenth-century operas, parts for women in *Jeanie Deans* outnumber those for men almost two-fold. The treatment of the *two* leading ladies is carefully done, differentiating their characters in the clearest possible way. Jeanie is characterised through her reactions to situations. She is given little time to soliloquise: she airs her forebodings about Effie in an initial couple of pages and also reveals her religious nature.

Figure 5.5 *Jeanie Deans*: pp27-28 including **Jeanie (2)** motif.

Whom day by day, we bear on soaring wings of prayer toward Heav'n?

pp

Jeanie (2)

²¹² See page 97 above (the comparison between *The Wreck of the Hesperus* and Schubert's *Erlking*), and the three riddles in Puccini's *Turandot* (1925) for musical sections pushed up into higher keys on repetition. In *Jeanie Deans* as in *Turandot* the effect is one of increasing tension and expectation.

Ah! that she e - ver left her shel - ter'd home!

cresc.
No spar - row falls with - out the Will of Him who made it

Jeanie (2)

The gently rising chords in the accompaniment will resurface in Act IV Scene 1 (page 201) when Jeanie meets the Queen.²¹³ In other words a noble procession of slow chords signals a higher authority, either spiritual or regal.²¹⁴ The two prayers in the opera (one real – Davie Deans pp .21-22, one bogus – Staunton in the guise of a minister p.154) are similarly set to slow moving deliberate chords. As Jeanie becomes more convinced of the action she has to take on her sister’s behalf, her music – predominantly *diatonic* in character – assumes a bracing vigour similar in effect to the opening of *Lord Ullin’s*

²¹³ See also p147 ss1-2 when Jeanie is telling her imprisoned half-sister of her plans to go to the King or Queen.

²¹⁴ And also perhaps a higher civil authority viz. the semibreves underlying the constable’s music in Act I pp.38-39, 41.

Daughter or the second theme of *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood*.²¹⁵

Figure 5.6 *Jeanie Deans*: Act III Scene 1 pp152-3.

Be-fore my eyes, as in a light pro-phe-tic, lies the end.

The pri-son bonds are loos-ed, the doors flung wide,

Her humility before the Queen is conveyed by falling phrases (Act IV Scene 1 pp.206-10) that become crystallized at the opening of her *scena* 'I would have saved him if I could' (page 211).²¹⁶

Figure 5.7 *Jeanie Deans*: Act IV Scene 1 p211: **Jeanie (3) motif**.

Andante Espressivo
Jeanie

I would have saved him if I could

²¹⁵ See VS pp152-153.

²¹⁶ See the table on p198 below.

In complete contrast, Effie's person is announced by a stream of mostly *chromatic* appoggiaturas that immediately points to moral weakness.²¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, MacCunn is able to work this insidious semitonal worm into much of Effie's music, in the form of appoggiaturas or chromaticism either in the vocal or orchestral part. It is, however, too simplistic merely to equate Effie with chromaticism and Jeanie with diatonicism: a certain neurosis also attaches itself to the orchestral rhythms associated with Effie, most notably in the lullaby she sings to her imagined baby (pp.107-109), in the prelude to Act III Scene1 (pp.132-133), and in the hesitancy of her first entrance music.

Figure 5.8 *Jeanie Deans*: pp28-29 Effie (1).



Beyond the chromaticism and rhythmic agitation, Effie is delineated by two further motifs. What Jerome Mitchell calls the imprisonment motif²¹⁸ and Jennifer Oates calls the innocence motif²¹⁹ is a memorable phrase uttered by Davie Deans (p.43) and recalled

²¹⁷ See **Figure 5.8**.

²¹⁸ Mitchell, 96.

²¹⁹ Oates, Jennifer, *Opera Tradition and Scottish Nationalism, Hamish MacCunn's 'Jeanie Deans'* (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Florida 2001), 137.

in the interlude before Act II Scene 2 set in the Tolbooth (p.94) – **Effie (2)**.²²⁰ In this interlude the phrase is gradually transformed into the final line of Effie’s song ‘Oh! would that I again could see’ which Oates dubs the ‘nostalgia motif’ – **Effie (3)**.²²¹

Figure 5.9 *Jeanie Deans*: p43 ss3-4: **Effie (2)**.

The musical score is set in a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Andante ben sostenuto'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system features a vocal line for 'DAVIE' and a piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic and includes markings for *poco pesante* and *simile*. The lyrics for Davie are: "O friends I said but now, "My". The second system features a vocal line for 'Effie (2)' and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a crescendo hairpin. The lyrics for Effie (2) are: "Ef - fie hath no part nor lot with you!" I".

Taking stock of these two main characters as presented by MacCunn and Bennett, we can picture Jeanie as a sensible, confident woman who gains strength from her religious

²²⁰ See **Figure 5.9** cf. first phrase of Elgar’s partsong ‘My love dwelt in a foreign land’.

²²¹ See page **Figure 5.12** on page 185 below.

beliefs, and Effie as the fallen innocent whose ambit encompasses human love, sentiment and suffering. It is regrettable that Jeanie has no ‘love interest’ in the opera to give a human dimension to her almost saintly behaviour. When quizzed by Dumbiedykes as to why she cannot marry him, she answers that she does not love him, whereas she is, in fact, in love with Reuben Butler (VS pp.177-9).

The *primo tenore* role of Staunton is a curiously anodyne creation. Bennett has upgraded his moral character from the novel, but he is still in need of some clearer musical definition. As befits an escaped criminal, he is always about to leave to escape the clutches of the law. His two duets with Effie are conventional but effective numbers in which he reveals his sensitive side. Madge Wildfire is well drawn through her folksongs and chromatic cackle (e.g. p.66 s1), while the deliberate tread of music associated with Davie Deans aptly conveys the man’s piety as well as his inflexibility. Laird Dumbiedykes is presented here as a popular, misguided figure, for whom the audience may develop a real sympathy in his unsuccessful wooing of Jeanie;²²² his dotted rhythm followed by even notes is the most immediately recognisable musical calling card in the opera.

Figure 5.10 *Jeanie Deans*: p6 Dumbiedykes.



²²² His scene with Jeanie (Act III Scene 2) was a particular favourite with early audiences.

Chorus

As is usual in late nineteenth-century opera, the chorus perform a number of different parts - 'Villagers, Soldiers, Rioters, Magistrates, Guards, Ladies of the Court, Mounted Retainers etc.' – as the title page has it. Having written extensively for choirs, both in individual partsongs and in cantatas, MacCunn handles the choral portions of the opera with expertise. Their role is to interject at relevant moments in the plot rather than sing extended scenes - the two exceptions to this are 1) the madrigal in Act IV – an attempt to recreate a typically English Arcadia with the ladies sitting under a tree singing words which suggest the obverse of 'Fear no more the heat of the sun' and 2) the boisterous prisoners' chorus in Act II Scene 2 (pp. 100-106). Right at the end of the opera there is a choral peroration which is the natural consequence of the happy events just past.

MacCunn's approach to operatic choral writing is explained by Cuthbert Hadden:

In vocal music Mr. MacCunn lays great stress upon declamation: the chorus should speak as well as sing. Hence he treats his chorus in masses by preference, holding that the total effect is more satisfactory than when the voices are broken up in fugal composition.²²³

Certainly, homophonic textures predominate but there *are* short imitative points in the madrigal and in some of the Act I interjections (e.g. p. 46).

Figure 5.11 *Jeanie Deans*: p46 Chorus parts.

Allegretto

Soprano

p

Nay, neigh-bour, take it not so hard, the charge can -

Tenor

p

Nay, neigh-bour, take it not so hard, the charge

[b flat minor]

²²³ Hadden, 55.

S
not be true, Look on thy child, and say if

A
Look on thy child, and say if

T
can - not be true, Look on thy child, and say if

B
Take it not so hard, Look on thy child, and say if

[D flat major]

Musical dialogue between men and women's voices occurs in the prisoners' chorus and in the villagers' appeal to Davie Deans (pp.48-9).

Musico-Dramatic Structure

Jeanie Deans is neither a number opera in the Verdian sense nor does it aim for or attain a Wagnerian continuity. Rather, it evinces its composer's past in writing concise, telling dramatic or lyrical movements within choral cantatas. These moments in the opera are then linked together by means of recitative or orchestral material, producing a structure that can adapt itself to ongoing narrative and more reflective aria-like moments. It ends up rather like certain French operas of the time, in particular those by Massenet. In the first act of *Werther* (1892) for example, the mainly recitative-like singing – albeit more tuneful than MacCunn's – gives way to set pieces: the children's carol-singing, a drinking song, Werther's entrance aria and so forth. Massenet's music *is* more detailed in its orchestral textures than MacCunn's, but a similar organisational principle seems to

obtain. The sequence of events in the first act of *Jeanie Deans* runs like this (principal musical events are in bold type):

Table 5.2 *Jeanie Deans*: Act I.

Page VS	Event	Key
1-4	Scottish Dance	G
4-10	Dialogue between chorus and Dumbie	E - G
11-14	Dumbie's Song 3 verses in ABA form	G [g]
15-17	Short chorus	- C
17	Dance - Tullochgorum	D
18-21	Dialogue: chorus, Deans, Dumbie	
21-22	Deans' Prayer	F
23-28	Entrance of Jeanie, dialogue and arioso	E flat - D
28-38	Entrance of Effie, dialogue	d - E - F - e -
38-42	Arrest of Effie	unstable
43-45	Deans' Aria	b flat
46-51	Dialogue between chorus, Deans and Dumbie	b flat - E flat - c - g
52-55	Effie's plea	g
55-58	Unmoved Deans disowns Effie	b flat

This mosaic ground plan is made up of important 'tiles' and lesser ones.

Recitative/arioso-like dialogue is the default idiom, ranging widely in key and emotion.

The bold-type entries above, on the other hand, represent a steadying of key and an expression of one or two emotions only. It is noticeable how the key zones in on B flat minor as we approach the end of the act.

When the 'lesser tiles' in the mosaic fail to achieve a level of melodic or textural interest, the structure may seem fractured and unsatisfactory. This is the case in Act II Scene 1: MacCunn's typical arioso style allows the drama of the storm and Staunton's threats to come through strongly but without any real melodic characterisation. The

approaching storm proceeds to its maximum violence as the scene moves towards its denouement. It is difficult to be original in the musical treatment of harsh weather conditions and MacCunn does not rise above the clichés of French and Italian Romantic opera in this respect: much (too much) *tremolando* string writing, undulating ribbons of consecutive thirds (straight out of *Rigoletto* Act IV) and sudden diminished seventh chords for bolts of lightning. These commonplaces are in danger of pushing the atmosphere over into melodrama. Madge's songs stand out from this background, and buttress the structure of the whole scene.

Much more successful is the following scene set in the Tolbooth; it is very well paced with beautiful lyrical moments - especially the exquisite lullaby sung by Effie to her absent infant - being interlarded with urgent action.

Table 5.3 *Jeanie Deans*: Act II Scene 2.

Pages VS	Event	Key
95-99	Effie Aria 1 'O would that I again could see'	B
99-102	Prisoners' Chorus 1	e
102-3	Two pages of diminished 7ths/augmented 6ths	
104-6	Prisoners' Chorus 2 (same as the last time)	e
106-9	Effie Recitative and Aria 2 Lullaby	- B flat
109-13	Brief recitative for Effie, then an agitated passage (approach of rioters, reunion of lovers)	
114-6	Rioters' chorus	f
117-22	Duet	F
123-125	Effie arioso 'Ourselves our world'	F
125-31	Closing section - Staunton trying to get Effie away	F

MacCunn's inspiration is more consistent both in the soaring lyrical sections of this act and in the dramatic portions, which may seem perfunctory, but are dramatically apposite. Part of the tension in this scene comes from the counterpointing of events within and without the jail – comparable perhaps to the last act of *Carmen* where the intimacy of murder is juxtaposed with the public triumphalism of the bullring. Aria 1 is a ternary form structure whose music sensitively embraces the yearning quality of the words. The ends of the outer verses are particularly well conceived: Effie's characteristic appoggiaturas (**Effie (1)**) are arranged in voice and accompaniment to give maximum discordant eloquence (e.g. page 96 system 1). The final line of words is repeated - 'I think thereon with tears' (**Effie (3)**) - the first time in the minor mode, the next in the major; the effect recalls Schubert (cf. 'Gute Nacht' from *Winterreise*) where the major restatement is even more touching than the traditionally miserable minor.

Figure 5.12 *Jeanie Deans*: p95 s4 –p96 s3: Effie's Aria 1: **Effie (1)** and **Effie (3)**.

The musical score for Effie's Aria 1 is presented in a system with three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, marked 'Effie (1)', with the lyrics: 'It low-ly stands be-neath the hill, Where flows a ti-ny, bab-ling rill,'. The middle staff is the right-hand piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is the left-hand piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include piano (p) and piano-piano (pp). The score shows a melodic line in the voice and a more complex accompaniment in the piano, with some chords and a simple bass line.

Effie (3)

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "I think there-on with tears, I think there-on with tears." The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* *ral*, *pp*, and *colla voce*. There are also some handwritten annotations and a fermata at the end of the piano part.

To break the mood entirely, a vigorous – and perhaps a little too merry - chorus starts up, its four-bar introduction sitting midway between a Dvorák *Slavonic Dance* and Sullivan’s ‘Three little maids from school’. It would have been very difficult to be this happy in an eighteenth century Scottish prison! The sounds of this chorus yield to a more commonplace effect, the diminished seventh chord - two pages of this sound, no less, as the officers hurry their charges back to the cells. As the prisoners exit there is a reprise of their chorus.

From the half-ridiculous to the sublime: the impervious Effie begins her lullaby to the baby she has lost.²²⁴ In the prefatory recitative the key has been brought round to the dominant of C major. The aria proper begins with thick textured strings outlining the chords of II \sharp^7 – V 7 , but the sound is rendered hazier by the converging internal melodic

²²⁴ In Scott the baby is not dead but is brought up secretly by Meg Murdockson, mother of Madge. In the closing pages of *The Heart of Midlothian* we meet him as the Whistler, a member of the tinker Donacha Dhu’s gang. Donacha Dhu was responsible for the death of Staunton. The Whistler was sold as a slave in America, escaped and joined a tribe of wild Indians and was never heard of again. No happy family reunions here.

lines and off-beat pulses,²²⁵ the real key of B flat is established at the fourth bar only. A harmonic outline of the whole song is laid out below:

Figure 5.13 *Jeanie Deans*: pp107-109: *Effie* (1) and *Effie* (3).

11b7 V7 11b7 V7 11b7 V7 I V7 16 V7

Effie (1)

Effie (1) & (3)

17 1°7 A: V7 I B: I

²²⁵ See Figure 5.18 on page 204 below.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of a vocal line (top staff) and a piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves). The vocal line begins with a melodic motif. The piano accompaniment features a complex harmonic structure with various chords and a pedal point. Chord symbols are provided below the piano part: V, I⁴⁷, iv⁶, I, iii, I⁷, V¹⁷, V, I⁴⁷. The second system shows a piano accompaniment with a pedal point (indicated by a dashed line) and chord symbols IV and I.

The appoggiatura motif **Effie (1)** is here again, but worked into a beautifully crafted melody: bars 7-10 of the vocal line grow organically from this idea. In the accompaniment, the chordal expansion of this motif yields some piquant discords through the pattern of passing notes and chromatic auxiliaries, e.g. the glance at B minor in the context of E flat minor three bars before the repeat. The principal modulation is to MacCunn's beloved flattened seventh (in bar 8 of **Figure 5.13**).

The urgent diminished sevenths return as the drama of the Porteus riots rages without - a mere 13 bars of them this time arranged in a manner which inescapably

recalls the development section of *The Ship o' the Fiend*.²²⁶ Effie's astounded reaction to hearing the voice of her beloved Staunton is signalled by a brightening key change from E flat to G (p111 ss3-4) and several ecstatic phrases. MacCunn ensures the musical continuum in the next ten pages by using an accompaniment pattern based on dropping fourths and rising seconds (cf. a similar motivic shape in the first half of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*²²⁷). This is first encountered on p113 s2, then in the orchestra during the rioters' outburst, and finally it generates - in semiquaver form - the accompaniment to the duet. A further constant in these pages is the tonal stability: As in Act I MacCunn establishes the final key of the act early on - here we reach the key of F at about the halfway stage – so that a structural agenda based on tonality may be felt through part, if not all, of an act.

In the duet which follows, Staunton's lines show a typically restless and passionate quality while Effie, though full of emotion, attempts to steady her impetuous lover. Staunton's climactic top A (p122 s4) is approached via a Brahmsian hemiolaic crescendo; when the climax is achieved it is harmonised with an augmented chord, and the semiquaver accompaniment continuum yields to forceful quavers. 'Ourselves, our world, and all around us peace', Staunton's final words, engender a daydream in Effie as she harks back to the Deans home and some of the words she sang at the start of the act. This is a convincing psychological and musical moment, the sudden peace of the prayer-like aria²²⁸ revealing a mind overwhelmed with uncertainties and taking refuge in the security of childhood memories; as her mind wanders, so does the key.

²²⁶ VS pp110-111, compared with *Ship*: 153-184.

²²⁷ See pages 126-7 above.

²²⁸ The opening phrase is similar to that of Sir Joseph Barnby's hymn-tune 'Cloisters' ('Lord of our life and God of our salvation').

rall
know nor sin, nor shame, nor tears.....

pp *poco rall.* *pp*

p
Our home! "It low - ly stands be - neath a

ppp

hill, Where runs a ti - ny bab - bling rill..
pp

As the reverie is broken into by overheard shouts of the Porteus mob having secured their victim, the final headlong dash to the end of this act begins. A fine romantic passion is stirred up as Staunton tries to get Effie to escape but she sticks resolutely to her principles

and remains. The species of Wagnerian melodic phrase that climaxes on a discord or an appoggiatura plus resolution is widespread here. An unusual accompaniment rhythm for MacCunn - the quaver, crotchet, quaver pattern - aptly underpins the full-blooded *agitato* passage at p128 s4 before Effie reaches a top B flat ('I stay, God help me! Geor-die, here I stay') over grinding discords in having her final word.

We have already noted how in two scenes the final key is established some time beforehand; three other scenes present us with a closed tonal organisation. Of course there is no obligation for a composer to start and end his scenes in the same key, but the two tableaux in Act III do gain in intensity and cohesive power by being based respectively on C and on B. The first of these, set in the condemned cell, uses mainly flat keys – C minor, E flat major – before blossoming out into C major at the end.²²⁹ In what turns out to be a second love duet, Effie's phrases 'Nor shame nor death/ can touch me here' (p142 ss3-4) are sequential, the second a tone up from the first. When Staunton sings this melody to the words 'Have courage dearest/love will find a way...' (p144 s1) the key moves upward by a semitone from E flat to E major - a smaller step but a much more emotionally charged one. After a recollection of 'Ourselves, our world' by Staunton and a restated determination by Effie not to escape from prison till proven innocent, Jeanie emerges from the shadows to present her plan to Staunton in the key of the 'English Court Scene' (Act IV Scene 1) – G major – from which it is an easy step to the C major conclusion.

The second tableau in Act III, a lighter affair altogether set in the courtyard of Dumbiedykes' House, uses sharp keys – in particular B minor/ D Major. An orchestral

²²⁹ Strangely, the lighting indication - "The cell from this point..... becomes more and more dark" (p141) - seems to go against the increasingly positive atmosphere in the scene.

prelude tells us who is to be the focus of this scene: the opening four bar phrase is repeated up a minor third in D minor – a MacCunn hallmark.²³⁰ These statements are cushioned one from the other by almost a bar's silence. Moving on with no further interruptions the central working out of the dotted motif and its falling continuation yields some rich harmonic joys. The progression IV⁷ - I looks forward to Janacek²³¹ while the extraordinary climactic passage (p158 ss1-2) starts off as Brahms and ends up as Wagner!

Figure 5.15 *Jeanie Deans*: p157 s3 – 158 s3.

The musical score for Figure 5.15 is presented in two systems. The first system, marked 'Andante' and 'p', spans measures 157 s3 to 158 s3. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody in the treble clef begins with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, then continues with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The harmonic progression is indicated as G:I, IV7, and I. The second system, marked 'poco accel. e cresc.' and 'f', continues the melody and accompaniment, showing a clear acceleration and increase in volume. The notation includes various rhythmic values and dynamic markings.

²³⁰ Dumbiedykes' musical calling card was heard for the first time beginning on B in Act 1 (VS p6). See also e.g. the opening choral section of *Lord Ullin's Daughter* where the main idea is restated in various keys.

²³¹ E.g. the final section of *Taras Bulba*.



As Jeanie enters Dumbie's courtyard she is amazed to find no-one up. A small 'sloth' motif - four descending notes - paints the words 'and no-one stirs' and 'Ah! me what sloth!' on page 159. This same pattern engenders a short quasi-canonic passage immediately afterwards and provides a comparable comment when Mrs Balchristie informs her that the Laird's in bed. A strict two-part canon, two and a half bars long takes its impetus from Jeanie's dropping sixth 'Oh shame!' (p160 s1) We are reminded of the complete Dumbie motif very forcefully at the foot of p163 as he curses Mrs Balchristie for her presumption, in one of the few moments of quadruple time in this act. This same motif is ironed out into a continuous semiquaver accompaniment to parts of the converse between Dumbie and Jeanie. As in the first act, a noticeable harmonic progression is down to the flat seventh (see p166 s4 D down to C), itself a feature of Scottish folk music. Dumbie cuts a ridiculous and desperate figure as he rushes into the house to gather together his gold to try to win Jeanie as his wife:²³² streams of semiquavers run about aimlessly and it is quite a relief when Jeanie puts an end to it by saying in an unusually (for an opera) candid way 'I do not love you'. Dumbie's bewilderment is well caught by the orchestra who reiterate in a stunned stasis a pathetic drooping double appoggiatura

²³² In the novel he takes her indoors to show her his treasury.

(p178 s3-4). Dumbie left alone, ponders his situation by singing 'Rattlin' roaring Willie' - the dance tune from Act I now mutates into something altogether more pathetic. Having decided to give the money to Jeanie he takes out his frustrations on Balchristie and the orchestra conclude with a fortissimo postlude mixing both dotted and straight versions of Dumbies's tune.

The opera's final tableau is based on A flat. In the previous scene (Act IV scene 1) much of Jeanie's pleading to the Queen has taken place in that key (pp211-13, pp216-17); it is as if MacCunn is seeing through the results of Jeanie's efforts in its successor. As in Act II Scene 1 Madge's songs are both architectural and a commentary on the action. Folksong 4 (to use the terminology of the table below on pages 198-200) in the Aeolian mode refers to a 'bonny tree whose limbs are of green leaves bare and *no* man dares gather its fruit' - referring presumably to the gibbet and the soon to be hanging Effie. In verse 2 'she's gone back to her father's ha'' alludes to Jeanie and her laudable qualities. Folksong 5 tells the story of one coming before the king to plead for another's life; it is hexatonic save for two leading notes towards the end. The third verse of Folksong 4 has the same words as verse 1 except for its last line ' And to gather it [the fruit] will *one* man [i.e. Jeanie] dare!' - 'one' now replacing 'no'. There is the same contrast of Aeolian and penta/hexatonic tunes as in Act II scene 1 as well as a comparable interlocking structure of songs.

The whole operatic edifice is bolstered by motifs associated with characters, and other recurring musical ideas. The principal ideas as mentioned earlier in the chapter are collected below together with a tabular representation of their placing in the musico-dramatic narrative.

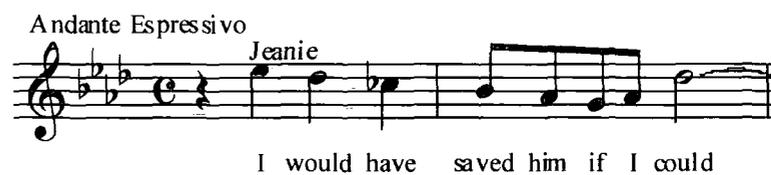
Table 5.4 *Jeanie Deans*: Recurrent musical ideas.

Dumbiedykes – see page 180 above. 

Jeanie (1) – see page 172 above. 

The open, sometimes Scottish/folk-inflected diatonicism found here is a key element in Jeanie's music in general.

Jeanie (2) – see page 175 above. 

Jeanie (3) – see page 177 above. 

Effie (1) – see pages 169-171, 178, 185-8 above.

Effie (1) 

This chromatic appoggiatura idea is freely transformed throughout the opera.

Andante ben sostenuto

DAVIE

Effie (2) – see page 179 above.



O friends I said but now,

Detailed description: This block contains a musical score for a character named Davie. The tempo is marked 'Andante ben sostenuto'. The notation is in bass clef with a common time signature. It begins with a chromatic appoggiatura (a half note G4 followed by a quarter note F4) before the main melody. The lyrics are 'O friends I said but now,'.

Effie (3) – see page 185-8 above.

EFFIE



I think there-on with tears, I think there-on with tears.

Detailed description: This block contains a musical score for a character named Effie. The tempo is marked 'p rall.'. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major). It features a chromatic appoggiatura (a half note G5 followed by a quarter note F5) before the main melody. The lyrics are 'I think there-on with tears, I think there-on with tears.'.

Neurotic orchestral rhythms are also associated with Effie.

Constable – Semibreves; see page 169 above.

Deans – Deliberate rhythmic tread of his music (see page 179 above) and the following stern little motif (VS page 41 system 3).

Allegro



Detailed description: This block contains a musical score for a 'stern little motif'. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The notation is in bass clef with a common time signature. It consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, some grouped with slurs, creating a rhythmic tread.

ACT I [page]	Motifs	Recurrent musical ideas
1-3		DANCE 1
6	Dumbie	
8-9		SING A SONG!
11-14	Dumbie	
17		DANCE 2
[21-22]	[Deans]	[PRAYER]
23	Jeanie (1)	
24-5	Dumbie	
26		DANCE 3
28-9	Effie (1)	
35 ss3-4	Effie (1) orchestral semiquavers, vocal line	
37	Jeanie (2)	
38-9	Constable	
39 ss3-4	Effie (1) orchestral agitato	
41	Constable	
41-42	Deans	
43	Effie (2)	
46		[CANONIC INCIPIT]
47	Dumbie	
50	Dumbie	
51-55	Effie (1)	
[55-56]		[CURSE]
58	Effie (1) orchestra	
ACT II SCENE 1		
59-62	Madge	FOLKSONG 1
62-3		STORM orchestral triplets
64-6	Madge	FOLKSONG 2 + CACKLE
66-7		STORM thunder
68-9	Madge	FOLKSONG 1
70		STORM approaches
79-83		STORM
86	Madge	FOLKSONG 3
88	Madge	FOLKSONG 3
89		STORM at its height
90-1	Madge	FOLKSONG 2 + CACKLE
92-93		STORM at its height

94	Effie (2) and later (3) in interlude	
ACT II SCENE 2		
95-99	Effie (1) and (3) within context of aria	ARIA
99-101		PRISONERS' CHORUS
104-6		PRISONERS' CHORUS
107-9	Effie (1) and (3) + neurotic orchestral rhythms within context of LULLABY,	LULLABY
110		RIOTERS
113	Effie (1) in orchestra	
114-6		RIOTERS
123		'OURSELVES, OUR WORLD...'
123 s4		[CANONIC INCIPIT]
124-5	Effie (3)	And ARIA reminiscence
129-130		RIOTERS
130 s3	Effie (1) in chromatic line to climax	
131		RIOTERS
ACT III SCENE 1		
132-133	Effie (1) and (3) + neurotic rhythms of LULLABY	PRELUDE
135 s4	Effie (3) in orchestra	
133 s3	Effie (3) in orchestra and Jeanie's line	
139 s1	Effie (3) in orchestra	
139 ss2-4	Effie (1) and (3) + nervous rhythms of LULLABY	PRELUDE
145		'OURSELVES OUR WORLD...'
154		[PRAYER]
155-6		ARIA as orchestral postlude
ACT III SCENE 2		
157-9	Dumbie	
159 s3		[CANONIC INCIPIT]
160 s1		[CANONIC INCIPIT]
161 s4-162 s2		[quasi CANONIC INCIPIT]

163 s4	Dumbie	
166-7	Dumbie	
171	Dumbie	
180	Dumbie	
181		DANCE 2
187-8	Dumbie in orchestral postlude	
ACT IV SCENE 1		
189-190	Jeanie (1)+ Effie (1)	INTRODUCTION
194		INTRODUCTION
197		INTRODUCTION
201 s1	Jeanie (2)	
202 s2	Jeanie (2)	
204-6		[PRAYER]
206 ss2-3 - 211	Jeanie (3)	
216-7	Jeanie (3)	
213 s4	Jeanie (2)	
ACT IV SCENE 2		
222-3		TATTOO
223		SING A SONG!
224-5	Madge	FOLKSONG 4
226		SING A SONG!
227-8	Madge	FOLKSONG 4
228 s1	Effie (1)	
228-9	Madge	FOLKSONG 5
231	Madge	FOLKSONG 4
233	Madge	CAKLE
237 ss2-3	Constable?	
239-41		PRAYER
241s3		TATTOO
245 s3	Effie (1) in orchestral semiquavers	
251 s1	Jeanie (3)	
256-7	Jeanie (3)	
257		TATTOO

From the above, it is evident that there are few pages that do not contain some sort of aural signpost for the listener. But aural signposts are all that they are, not Wagnerian leitmotifs; it might even be debated as to whether Jeanie's motifs are consciously constructed in the way that Effie's most certainly are.

A Note on Orchestration

MacCunn writes for the standard late Romantic orchestra – double woodwind, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. The full band is used to accompany the chorus and also at particularly emotional points in the drama, for instance in the final part of Jeanie’s plea to the Queen (Act IV Scene 1 VS pp216-7). Elsewhere a reduced instrumentation obtains. Dumbiedykes’ song in Act I is accompanied by strings with occasional woodwind interjections. Davie Deans’ Act I prayer is for strings alone, as is the first entry of the Constable – one might have expected a brass choir playing these solemn semibreves, as in fact *does* happen for his second phrase ‘We hold a warrant of Justiciary....’ (VS p41). Figurations for strings are often intricate, as in the love duet between Staunton and Effie (**Figure 5.16** page 202 below), Jeanie’s private prayer in Act IV Scene 1 – where the sextuplet semiquavers sound like Philip Glass a century too early (**Figure 5.17** page 203 below) – and above all in the accompaniment to Effie’s prison lullaby (Act II scene 2). Particular care has been taken here, with the muted instruments divided - violins into three, violas into two and cellos independent of the double basses – within a relatively small pitch range. The violins’ off-beat patterns further muddy the waters (**Figure 5.18** page 204 below). As we found in the orchestral works, MacCunn favours the sound of a wind body reinforcing the strings; this wind body often includes the horns who work within the unit. Heavy brass are held back for special occasions and effects. Solos for wind instruments are rare and significant; Jeanie’s first entrance is signalled by a solo oboe (VS page23), her presence

Cresc.

Handwritten musical score for "Jennie Deans Act II Sc. 2". The score includes several staves of music with various annotations such as "Cresc.", "pp", and "cres". The bottom staff contains the following lyrics:

Saw ... ever more I am ... thy King!
 My King thou art! my hope, my

Figure 5.16 Jennie Deans Act II Sc. 2.

Moderato con nob.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the scene 'Jeanie Deans Act IV Sc. 1'. The score is written on multiple staves. At the top, there are several staves of music, likely for a string ensemble or piano accompaniment, featuring long, flowing lines with various dynamics and articulation markings such as *mf*, *ff*, *rit.*, and *acc.*. Below these are several staves of piano accompaniment, including a prominent bass line with a steady rhythmic pattern. The vocal line is written in a single staff with lyrics in English. The lyrics include: "O Gracious Heaven, be merciful to me in this hour of hope and fear. Help not my sister die! Saint's quarters are thy servants. Speak to them, and she shall". The score is filled with musical notation, including notes, rests, and various performance instructions.

Figure 5.17 Jeanie Deans Act IV Sc. 1.

(Ettie's Cradle-song)

Andante con moto tranquillo.

Con sord.
Con sord.
Con sord.
Con sord.
Con sord.

2. m. b.

(SEE BELOW)

Sleep! ... For the day is done and the fading
of the light

poco rall. all. fu.
poco rall. all. tempo
poco rall. all. tempo
poco rall. all. tempo
poco rall. all. tempo

See - he ambertown closes.

Slum, down his couch of good repose

p
pp
pp

Sleep! - For the night is near; may dawn do not fear, when the
sun is down

Figure 5.18 Seaside Deans Act II Sc. 2.

at the English Court is accompanied by solo flute then solo oboe in the prelude to Act IV. If MacCunn's orchestral technique is solid and effective, it is not marked by any great individuality.

Contemporary Reaction to Early Performances

The planned Glasgow premiere mentioned above²³³ never happened, and it was given to the rival city of Edinburgh to host the first performance as late as 15th November 1894 at the Lyceum Theatre.²³⁴ This was something special - the first outing of an opera by a Scotsman on a Scottish subject in the Scottish Capital. The cast on that occasion was

Jeanie (soprano) - Marie Duma
Effie (soprano) - Alice Esty
Davie Deans (baritone) - Alec Marsh
Staunton (tenor) - E.C. Hedmond
Madge Wildfire (soprano) - Miss Meisslinger
Dumbiedikes (baritone) - Lemprière Pringle
Queen Caroline (mezzo-soprano) - Minnie Hunt²³⁵

Bennett, having been disappointed by the lack of resources available for his previous operatic project (as librettist for Cowen's *Thorgrim*), was delighted that

Money had been spent; no pains had been spared, and all engaged not only knew what they had to do, but how to do it. Soldiers bore a part in one scene and were drawn from a Highland regiment stationed at the Castle. It was amusing to see these gallant warriors acting in aid of the civil power against a mob from the Wynds. [...] I have always strongly objected to 'taking a call' and, in fact, have invariably refused the few which have been offered me; doing so, however, not from want of respect for the audience, but because I wished to avoid nervous wear and tear. [The audience] may have wished to give me a cheer, or to glare at the Southron who had dared to lay his hands on Scott's

²³³ See page 157 above.

²³⁴ Much more suitable, in fact, given the location of the drama.

²³⁵ These are regular names in the Rosa Company of the 1890's. For example, Alice Esty's roles included Elizabeth (*Tannhäuser*) Eva (*Meistersinger*), Juliet, Marguerite (*Faust*) and Mimi in the first English performances of *La Bohème* (22 April 1897 Manchester, 2 October 1897 London). We hear of E.C.Hedmont in (among others) *La Fille du Régiment*, Alec Marsh in *Fra Diavolo* and *La Damnation de Faust*, and Lemprière Pringle in all three works.

novel, or to hoot a bad workman off the stage - anyhow my strategic movement to the rear got me out of a difficulty in which the odds were stacked 2 to 1 against.²³⁶

Bennett's worries were well founded, as it turned out. The critic of *Musical Opinion* wondered 'why Mr. MacCunn should have gone to an alien for his libretto, and why he should have allowed that alien to turn the beloved Sir Walter Scott into the most unadulterated forms of school-board English',²³⁷

The reviews in the dailies were typically more even-handed, acknowledging the success of the libretto and the music but wondering if in the longer run the opera might prove to be a mere 'succès d'estime'. *The Scotsman*²³⁸ noted that '[Bennett] has been specially ingenious in securing fairly effective climaxes; his characters never talk too long and only in the Court Scene (Act IV) do we feel he has run to sheer excess, and resorted to what resembles 'padding''. The music was 'strikingly dramatic but not particularly melodious', 'not Italian, not Wagnerian'. 'The outstanding feature of the music as a whole is its inherent restlessness' showing 'a bold and determined disregard for conventional melody.' 'There are practically no lyrics. Even the lullaby which Effie sings, instead of being a simple and effective song, is marred by strange and perplexing progressions.' Again the start of Act IV came in for criticism 'This whole episode is somewhat uncalled for, as it has no bearing on the action; and moreover the 'melodram' is far from successful, the conversation being too brief in comparison with the music.' *The Glasgow Herald*²³⁹ said much in the same vein: 'Mr. MacCunn is not a lyrist; probably he will never write a melody of the highest worth.... but he is a dramatist.' 'His

²³⁶ Bennett, Joseph, *Forty Years of Music* (London, Methuen 1908), 378.

²³⁷ *Musical Opinion*, no.208 (January 1895), 237.

²³⁸ 'New Scottish Opera in Edinburgh', *The Scotsman*, 16 November 1894, 5.

²³⁹ 'Production of a Scottish Opera: MacCunn's *Jeanie Deans*', *The Glasgow Herald*, 16 November 1894, 5.

recitatives are neither monotonous or bizarre, although in many of them the intervals are ungrateful, and one suspects an undue straining after the unusual.’ However this critic isolates Effie’s two songs in Act 2 Scene 2 as respectively ‘the composer’s happiest attempt at melody’ and (of the ‘Lullaby’) ‘[it is] a gem; Mr. MacCunn has done nothing better in conception and execution, and deserves great credit for the treatment of a difficult situation.’ When the critic of *The Musical Times* had had an opportunity to formulate his opinions, he agreed with the *Herald*’s view that the best parts of the music were those which illustrated dramatic action, and that the recitative was ‘at times rather unquiet and even ungainly in its harmonic progression.’ He didn’t care for Effie’s lullaby – ‘smothered under rhythmless melody in a labyrinth of dissonances’ – and dismissed the Madrigal in Act IV as ‘extremely crude in its part-writing and uninteresting in its musical content.’²⁴⁰ The papers remarked on the glittering audience at the premiere, including Mrs. MacCunn, Madame Rosa and the Marquis of Lorne ‘who is, notwithstanding contradictions, actually engaged in collaboration with Mr. MacCunn on yet another Scottish Opera.’²⁴¹ The *Scotsman* critic noted somewhat wearily that the evening started at 7.30 and did not finish till 11 p.m.

Jeanie Deans travelled to Glasgow the following week and thence to the usual ports of call on a Rosa tour as part of the repertory through the early part of 1895. The following season it played at Daly’s Theatre in London (January 1896). *The Times* raved that the performance was ‘by many degrees better than that given at first’ and that ‘the artists who still retain the principal parts have [...] advanced in power and conviction as they have become familiar with the music.’ Miss Meisslinger had been replaced by Edith

²⁴⁰ ‘Hamish MacCunn’s *Jeanie Deans*’, *MT*, xxxv (1 December 1894), 816-17.

²⁴¹ ‘Production of a Scottish Opera: MacCunn’s ‘*Jeanie Deans*’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 16 November 1894, 5. This refers to the Celtic drama *Diarmid* to be discussed in the next chapter.

Miller in the role of the Madge Wildfire: ‘her pronunciation was in strong contrast to that of her predecessor in the part.’²⁴² *The Athenaeum* patronised:

Mr. Hamish MacCunn must not be discouraged if his so-called grand opera *Jeanie Deans* does not prove a popular success in London, for in his first ambitious effort for the lyric stage he has accomplished much, and given evidence of talent in writing in this department of art; so that he may be requested to persevere.²⁴³

The reviews, then, were generally encouraging, but hardly ecstatic even with the added patriotic glow surrounding the first Scottish performances. The opera remained in the Rosa Company’s repertoire until the First World War. From then on there were occasional airings throughout the twentieth century.

Table 5.5 Performances of *Jeanie Deans* after World War I.

Date	City	Details
1918 [10 May]	London	Shaftesbury Theatre
1934 [10, 12, 13 April]	Edinburgh	King’s Theatre conducted by Ian Whyte
1938	Edinburgh	Revival by the BBC in a concert version with the BBCSO conducted by Ian Whyte
1951 [May]	Glasgow	Glasgow Grand Opera staged it as their contribution to Festival Year 1951 with Joan Alexander in the title role. The performance was broadcast by the BBC and was partly funded by the Arts Council and Glasgow Corporation.
1968 [26 April]	Radio	BBC Scotland abbreviated version for the centenary year of MacCunn’s birth. Patricia Hay in the title role, Patricia MacMahon as Effie, conducted by James Loughran.
1986 [5-8 February]	Ayr	Gaiety Theatre. Opera West, produced by Marilyn de Blicke and conducted by Raymond Branwell.

²⁴² *The Times*, 23 January 1896, 7.

²⁴³ *The Athenaeum*, no. 3562 (1 February 1896), 156.

1994 [14-16 April]	Ayr	Gaiety Theatre. Opera West
1995		Recording of extracts made by Martyn Brabbins and the BBCSSO for Hyperion Records. More extended sections were recorded for the BBC Radio 3 programme <i>Britannia at the Opera</i> .
1996 [1-3, 5, 7 November]	Hamilton, New Zealand	Opera Waikato. Orchestral score arranged for two pianos.

MacCunn evidently warmed to Bennett's libretto, or maybe it was Bennett who found exactly the right way to stimulate his collaborator. Whichever is the case, it is the dramatic flow that is so impressive in *Jeanie Deans*, the way the forward momentum is never lost even when characters are allowed a lyrical indulgence. Of these latter there are relatively few extended *scenas* or arias and rather more moments which would fall into the category of *arioso*. If there is a failing in the opera it is in the recitative which could be more melodic and less concerned with dramatic gesture; there is little or no polyphonic depth in their accompaniments which renders them yet starker. But the characters are well drawn and the balance between dark and lighter situations is finely judged. With its predominantly peasant milieu and unflinching depiction of some pretty murky incidents there is a case for considering this opera as the standard bearer for an indigenous Scottish *verismo* movement²⁴⁴. MacCunn would not go on to develop this strain further, but would immerse himself in Celtic myths as interpreted by the Marquis of Lorne in *Diarmid* - an opera of huge choral scenes, soaring lyricism and some of the composer's greatest music, but one which sacrifices in the process the white-hot dramatic power of *Jeanie Deans*.

²⁴⁴ *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* - as models for the 'slice of life' ethos in opera had both been presented in English by the Rosa Company in 1892 and 1893 respectively.

CHAPTER 6

Opera II: *Diarmid*

Background

Plot

Contemporary Press Opinions

Celtic Context

Structure, Characters, Chorus

A Note on Orchestration

Breast of Light

‘Diarmid, son of Olla of the guiding heart,
Who would softly play the harp,
Blood-fury left on thee stain nor mark,
Tho’ low laid by the boar at last’

(from Kennedy Fraser, Marjory, and MacLeod, Kenneth, *Songs of the Hebrides* (London, Boosey 1909), 112-13: ‘The Lay of Diarmad’ as sung by Janet MacLeod.)

Background

There was a third element [after church music and historicizing pastoralism] – as popular in England as in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Cornwall from where it drew inspiration – and that was the Celtic, the music of mists and mysticism, magic and mystery, gods and legends, fairies and giants, a kind of rejection of modern industrial society different from the construct of ‘Merrie England’.²⁴⁵

The tendency for Scots to superimpose a layer of bogus tradition on their vibrant history and culture has already been remarked upon in an earlier chapter.²⁴⁶ Inevitably the Celtic tradition provided the right sort of incidental, picturesque detail to fire a certain sort of poetic mind. One such mind belonged to the librettist of MacCunn’s second grand opera, the incumbent of the grand castle at Inveraray on Loch Fyne, John Douglas Sutherland Campbell, the Marquis of Lorne, later 9th Duke of Argyll, and the Queen’s son-in-law through his marriage to Princess Louise. Louise comes down to us as a rather attractive figure, a gifted artist and sculptress who enjoyed a bohemian life-style which could sit uneasily with her royal duties. She feared that she was not clever enough for Lorne; certainly her husband – who became the Liberal Unionist MP for Manchester South in 1895 - was a cultured man who sketched, wrote plays and poems, sat on numerous committees dealing with artistic and social affairs, and was tireless in his charitable works. They had married in 1870 and were to have no children. A whiff of scandal attached itself to each of them, she for her extra-marital liaisons – in particular with the sculptor Edgar Boehm²⁴⁷ - and he for his alleged homosexuality. Lorne was appointed Governor General of Canada in 1878, thus conveniently getting the couple out of the way of further accusations. Although their relationship went through lengthy turbulent

²⁴⁵ Jeffreys, Richard *Imperialism and Music, Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester, Manchester University Press 2001), 13.

²⁴⁶ see Chapter 2, pages 67-8 above.

²⁴⁷ ‘A substantial figure – it was said that a winch was necessary to lift him from his royal mistress when he died *in flagrante*’ Wilson, Andrew N., *The Victorians* (London, Hutchinson 2002), 503.

phases, Louise grieved deeply at her husband's death in 1914, which suggests that the bedrock of the marriage was secure. As Duke of Argyll, he wrote an episodic autobiography *Passages from the Past*²⁴⁸ in which is detailed his enthusiasm for life in general, and his love and knowledge of Scotland in particular. He even notes the link between his family and the Celtic legend that formed the basis of his operatic cooperation with MacCunn:

The family [the Campbells] which for so long a time has made this place [Inveraray] its headquarters moved here from Loch Awe, where a castle on an island [Kilchurn] in the narrow part of that loch was the first considerable stronghold they possessed. Near it, in the 'String' or pass of Lorne, their ancestor Colin Mhor, or Black Colin, fell pierced by the arrow of a murderer hiding behind a rock by the wayside. His fathers called themselves originally not Campbell, but O'Duin, or sons of Brown Diarmid, the Celtic hero who eloped with Queen Grainia, wife of King Fion, and who like Meleager, slew a terrible wild boar.²⁴⁹

In the reviews of the first performance of the opera, Lorne is portrayed as someone who has made important contributions to Celtic patriotism in every shape or form, from the unveiling of statues to the writing of books that formed a fitting complement to the interest that the Royal Family took in the country at large.²⁵⁰ The Marquis had been carefully following MacCunn's musical development. It is possible that Lorne knew the family in Greenock; his first extant letter to MacCunn suggests a longer acquaintance in its pleasantly informal tone:

I am very glad to hear you are safe and sound. I shall look forward with great interest to my local account that may reach me of the concert for the Savants. Under your leadership it is sure to 'go off' well. I wish you could have come back with us to Mull but our last expedition to see the great cave [Mackinnon's Cave] was not successful owing to the tide having obstinately remained too high during the evening hours of daylight. As yet our grand piano stands untouched, but I hope next week when my wife comes that we shall have some music.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ London, Hutchinson 1907. Princess Louise is mentioned once in the course of 674 pages.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid* vol. 1, 138.

²⁵⁰ See 'Royal Carl Rosa Company', *The Times*, 25 October 1897, 8.

²⁵¹ Knock, Aros, Argyllshire dated Sept. 19.1889. Uncatalogued letter in the Watt Library, Greenock.

Lorne's leisure pursuits - billiards, golf, fishing and sailing – chimed in with MacCunn's: it seemed likely that they would collaborate successfully at a personal as well as a professional level.²⁵²

Plans for *Diarmid* were in train before *Jeanie Deans* received its first performance. Lorne wrote to MacCunn from Balmoral in September 1894 with a recommendatory note for the composer to use in his negotiations with the Carl Rosa Company, and, after news of a successful church bazaar he concludes 'This [the bazaar], and travelling have prevented me from doing much to no. 3, but I have a sketch plan in my head!'²⁵³ Notices for the opening of *Jeanie Deans* confirm the on-going collaboration between the two men.²⁵⁴ Apparently, this was not the only version of the Diarmid legend being written at that time:

Mr. [More] Smieton has been the victim of a curious coincidence. Some time ago he started to set a certain Irish story to music, his brother having written the libretto for him. He had just covered about 50 pages of his manuscript, when the announcement was made that Mr. MacCunn and the Marquis of Lorne were at work together on that selfsame Irish story. What to do? Well, Mr. Smieton wrote at once to Mr. MacCunn and, as he says 'I got back such a nice letter that I could do nothing more than throw up my own work'.²⁵⁵

In February 1895 MacCunn was staying at Inveraray, enduring wild weather conditions but enjoying some fine skating,²⁵⁶ shortly after this visit he received a request from the 8th Duke of Argyll (Lorne's father) to set his poem 'The Dipper' to music.²⁵⁷ To finance the presentation of the new opera 'The National Celtic Opera Syndicate' was

²⁵² Lorne may not have been impervious to MacCunn's Byronesque good looks either.

²⁵³ 6 September 1894, Uncatalogued letter in the Watt Library, Greenock.

²⁵⁴ e.g. 'Production of a Scottish opera', *Glasgow Herald*, 16 November 1894, 5.

²⁵⁵ *Musical Opinion*, xviii no. 207 (1 December 1894), 172. Smieton turned to a Celtic fairy tale instead, and wrote the dramatic cantata *Connla*.

²⁵⁶ Letter to Joseph Bennett 7 February 1895, *US-NYpm* MFC M133.B4716 (11).

²⁵⁷ Letter dated 19 February 1895. Uncatalogued letter in the Watt Library, Greenock.

established: 'the capital is 1,200 pounds, and with that sum the syndicate calculate that they will be able to carry through agreements with Mr. MacCunn and his librettist the Marquis of Lorne as well as with the publishers Messrs. Matthias and Strickland.'²⁵⁸

Among Lorne's other dramatic writings is a comedy designed to be given in the Great Hall of Inveraray Castle called *The Coach and Six*. The text is reprinted in *Passages from the Past*²⁵⁹ with various songs included in the action – the play starts with a cricketers' chorus! In the operatic sphere, he would provide a further Celtic libretto for Learmont Drysdale's unfinished *Fionn and Tera* (1909). But on 23 October in the Queen's Jubilee Year of 1897 *Diarmid* was presented on the stage of Covent Garden by the Carl Rosa Company with the composer conducting. There is, unfortunately, no exchange of letters documenting the shaping of libretto and music as there had been with *Jeanie Deans*. Indeed the only extant letter from 1897 is Lorne's message of condolence when MacCunn's mother died in July that year.²⁶⁰

Plot

The plot of the opera is summarised below. What King Arthur is to the Welsh / Cornish Celts, Fionn is to the Celts of Ireland and Scotland. Similarly there is a clear parallel between the love story of Guinevere and Lancelot in Arthurian Romance and that of Diarmid and Grania here:

[Act I] 2nd century Erin or Scotia. A bellicose band of Scottish soldiers look forward to encountering again their Norse foes in battle having beaten them off in a recent engagement. Diarmid, a Scottish warrior, urges them not to rest yet, but to reinforce the

²⁵⁸ 'Music in Scotland', *Musical Opinion*, no. 214 (1 July 1895), 641.

²⁵⁹ Campbell, 603-651.

²⁶⁰ Letter dated 8 July 1897. Uncatalogued letter in the Watt Library, Greenock.

battlements. Eila, daughter of the Scottish King Fionn from his first marriage, is in love with Diarmid and encourages him to break from his warmongering ['Heavy thy burden Diarmid, Rest from thy toil awhile!'] but Diarmid brushes her off and implores the gods to give him strength in battle. The gods give him their protection but warn, 'in one place alone shall thy body feel death' - his foot. Diarmid falls asleep, the goddess Freya appears with attendant maidens and casts a spell on him 'All women who see thee shall straight be enamoured'

[Act II sc 1] King Fionn broods in the woods on past glories. His wife Grania taunts him for being a spent force and a coward; she suggests he sends Eila (her step-daughter) with some treasure to appease the Norse King Eragon, and when he hesitates, stings him with the line 'Thou lovest Eila better than thy wife'.

[Act II sc 2] Eila is received in the Norse camp with her gifts. Her offer is brusquely rebuffed by the Norse and she flees. A fugitive Norseman enters out of breath with news of a great Scots warrior without. It is Diarmid, and he encourages Eragon to send out soldiers to fight him and the Scots. Many are killed offstage and finally Eragon himself succumbs as the victorious Scots enter.

[Act III sc 1] After a choral ballet of Gnomes, Hobgoblins and Fairies, [Act III sc 2] Grania enters as the first greys of morning appear, and proceeds to seduce Diarmid.

[Act IV sc 1] In another part of the forest the terrible venomous boar has been spotted and Fionn enters with a band of huntsmen to pursue it.

[Act IV sc 2] Diarmid and Grania's passionate embraces are interrupted by the hunting party. They are discovered, and Diarmid is denounced as a traitor by Fionn; he is told to take off his shoes to aid his descent from his cliff top hiding place and to kill the trapped

boar. This Diarmid does, and at Fionn's command measures the boar's size with his bare feet. A poison bristle pierces Diarmid's vulnerable foot. Although Fionn has a cup of healing drink, he flings it away rather than give it to the ailing hero. Diarmid dies, Eila and Grania lament and in heaven his soul is welcomed and forgiven.

Contemporary Press Opinions

The Sunday papers advertised the premiere as 'The Marquis of Lorne's New Opera', but there were some critics who considered that even the libretto was not entirely his own work, having been retouched by Joseph Bennett.²⁶¹ Opinions about the quality of the text were divided. There were those who dared not criticise the words of a gentleman connected by marriage to the Royal Family, and those who thought it must inevitably be a failure for the same reason. J.C.Runciman in the *Saturday Review* was in no doubt that 'the libretto is as bad as ever was offered to an unlucky opera composer. There is no continuity, no development, no sweet reasonableness in it; it is a series of incoherent incidents,'²⁶² and he went on to list the non-sequiturs in the plot.

Why is Eila brought in? What becomes of Grania? Why does Grania taunt her husband with cowardice while urging him to a cowardly course? How does Fionn discover Diarmid to be vulnerable in the soles of his feet? Why does Diarmid fall so suddenly in love with Grania?²⁶³

As regards the music, this splenetic critic was forced to admit that the audience enthusiastically clamoured for the composer and librettist after the Third Act love duet ('One may look in vain through all the love music written during the last twenty years by English composers for a piece which sweeps with anything like the force, certainty,

²⁶¹Runciman, John F., 'Mr. MacCunn's New Opera', *The Saturday Review*, 30 Oct 1897, 460.

²⁶²*ibid.*, 461.

²⁶³*ibid.*, 461.

and poise of this duet.²⁶⁴) even if they were relatively subdued after the much less successful final act. Aside from the Love Duet -which other critics rated highly as well- Runciman loved the ballet that preceded it, but here his colleagues balked at the incongruity of its placing – or even of its very existence²⁶⁵ while praising MacCunn’s imaginative scoring. There was general approbation for Eila’s simple strophic air in Act I, its pentatonic inflections probably convincing the English audiences that this was how Scottish music really was: ‘a song of great melodic charm [...] which proved the chief success of the performance’²⁶⁶ ran a typical review. To what extent the opera was revised after early performances and in the light of criticism is demonstrated below.

Table 6.1 Comparison of Original and Revised versions of *Diarmid*.
[page numbers refer to the published version]

	Original Version '1897 London'	Revised version dated April 1898.	Effect
Act II Scene 1	Started at VS p78 s2 with orchestral prelude proceeding to Grania’s initial taunt ‘Thus lonely is thy regal state, so soon, O King!’	Fionn’s song (VS pp72-8) added to start this scene, before going on to orchestral ‘prelude’ and Grania’s taunt.	To fill out the character of Fionn in what turns out to be a rather dull song.
Act IV Scene 1	Not in this version	Added: chorus of frightened villagers, song for Eila, Hunting Song for Fionn and chorus.	Eila would have disappeared after Act II Scene 2 were it not for this song.
Act IV Scene 2	Just ‘Act IV’ in original. Love duet finished on F major chord (end of p268) then straight into ‘The Cherry and	Addition of link from F major conclusion of Love Duet to A minor of ‘The Cherry and Rowan’ pp268-72, including an anticipation	A smoother key change

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 461.

²⁶⁵ e.g. ‘but surely never was anything more incongruous than the introduction into such a scene (the period of the opera being the second century) of a pantomime ballet with a pirouetting danseuse in very scanty attire.’ ‘Music in Scotland’, *Musical Opinion*, no.243 (1 December 1897), 182.

²⁶⁶ ‘MacCunn’s New Opera, *Diarmid*’, *MT*, xxxviii (1 November 1897), 747.

	Rowan' p272.	of this latter song's introduction p270 ss1-2.	
Act IV Finale	Opera originally ended with an E flat minor chord on p319 (Chorus – 'Woe! woe! woe!')	Change of E flat minor chord to a 'Tristan' chord by underpinning with a C. Mourning by Eila, Gaelic lament by Grania, Freya gloats on her success at destroying Diarmid and gaining revenge for Norway, the Immortals pardon Diarmid and welcome his soul to Heaven.	The original ending seemed perfunctory. At least in the revised version some degree of catharsis is achieved through the females' lamenting and the final chorus with its more uplifting <i>terce de Picardie</i> .

Runciman's suggestion that Joseph Bennett might have been involved in retouching Lorne's words would seem to be more valid for the Revised Version, done presumably for the Rosa Company's tour; when Lorne prints the libretto at the end of *Passages from the Past*,²⁶⁷ none of the revised sections appears in it.

Covent Garden on that October evening was certainly a glittering place to be. In the Royal Box were Princess Louise and her librettist husband, and the Princess of Wales, who had delayed her departure for Sandringham to be able to attend. The National Celtic Opera Syndicate (together with the Grand Opera Syndicate) had raised sufficient funds to be able to stage the piece in a sumptuous manner; there was, for instance, an imposing stone circle for Act III and the set for Act IV included a real cascade of water falling over a cliff.²⁶⁸ The cast was a strong one:

Diarmid (tenor)– Philip Brozel
 Fion (baritone)– Mr. Maggi
 Eragon (bass) – Charles Tilbury
 Eila (mezzo-soprano) – Louise Kirkby Lunn
 Freya (contralto) –Agnes Janson
 Grania (soprano) –Marie Duma

²⁶⁷ Campbell, vol ii, 652-672.

²⁶⁸ 'which sometimes over-played its part.' 'London Theatres', *The Stage*, 28 October 1897, 15.

With one or two exceptions it was MacCunn's ability as a conductor and composer that excited the greatest plaudits from the critical community, of which the following was typical:

Mr Hamish MacCunn conducted with extraordinary coolness and self-possession before a brilliant audience. [He] [...] has mastered the technique of his share of the business with amazing completeness. His fluency is overwhelming, and never on any occasion fails him. Moreover it is a fluency which never degenerates into the utterance of commonplace twaddle, after the fashion of most fluency, literary or musical. Mr. MacCunn, it is true, is sometimes crabbed, and sometimes avoids with great presence of mind the haunts of beauty: but he is never silly or vapid. He shows very often the firm grasp, the strong, sweeping inspiration, the confidence and imperturbability of the real musician rejoicing in his art.²⁶⁹

Sadly, there were some commentators who already perceived the waning of a bright star:

Poor Hamish MacCunn! Some years ago he was the prophet who was receiving *all* the musical honour that was a-going. He was hailed as the artistic saviour of a country hitherto given up entirely to folksong and the bagpipes: and it was generally felt that in him Scotland had a composer who would yet win for himself a place among the immortals.

Serious opera was 'entirely out of keeping with his artistic temperament.' The music was

written for the upper registers of the soprano and tenor voice. [...] Saving one air - that for the contralto [sic] Eila - there is little melodic charm in the whole work. [...] 'The orchestration [...] is far too noisy and wanting relief.' [...] 'Even in the love duet ... where one might expect repose and peace, orchestra and singers make a perfect row which was all sound and fury.'²⁷⁰

Remarks on the lack of melodic charm echo comparable comments regarding the premiere of *Jeanie Deans*, while apparently needless complexity ('sound and fury') was a charge levelled against Effie's Lullaby in the earlier work.²⁷¹ MacCunn conducted two further performances at Covent Garden on Wednesday 27 October and Saturday 30th

²⁶⁹ 'The New Opera at Covent Garden', *Illustrated London News*, 30 October 1897, 597.

²⁷⁰ 'Music in Scotland', *Musical Opinion*, no.243 (1 December 1897), 182.

²⁷¹ See pages 206-7 above.

October (matinée) 1897. It was subsequently toured around and played at Edinburgh, Manchester and Liverpool. The following year on 9 June he directed selections of *Diarmid* for the Queen at Balmoral with Brozel, Kirby Lunn and Cecile Lorraine (not in the premiere but presumably interpreting the part of Grania).²⁷² Queen Victoria ‘sent me a beautiful silver inkstand as a souvenir of this occasion’ he later wrote in a letter to Janey Drysdale²⁷³. There are no records of *Diarmid* having been performed in the hundred or more years since then.

Celtic Context

In the previous chapter the Scottish context for *Jeanie Deans* was considered and the opera was placed within the ambit of works inspired by Sir Walter Scott. As intimated at the start of this chapter the ‘Celtic Twilight’ movement provided the cultural backcloth for *Diarmid*. *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) was a book of stories from Sligo and Galway by W.B. Yeats. It gave its name to a late nineteenth – early twentieth century interest in Celtic folklore and society, manifested in plays, novels, poems, scholarly research and music. The sharpening of a sense of Celtic nationalism was felt in the various ‘fringe’ countries and – in refracted form - in England. In Dublin the Italian expatriate Michele Esposito became a piano professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and galvanised the city’s musical life through his frequent recitals and his founding of the Dublin Orchestral Society in 1899. As a composer, he incorporated Irish melodies into many of his pieces - the *Irish Suite*, an Irish operetta *The Post-bag*, an opera *The Tinker and the Fairy* and the *Roseen Dhu* songs. The main Irish competitive festival Feis Ceoil was

²⁷² ‘Court Circular’, *The Times*, 10 June 1898, 10. The small audience included the Munshi Abdul Karim.

²⁷³ Letter dated 29 Dec 1913, *GB-Gu MS Farmer 264*.

established in 1897, as was the Oireachtas, a celebration of Gaelic literature, drama, traditional music and fine art. Operas appeared in the Irish language: O'Brien Butler's *Muirgheis* (1903) and Robert O'Dwyer's *Eithne* from 1910. Stanford recalled the country of his birth in the 'Irish' Symphony (1887), the cantata *Phaudrig Crohoore* (1896), the opera *Shamus O'Brien* (1896) and the later Irish Rhapsodies, one of which – no. 4 – was a belligerent political statement on behalf of the Unionist cause.²⁷⁴ In Scotland Learmont Drysdale would compose *The Kelpie of Corrievreckan* (1897) and the aforementioned opera *Fionn and Tera* (1909) and, earlier in Wales, Joseph Parry had composed the first Welsh opera *Blodwen* (1878) to be followed by *Arianwen* (1890). A wider interest in North European mythology, no doubt inspired by Wagner's *Ring* cycle as much as by any home-grown vogue may be seen in Cowen's Icelandic opera *Thorgrim* (1890) and Corder's Norse cantata *The Sword of Argantyr* (1889).

Early reviews of MacCunn's *Diarmid* suggested that composer and his librettist had envisaged a sequence of Celtic works in the manner of Wagner's great tetralogy.²⁷⁵ The sketches of a second instalment, (not a sequel, as *Diarmid* is still the central character) *Breast of Light*, will be discussed later in the chapter.²⁷⁶ There are echoes of other operas in *Diarmid*: the couple discovered during a hunt recalls *Dido and Aeneas* and *Tristan and Isolde*, the enchanted sleep looks back towards *Walküre*. Within MacCunn's own output there is an obvious link in subject matter with his cantata *Queen Hynde of Caledon* - another story of Scots versus Norse. A few years later, audiences

²⁷⁴ See Dibble, Jeremy, *Charles Villiers Stanford, Man and Musician* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 408-9.

Some elements in the sketch of the Celtic Twilight movement on pages 220-1 were suggested through discussion with Professor Jeremy Dibble.

²⁷⁵ E.g. 'Royal Carl Rosa Company', *The Times*, 25 October 1897, 8.

²⁷⁶ See page 247 below.

would be treated to *Diarmuid and Grania* (1901), a dramatic re-working of the legend by George Moore and W.B. Yeats with incidental music by Edward Elgar.

Structure, Characters, Chorus

In theory, the possibilities the Diarmid legend opens up for the composer would seem to be manifold. In practice MacCunn allows himself to get bound up with individual scenes so that forward motion is compromised, and the opera becomes a series of impressive, if rather overblown tableaux. Conceived as a grand opera in four acts (with no mention of tableaux this time, however apposite that term might be here), the superficial ground plan is identical to *Jeanie Deans*: one scene in the first act and two in each of the succeeding ones. The opening act establishes several important premises for the rest of the opera: the warlike backcloth, Diarmid's 'Achilles Heel' and his vulnerability in his dealings with women - as evidenced by Eila's unreturned love and the supernatural intervention of Freya.

The seven scenes might be summarised thus

Table 6.2 *Diarmid* [revised version], Scenes.

Act I	Premises.
Act II Scene 1	The Royal Household - character of individuals and relationships between them.
Act II Scene 2	The Norse enemies and their destruction
Act III Scene 1	A ballet
Act III Scene 2	Seduction and first love scene
Act IV Scene 1	Hunt
Act IV Scene 2	Second love scene and denouement.

The ballet divides the opera into two contrasting halves. There is little mention of Diarmid and Grania's love until the second half. Much time is devoted to building up the formidable Norsemen early on, only to have them and their king killed off in Act II Scene 2. The lyrics in the choral ballet are fey and insubstantial, and apart from the gnomes' mocking of human foibles, ('See how vain his oaths and deeds! / Few are faithful, most are weeds! / Ho, ho ho the human heart / Thumps this tune ere life depart') have no bearing on the story's progress. The tradition of introducing dance into opera could not be resisted apparently; MacCunn follows the example of French Grand Opera composers, Wagner in *Tannhäuser* (the extended Venusberg scene in the 'Paris version'), *Die Meistersinger* (Act III scene 5) and *Parsifal* (Flower maidens in Klingsor's Magic Garden), Verdi in many works up to *Aida* (1871) and *Otello* (1887) and virtually every opera by Tchaikovsky. There are two love scenes in the opera which might seem like one too many (so thought several critics), but they do include some of the composer's most passionate music. Diarmid spends a surprising amount of time asleep in the opera: he drifts off in Act I when Freya delivers her message concerning his irresistibility to woman, and is unconscious through the ballet and the first part of Act III Scene 2. Perhaps this is to emphasize the interplay between the real and the dream world – an interplay typical of 'Ossianic' literature and one embraced wholeheartedly by Lorne. A further indebtedness to the earlier epic is to be found in the intimate relationship between humanity and the natural world. In James MacPherson's fraudulent work, characters are often described in terms of nature, for example:

The son of Morny came; Gaul the tallest of men. He stood on the hill like an oak! His voice was like the streams of the hill. Why reigneth alone, he cries, the son of mighty Corval? Fingal is not strong to save: he is no support for the people. I am strong as a storm in the ocean; as a whirlwind on the hill.²⁷⁷

In *Diarmid*, the opera's post-coital love duet (Act IV scene 2) is a quasi-Pantheistic hymn in which human and spiritual love are mixed with wonder at the surrounding landscape. Eila's second song (Act IV scene 1- added to the revised version of the opera) finds the singer asking the stream, the birds and the winds for news of Diarmid. The whole opera takes place in the open air in exactly the sort of craggy Highland scenery envisaged by MacPherson. In dramaturgical terms *Diarmid* contains the Aristotelean elements of *peripeteia* (reversal) and *anagnorisis* (recognition) necessary for tragedy. Diarmid, the almost superhuman hero, suffers a terrible reversal of fortune having made the error (*hamartia*) of falling in love with his king's wife Grania. His death through the poisonous bristle piercing his vulnerable heel brings about Diarmid's recognition of his guilt as he vainly pleads for his life. Fionn's sadistic taunting of Diarmid with the remedy for his wound ends with the lines 'What good is thy life? Can its fair deeds o'erpower the guilt of one act, the curse of an hour?'²⁷⁸ Freya appears and treats Diarmid's death as a successful fulfilment of her spell and a victory for Norway. The Immortals (*dei ex machina*) welcome Diarmid to Heaven as they pardon his offence. Some of the power of this effective scenario is necessarily lessened by Lorne's laborious verbalisation of it.

Musically *Diarmid* represents a huge advance over *Jeanie Deans*. It is harmonically more adventurous, there is a more comprehensive system of motifs used

²⁷⁷ Akenside, Mark, MacPherson, James, and Young, Edward, *Selected Poetry* (Manchester, Carcanet Press 1994), 86.

²⁷⁸ VS pp316-7.

and the writing for chorus is extensive and sophisticated. There is also far less *agitato* padding and fewer empty gestures. The key schemes within the opera are also more convincing because MacCunn spends more time in establishing tonalities rather than continually flitting from one to another. If we consider Act I from this standpoint:

Table 6.3 *Diarmid* Act I.

pp1 - 6	Prelude	F sharp minor
7 - 26	Chorus of Soldiers	F sharp minor/major
27 - 32	Diarmid and soldiers	unstable
33 - 37	Eila's song	G major
38 - 47	Diarmid and Eila	unstable/ E flat major /A flat major
48 - 51	Immortals	C minor
52 - 56	Diarmid	A to F sharp
57 - 70	Freya and her train	B

There is a clear movement flat-wards to the most remote key - C minor - suggesting the 'other-worldliness' of the Immortals; this imaginative tonal move is let down by the Immortals' music itself, which is churchy and earthbound.²⁷⁹ An abrupt change to A major brings us back to the human field and from then sharp keys reappear with radiant B major providing closure on an act which started in F sharp minor.²⁸⁰ Within individual items the music can range quite widely, the modulations effected by sequential movement e.g. in the Soldiers' chorus (see pp8-9 of the vocal score). Sequence is not only overused within individual phrases; MacCunn engineers this piece so that there is a wholesale repeat of the opening down a tone (pp10-14). In spite of larger pools of tonal stability there is little to suggest that large-scale key planning is a conscious process for MacCunn, either here or in subsequent acts.

²⁷⁹ An effect heightened at the first performance by having a harmonium support the voice parts.

²⁸⁰ The sense of 'uplift' felt in this long-term cadence recalls Wagner's experimentation in *Tristan and Isolde*: in Act II, the expectation felt by Isolde at Tristan's imminent arrival (B flat major as the core tonality in the Introduction and Scene 1) is transfigured by the end of the love duet through a long-term semitone shift upwards (B major at the end of Scene 2).

To bind the opera together MacCunn uses various recurring motifs to signal characters, feelings and situations. These motifs *do* evolve more than they had done in *Jeanie Deans* but not sufficiently to be called leitmotifs in the Wagnerian sense.

Diarmid's doughtiness is symbolised by a halting dotted motif, perhaps suggested by the rhythm of his name.

Figure 6.1 *Diarmid* : VS p27 s1. Diarmid.



In a later version of this motif the dotted rhythm is extended by a creeping chromatic idea as Grania enters for the first time.

Figure 6.2 *Diarmid*: p78 s2. Forbidden Love.



This suggests in a quite literal fashion the way Diarmid will be corrupted by forbidden love - a musical poison which seeps into Fionn's mind. The initial melodic shape [rising 3rd + 6th, falling semitone + 6th] associated with Diarmid's dotted rhythm gives rise to various linking passages, for example, this extract, that recalls Wagner's 'Loge' music.

Figure 6.3 *Diarmid*: p31 s4. Diarmid.



and in the closing bars of the opera Diarmid's motif is diatonicised in the major key as his soul is welcomed into Heaven.

Figure 6.4 *Diarmid*: p328 ss3-4. Diarmid.



Whenever the attractive but dramatically underdeveloped character of Eila appears or is mentioned, the lilting triple measure sounds of her first song (certainly the single loveliest melody in the whole opera) are heard.

Figure 6.5 *Diarmid*: p33 s1 Eila.



The diatonic sweetness of Eila's music contrasts with the chromatic idea noted above in connection with Grania. The Immortals' phrase 'In one place alone shall thy body feel death' (p50) will return orchestrally towards the end to warn the audience (if not Diarmid) of his impending death (p304 s4 - p305 s1, p309ss1-2).

Figure 6.6 *Diarmid* : p50 s2 Immortals.

The image shows a musical score for a men's chorus. It is titled "Men's Chorus". The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key signature of two flats (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody in the treble clef is characterized by a diatonic, flowing line with a prominent slur over the first four measures. The bass clef provides a steady accompaniment with eighth-note patterns. The lyrics "In one place a - lone shall thy bo - dy feel death." are written below the treble staff.

A raft of important motifs is introduced in the prelude to the 'Enchanted Sleep' scene at the end of Act 1: these are laid out overleaf as 'Love (a) to (e)'

Figure 6.7 *Diarmid*: p56 s4 – p57 s3. Yearning love (a), love (b) and (c).

Figure 6.8 *Diarmid*: p60 ss1-2 Love (d) and Grania's motif = love (e).

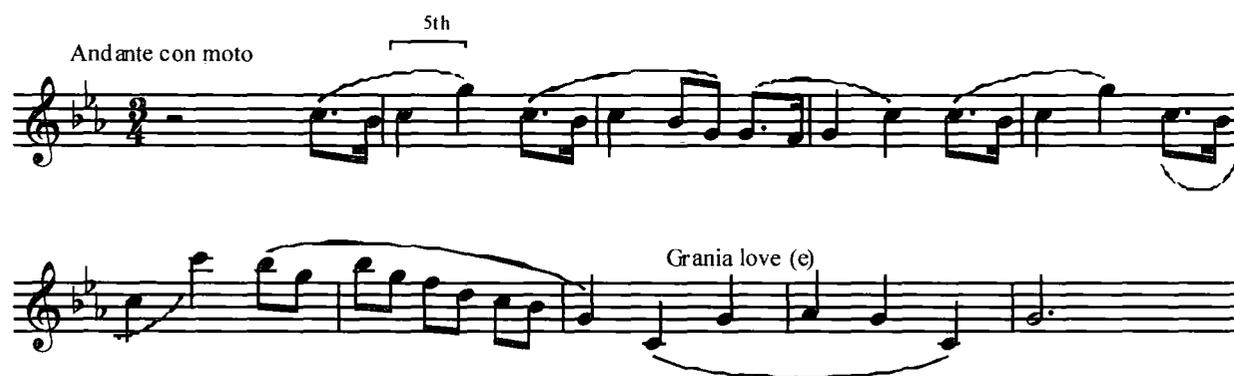
Love (e) appears to refer to Grania - this pattern introduces her first words in Act II p80.

A Tristanesque chromatic link Love (b) i is related to other chromatic figures – notably

Forbidden Love - and readily conjures up the anguish of passion. Grania's motif ,

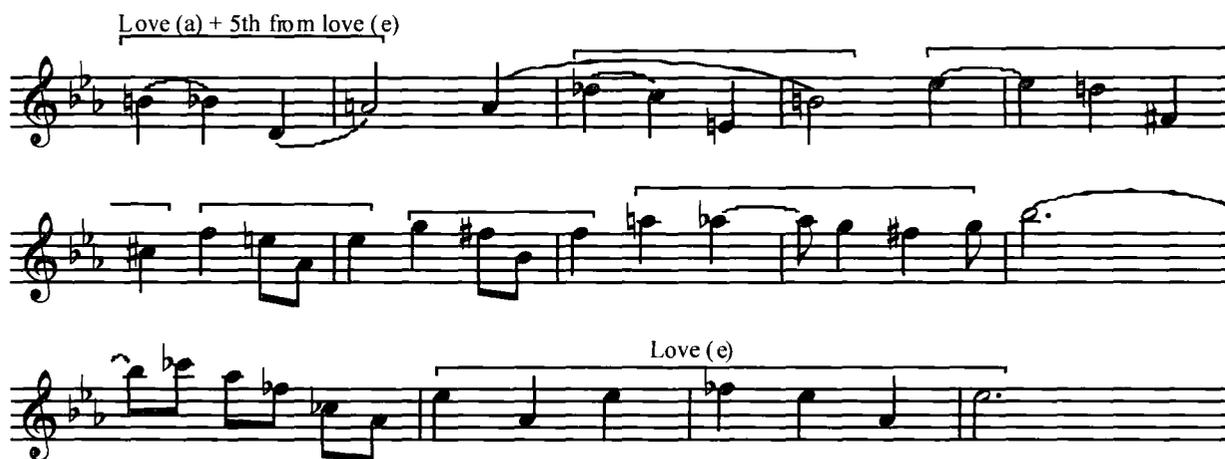
Love (e) - in particular the rising 5th - is developed in 3/4 at the start of Act III Sc 2.

Figure 6.9 *Diarmid* : Act III Sc 2 p178 ss1-3 Grania.



In the continuation of this prelude, the motif is extended further, revealing a link to yearning love (a) – entirely appropriate in view of the passionate seduction scene that is about to happen.

Figure 6.10 *Diarmid*: p179 s2 – p180 s1. Love (a) and Grania = love (e).



heard when Fionn catches up with the lovers p304 *fff* and at the moment when Diarmid's foot is pierced by the poison bristle p310.

Some of the most radiantly passionate pages of the score are those in the orchestral prelude to Act IV Scene 2. Love motifs are combined with a new melody we may call **Love (f)**:

Figure 6.12 *Diarmid*: p243 s2 – p244 s1. **Love (f)**.



that will be taken up vocally by Diarmid p253, and by Diarmid and Grania p260, before being restated orchestrally in the postlude p267. The element of this new melody marked 'Tristan' bears an unmistakable likeness to a motif in the 'Liebestod' from Wagner's music drama.²⁸¹

The choral writing in *Diarmid* is more ambitious and widespread than it was in *Jeanie Deans*. The opening TTBB soldiers' chorus runs for almost twenty pages of vocal score, moving in character from victory hymn to lullaby and featuring a fearsomely high tessitura for the upper tenor line. Texturally in the first section (pp7-14) MacCunn uses mostly block chords over a running accompaniment (cf. the closing stages of *Ship o' the Fiend* [brass block chords over strings] and the last chorus in *The*

²⁸¹ e.g. see the last four pages of the vocal score of *Tristan*.

Lay of the Last Minstrel). Pairs of voices and imitation take over for the middle tranche (pp15-18) still underpinned by motoric quavers in the orchestra. After this we expect a return of the opening material, but get instead a gentle F sharp major section in which the soldiers, tired of waiting for the foe, fall asleep. The final drift into slumber is very well managed with some glorious juxtapositions of harmony (pp22-23) playing with a variety of chords beneath a single note – C sharp, longer note lengths to suggest deepening breathing, and a progressive thinning of texture.

Elsewhere in Act I there is an *a cappella* homophonic TTBB chorus of the Immortals and a radiant women's number involving the goddess Freya and her attendants - surely one of the climaxes of the whole opera. This is another extensive structure, with a solo verse for Freya, then a two-part choir verse with Freya adding herself later on as the texture ultimately blossoms into five-part writing. As in the Soldiers' Chorus, MacCunn engineers a repeat of the opening material but down a tone (p65 in A major, having started in B). A gentle triplet *perpetuum mobile* in the orchestra supports the singers; there are other moments in both operas where MacCunn sets up an accompaniment figure which obtains for a surprisingly long time - a song makers technique transferred to opera.

In Act II male voices dominate, firstly in the TTBB chorus of the Norse, but then most spectacularly in the 'choral battle' between Scots and Norse. This is conceived in three phases. 1) in F sharp minor: the Scots sing as one - the tenors in unison 'Suassa!' answered by an eight-part double chorus of Norse – no doubt the united Scots against the fragmented Norse. 2) Dialogue, then eight-part chorus of Norse: F minor to G minor when the Scots come in with their melody. 3) Dialogue, then a climactic combination of

Scots and Norse in A minor as Diarmid slays Sigurd and Eragon. MacCunn uses the operatic staple of pushing up the key for successive restatements of the material to ratchet up tension. This elaborate choral canvas was presumably what MacCunn was thinking of when in an interview with the *Tatler*²⁸² he said of the pieces he was most proud *The Land of the Mountain and Flood* and Act II of *Diarmid* stood out above all the rest. The complexity of this and other choral moments is alluded to in the *Illustrated London News* review 'The mounting was extremely good, and the choruses were obviously a little handicapped by the elaboration and great difficulty of their music.'²⁸³ It is hard to reconcile the ambition shown in moments like these with the composer, who only a few years later, would be turning out additional songs for third-rate musicals.

The choral ballet that forms Act III Scene 1 is likewise on a large scale. The gnomes (basses) enact a sub-'Hall of the Mountain King' introduction, followed by a waltz (two verses and coda sung offstage SATT, onstage B) providing the ballet music for assorted Fairies, Sprites, Hobgoblins and Gnomes. A foretaste of MacCunn's subsequent involvement in 'light music' occurs in the *Pas Seul* and *Danse Generale* which round off this scene. To sing hunting songs and to comment on Diarmid's demise are the chorus roles in Act IV. The chorus beg Fionn for clemency and voice their (and our) horror at his intransigence. The all-male Immortals pronounce their blessing on Diarmid's soul in block chords as before, at the final curtain. Every time the chorus enter in this opera they are involved in a substantial *scena*. There were only two extended choral moments in *Jeanie Deans* - the prisoners' song and the madrigal in the English Scene. The greater choral role in *Diarmid* produces some impressive music - in

²⁸² 9th April 1902, 67.

²⁸³ 'The New Opera at Covent Garden', *Illustrated London News*, 30 October 1897, 597.

particular Freya's scene (Act 1) and the Battle (Act II Scene 2), music which may be reflective or dynamic as the story demands.

Scope for individual musical characterisation is confined to four principal figures: Diarmid, Grania, Eila and Fionn. Neither the goddess Freya or King Eragon assumes more than two-dimensional stature due to the relatively short time they are on stage. Diarmid - like Jeanie Deans - has no set-piece aria and tends to be seen in relation to other characters. His dotted motif does service to suggest both a stalwart nature and elements of self-doubt, but here is certainly no conventionally dashing hero. The stage direction at his first appearance describes him as 'Fatigued, his face lined with care - looking excited and exhausted - and carrying a great stone'. Having shrugged off Eila's advice and interest he launches into a patriotic hymn (p41) - accompanied by the bardic harp?²⁸⁴ - extolling service to his country to the exclusion of everything else. Diarmid gratefully receives the benison of the Immortals, realises that he has an 'Achilles heel' and then doubtfully considers the effect he has on women. Suitably enough, a flowing semiquaver accompaniment comes abruptly to a halt (p55 s4), we hear the 'Fate' motif introducing a hesitant recitative: the Immortals have demanded unswerving loyalty to the heroic cause; Diarmid requests that

'If magic can kill the love of women,
Ye gods, ye gods, then restore me the weakness you took
By the curse of your will.'

Immediately afterwards, in the enchanted sleep, Freya pronounces that 'All women who see thee [Diarmid] shall straight be enamoured'. His destiny is outlined. Grania's seduction of Diarmid in Act III is effected by perseverance rather than any obvious

²⁸⁴ See motto on page 210 above.

wiles. When Diarmid's defences are weakened he muses - with the dotted motif in the bass - 'Shall Love then ever come, And make my heart his home, No stony place but fair and nurtured well; Wood shaded, where may dwell Man's happy race?' (pp196-9). The floodgates are open, he goes back on his vow of total subservience to the Immortals, and within pages he and Grania are singing a passionate love duet, both voices intertwining, as their hearts are and as their limbs soon will be. The libretto in this act has made several allusions to the natural world, in particular to the topography of Scotland, and Act IV Scene 2 will, as we have seen, develop this human/ natural world relationship further. Diarmid's death generates a meeting of the important motifs associated with the hero: **Fate** (p310), **Diarmid** (pp312, 316), **Forbidden love** (pp316-7), **Love (f)** 'Tristan' (pp317-18). A character, then, torn between duty and love.

It is regrettable, given that she is central to the second half of the opera, that at her first appearance Grania seems so unsympathetic. In Act II Scene1 she berates her husband for his cowardice, reveals her jealousy of her stepdaughter Eila and convinces Fionn to send Eila on the potentially hazardous mission to the Norse. Her first entrance is preceded by the **Forbidden love** motif (p78 s2 onwards) as well as her own pattern (p80 s2 onwards). During the seduction scene (Act III Sc 2) the fifth motif from **Love (e)** is extended to ratchet up the emotions as Grania tries to break down Diarmid's resistance (pp192-4). She succeeds. By the second love scene the two characters are as one as they rejoice in their love. After Diarmid's death she sings a Gaelic air 'Seinn an Duan' whose pentatonic simplicity sits awkwardly with the full-blooded outpourings from earlier on in the opera.

Eila's appeal is simple: she is young, beautiful, in love with Diarmid and she gets the best tune. MacCunn has given her two songs - the first of which has been extracted and published separately - and a scene with the Norse. Her calling card is the gentle triple measures found at the start of 'Heavy thy burden, Diarmid' p33²⁸⁵ - indeed the majority of her music is in triple time. This song is a perfect example of MacCunn's melodic writing at its finest. It sets off using only the notes of the pentatonic scale and grouping its shapes into two bar phrases. Each sentence ends with a derivative of phrase (c) thereby unifying the whole. Incidentally, phrase (c) is identical in rhythm to the

Figure 6.13 *Diarmid*: pp30-2 vocal line. **Eila.**

The musical score consists of six staves of music in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is divided into several phrases labeled as follows:

- Staff 1: (a) [2 bars], (b) [2 bars], (a 1) [2 bars]
- Staff 2: (c) [2 bars], (a2) [2 bars], (b2) [2 bars]
- Staff 3: (a3) [2 bars], (c1) [2 bars], (a4) [2 bars]
- Staff 4: (a4 sequence) [2 bars], (c2) [2 bars]
- Staff 5: (to climax) [2 bars], (c) [2 bars]

²⁸⁵ See p228 above.

corresponding phrase in Effie Deans' first song 'I think thereon with tears' (*Jeanie Deans* VS p96) and 'are like a dream to me' (*Jeanie Deans* VS p99). Throughout, the melody follows a limited number of rhythmic patterns. The only place where it deviates at all from these patterns is when approaching the climax: there is a three bar phrase, and the harmony changes more often. Although the first bar of the three bar phrase is rhythmically identical to (c), the chromatic intricacy is new. In the three sentences the harmony becomes progressively more complicated: from simple diatonic chords of the home key of G major (bars 1-8) the music moves sharp-wards to the dominant (bars 9-16), and finally in bars 17-25, via a cycle of fifths pattern to E flat; then there are nine different chords in as many notes and a final return to G.

Figure 6.14 *Diarmid*: p34-5 (bars 17-25). *Eila*.

17 *p a tempo*

Eila

Call - ing "Good - night" to O - cean "Good - night" for day is o'er!

17 *p a tempo*

i iv F: IVc I E flat: IV I
Plagal

21
Eila
Call-ing "Good-night" to O-cean, "Good-night" good-night for day is o'er!
21
pp
pp

This is a strophic song with an identical second verse. In Act II when Eila offers a rich array of precious stones to the Norse an extraordinary chord progression reflects the dazzling quality of her gifts. The passage (see the example on the next page) is framed by dominant harmony, but it is the matrix of intervening harmonies that are so striking and impressive. Here, once again, MacCunn shows his predilection for harmonic experimentation and originality. Besides his characteristic use of seventh and ninth chords, whether on tonic or dominant pedals, he reveals a clear delight in the unexpected progression, closely akin to the ‘sound moment’ of French composers of the 1890s such as Franck, Chausson and Debussy, where a particular chord, texture and even dynamic are thrown into relief but an exceptional or distinctive harmony. This is clearly evident with the phrase ‘with the stone like amber clear’ which shifts to the dominant of D sharp major, yet the resolution is denied by the interjection of the dominant of A. MacCunn, however, is not finished yet. From what appears to be a return to tonic harmony is deflected by a further dominant, this time of C sharp minor, though this is itself unconventionally contradicted by a further climactic ‘sound moment’ on the dominant of G (‘and here, O King, a belt of pearl!’) and the vocal climax on ii7 (flat 5) of A. MacCunn’s recovery, too, is far from simple, in that before establishing his dominant

harmony, a prevailing dominant pedal (on E) supports a harmonic ‘parenthesis’ governed by a sideways glance at the flat mediant (C major), delaying the much anticipated cadence. Much of this harmony has almost post-Wagnerian manner and method, though one can observe the strong voice-leading characteristics of the vocal lines which betray MacCunn’s indebtedness to *Tristan* (notably Act II).

Figure 6.15 *Diarmid*: p110 s2- p111 s4.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece 'Diarmid'. Each system consists of a vocal line (Ella) and a piano accompaniment.

System 1 (p110 s2- p111 s4):

- Vocal Line:** The tempo/mood marking is *L'istesso tempo ma con anima*. The lyrics are: "This for thy queen, A gir-dle, with the stones like shal-low sea".
- Piano Accompaniment:** The tempo/mood marking is *L'istesso tempo ma con anima*. It includes a *pp* dynamic and a *sim.* (string tremolando) instruction. The harmonic analysis below the staff lists: V9, V11, V7, and V7//.

System 2 (p111 s4):

- Vocal Line:** The lyrics are: "That flows in pur-ple o-ver ban-nerd rocks".
- Piano Accompaniment:** It includes a *f* dynamic and a *pp* dynamic. The harmonic analysis below the staff lists: I, vi7, ii7, vii7(b5), and III.

Eila

A gob-let with the stone - like am - ber clear! _____ And

sim. *pp*

bVII dim vi M6

Eila

am - ber beads are here, and here, O King a belt of

f *f*

f *V* VII IV

Eila

pearl! _____ thou hast a queen? They said that she had come, Your wives _____

f *p* *p*

ii7(b5) iv7/I ii7(b5)/bvi

Eila

poco rall.

are here?

poco rd.

p

I17/V

V7

Fionn's entrance aria (pp72-8) portrays a disappointed man, someone whose glories lie in the past. At first glance this appears to be another strophic number, but the second verse departs significantly from the initial music. Fionn remembers his praise-filled early days, muses on the fickleness of fortune and, on the other hand, the immutability of nature. In the second verse, the words tell of golden leaves falling off trees and being swept away by silver waters - a metaphor for the passing of *his* golden days. The falling leaf could be the key to the music of the whole song: the shapes in the introduction resemble just that, while the number of descending intervals speaks of inner sadness. The idiom is much more chromatic than in Eila's song, with many lingering appoggiaturas. 'Fortune thou canst change...' effects a startling harmonic move from B major to C minor (p73 s3). Another semitonal shift occurs in the second verse from A major to B flat minor (p76 s1). The accompaniment to the second verse is busier, suggesting building frustration before a quiet ending with the baritone rising to a high F sharp *pianissimo*. MacCunn - as he did in Eila's song - neatly (too neatly?) rounds the number off with a restatement of the introduction. This is in no way as profound or moving piece as it should be. Several pages after this aria, Fionn alludes to how Grania's eyes follow Diarmid, in a telling aside, accompanied by the **Forbidden love** theme in

the bass (p90 ss1-2). When he has Diarmid in his grip at the end of the opera, his injured pride produces a heartless and cruel reaction, taunting his victim with an antidote to the poison and then throwing it away in spite. He is the wronged husband, a role he plays out with conviction but little imagination.

As may be gleaned from the musical examples above, the harmonic idiom is richer than it was in *Jeanie Deans*, lending the music a new breadth and passion. This is particularly true of the two love scenes where notable harmonic advances are made. The characteristic combination of modal writing and chromaticism does indeed prefigure Debussy, as John Purser suggests.²⁸⁶ The prelude to Act III scene 2 has been discussed on page 231 above in connection with motivic development but the harmony is also entirely characteristic of the questing MacCunn.

Table 6.4 Prelude to Act III Scene 2 : harmony.

Bar	Harmony
1-13	modal C minor over a C-G drone.
13-14	a Verdian silence.
14-20	a shortened restatement in modal g minor of the first bars - over a G-D drone.
21- 32	an anguished <i>crescendo</i> alternating diminished 7ths (with appoggiaturas) and augmented chords.
33 – 37	climax : startling change from B flat major harmony to F flat augmented 6 th , i.e the augmented 6 th on chord flat VI of A flat major (See Figure 6.16 overleaf).

²⁸⁶ Purser, John *Scotland's Music* (Edinburgh, Mainstream 1992), 223.

Figure 6.16 *Diarmid*: p179 s5 – 180 s1.

The image shows a musical score for a piano and voice. The piano part is written in two staves, with a forte (*ff*) dynamic marking in the first measure and a piano (*p*) dynamic marking in the third measure. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a melodic line and the lyrics "Grania love (e)". The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

38 - 46

A sudden move straight from A flat major to E minor (= flat vi in A flat major) and a greater concentration on augmented chords leads to the voice entry.

MacCunn's more fluid movement between keys leads to some extraordinary progressions both here and in subsequent scenes. In the two love scenes there is a Wagnerian flow to the music which *is* entirely new for this composer. In the orchestral prelude to Act IV Scene 2 (pp242 - 249) a rich texture with inner polyphonic lines, yearning sequences, waves of climaxes and final peace graphically portrays the loving couple in their passion. This is a section that could with advantage be extracted and played in the concert hall.

To summarise the harmonic language in *Diarmid* will reveal its composer at his furthest point of experimentation: beyond the modal, diatonic and chromatic elements he shows a predilection for complex dominants, 9ths, 11ths, 13ths and a love (more boldly stated) for juxtaposing unrelated chords. One major change seems to be the relative scarcity of augmented sixth chords, and a greater number of 'Tristan' chords with chromatic appoggiaturas. In *Jeanie Deans* the former effected endless seemingly

arbitrary key changes. Now in *Diarmid* the latter amplify the emotion, particularly in the love scenes.

A Note on Orchestration

In spite of the heightened presence of motifs and their limited development, it is not possible to equate MacCunn's orchestral technique with that of Wagner, who *thought* in terms of orchestral sound and occurrence of leitmotif, to the point that it was this *polyphonic dimension* that profoundly governed the structure of his later operas. *Diarmid*, more than *Jeanie Deans*, is really a number opera with motivic relationships imposed upon the constituent parts. It is scored for a conventional late Romantic orchestra, with harp and a percussion section which runs to nine instruments – mostly used for colourful effect in the Act III ballet. As in the later *Four Scottish Traditional Border Ballads* MacCunn is specific about his percussion:

'(The gong (small) a highish toned one. The rattle an ordinary revolving wooden one)'.²⁸⁷ The harp is used to point the start of sustained chords at the appearance of Freya and her attendants (Act I p57 s4) and when this music returns (Act IV p248 s2). Otherwise it plays arpeggio patterns sometimes linking into characteristically elaborate string patterning (See **Figure 6.17** overleaf).

²⁸⁷ A note in the MS full score initialled by the composer referring to p147 s3 of the VS – 'Entry of the Hobgoblins'. At the same place he has written: 'Note trumpets and trombones *mf* only, not *f*'

Figure 6.17 *Diarmid* : Full Score Vol II p29 [=VS p260 ss2-3], string parts.

The image displays a page of a musical score for the string parts of the opera *Diarmid*. The score is arranged in a system with six staves, labeled from top to bottom: Harp, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The Harp part is written in treble clef and features a melodic line with triplets and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violin I and II parts are in treble clef, with Violin II including a *div* (divisi) marking and a dynamic of *p*. The Viola part is in alto clef with a dynamic of *p*. The Cello part is in bass clef with a dynamic of *p*. The Double Bass part is in bass clef with a dynamic of *p*. The music is characterized by intricate string figuration, including many triplets and slurs, and is set in a 3/4 time signature.

'Cellos take independent lines from the double basses throughout the opera, and elsewhere are often divided among themselves. If criticisms were levelled at MacCunn's orchestral technique – which for the most part is professional and effective – they would concern the overuse of horns and bassoons as sustaining parts under string figuration, a more general excessive thickening by doubling of strings by wind, and too many chromatic scales in string passagework. To bring his music to a larger audience (and, presumably, to bring in more money) MacCunn was keen to be able to extract the colourful ballet music shorn of its vocal trappings. To this end he made an alternative version in which voice parts when not doubled by the orchestra are incorporated into the woodwind, for instance, the held chords on pp166-8 of the vocal score. This version was

played by the Philharmonic Society on 10 March 1898 at the Queen's Hall.²⁸⁸ As regards the visual appearance of the full score, MacCunn here as elsewhere places the voice parts right at the foot of each page rather than above the strings, which would be more conventional.²⁸⁹

It is unlikely that *Diarmid* will be revived: it is an unwieldy beast of huge proportions. Although the four main roles offer an attractive challenge for singers, and the chorus work is elaborate and fulfilling, the ballet and the quaint nature of much of the libretto would not be acceptable to today's audiences. A similar problem affected MacCunn's light opera *Prue*. In a letter to Alison MacCunn after her husband's death, Louie Pounds wrote 'He [Charles Courtice Pounds, her brother the actor and impresario] likes the music tremendously & thinks it is charming and very high class if only the public would take it these days. The book he feels is not very possible in its present state and would need a lot of bucking up and pulling together.'²⁹⁰ Much worthwhile music from MacCunn - and his contemporaries - is thus unlikely to be heard today because of dramatic and literary shortfalls in the libretto.

Breast of Light

A second instalment in the *Diarmid* project is entitled *Breast of Light*, the words again by the Marquis of Lorne, now Duke of Argyll. A vocal score of sketches for some

²⁸⁸ 'We have ever championed our composer's right to be heard and welcomed their works with the utmost enthusiasm their merits warranted. But we accept Mr. MacCunn's ballet music with hesitation. Such a noisy, unlovely complement of percussion instruments as he has used throughout these dance measures was surely never dreamt of before. Where is this craving for sheer noise to stop?' 'Philharmonic Society', *MT*, xxxix (1 April 1898), 244.

²⁸⁹ However, Wagner's printed scores place the singers above the 'cellos.

²⁹⁰ Letter *GB-Gu* Special Collections Ca15 - x.7/5.

of the numbers from this opera is held in Glasgow University Library.²⁹¹ In the library catalogue it is listed erroneously as Opus 6 but on the manuscript is Opus 36. MacCunn would also use Opus 36 for his *Album of Six Songs* (to poetry by Lady Lindsay) rendering such labelling meaningless. *Diarmid* came in at Opus 34 (1897), so it is reasonable to assume that these sketches date from 1898, except that Lorne only became the 9th Duke of Argyll in 1900 and it is very clearly this latter appellation that appears at the head of the score; *Breast of Light* thus belongs to the opening years of the twentieth century. There are 14 folios (24 pages) on 22 stave MS paper containing the following eight items:

1) An extended opening chorus for women's voices [pp2 - 8], set in 'A vast sea-cave interior, opening at back to sea. Distant islands at horizon. Sandy floor except where a shelving rock rises near the sea. Ferns and mosses on cave walls, where ridges make footing possible at various heights. At edge of sea white foam-balls visible, those fixed in caps of dancers and singers. Bright moonlight at beginning of the scene.' This stage direction bears a strong resemblance to Argyll's description of MacKinnon's Cave on Mull in *Passages from the Past*.²⁹² The prelude - in common with many MacCunn preludes - is a huge dominant preparation with passing glances at other remote keys. Foam Sprites (F major) have been blown into the cave by the Four Winds each of whom, dressed in colour coded garments, sing a short verse: South (green, A major), North (white, F minor), East (gold, D flat) and West (crimson, A flat). All five groupings come together at the end to recapitulate the opening Foam Sprite material. A large-scale arrangement, then, which promises more than it delivers due to a failure to integrate the

²⁹¹ *GB-Gu MS MacCunn Ca15 - w.22.*

²⁹² Campbell vol.ii, 549.

thematic material or to combine ideas one with another. An interlude with thunder leads via juxtapositions of F minor and A major chords to

2) [pp 9-11] a mysterious and rather threatening SATB chorus of Fairies ['as if whispering to one another'] in D minor, all voices in octaves, then a D major choral dance in 4 parts ['they dance a grave and precise measure very softly'] .

3)[pp12-13] 'During this song the dawn-light increases until, at the end, & with the entry of Diarmid & B.of L., it is full sunlight'. A short song in B flat for Breast of Light - who turns out to be a person! The words are a paean to dawn over a seascape and are sung from off stage. 'Enter Diarmid and Breast of Light in a boat from which they disembark, coming downstage'

4) Recitative / dialogue. Diarmid has given up the sword for love. Sequential, chromatic writing in the accompaniment takes the key to E then flatwards again for B flat7 preparation for

5)[pp14-17] Love duet in E flat.. Diarmid's verse uses a dotted rhythm as in the earlier opera; Breast of Light's verse ranges into more distant keys; then there follows a duet version of Diarmid's melody in imitation between the voices. This is similar in tone to the love duets in *Diarmid* - there is the same connection between landscape and feelings of love.

6) [p18 blank 19-20] B flat 3/4. This is separated from the 'story-line' encountered in 1) - 5) and appears to come from later on in the scenario. Something is troubling Breast of Light. Diarmid is trying to discern what it is. A favoured verse-end pattern found in

other operatic songs in triple measure occurs here: it involves word repetition and a four quaver / dotted quaver semiquaver rhythm.²⁹³

Figure 6.18 *Breast of Light*: p19 ss5-6.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song 'Breast of Light'. The first system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part is written in a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and includes a crescendo hairpin. The lyrics under the Tenor line are 'Has their might brought a dark-ness o'er thy thought?'. The Piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* and includes a crescendo hairpin. The second system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part is written in a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *p* and includes a crescendo hairpin. The lyrics under the Tenor line are 'Has their might brought a dark-ness o'er thy thought?'. The Piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *ppp* and includes a crescendo hairpin.

7)[pp21-2] 2 verses strophic love song from Diarmid to Breast of Light in D flat major

8) [pp23-4]A further song for Diarmid. The sentiments this time are more bellicose:

‘Tis battle grants the strength of life and love supremely blest, Give me the hour when strong in strife Man lifts his breast!’

A curious pair of letters exists between the Duke of Argyll and Janey Drysdale which suggests that the Duke’s relationship with MacCunn had been soured somewhat

²⁹³ cf. Effie’s first song *Jeanie Deans* Act II Scene 2 or Eila’s first song *Diarmid* Act I.

by the latter's failure to complete *Breast of Light*. The Duke is advising Drysdale on how to get her brother's Celtic opera *Fionn and Tera* performed (at this time MacCunn was a conductor for Beecham's company):

I hope you will see Mr. Beecham if you get a chance.....I fear that MacCunn may be averse to B's enterprise, as he has been disappointed in not having a 2nd [sic] opera of his own completed. This, of course, has been entirely his own fault, but human nature is jealous, & people are inclined to say 'If I can't do it - nobody else shall!' So I w[ould] advise you to have a personal interview or let the friend who helped you, have an interview with B.²⁹⁴

Of course there will be no chance of the opera being done as long as MacCunn is at the head of the Beecham lot. In your place I would ask Beecham if he means to do anything for your opera - or think it best you watch [?] out for another friend²⁹⁵

A year later in a letter to Janey Drysdale, MacCunn disparagingly mentions the 'rather useless and irrelevant insistence (after the manner of the Duke of Argyll) on 'snippets' of legendary particulars as to fairies, fairy beans, rowan trees, 'bogles' & such-like'²⁹⁶.

The sketches for *Breast of Light* from around ten years earlier show that MacCunn was already finding less inspiration in Argyll's particular brand of Celtic mysticism, and was producing modest results rather than the long passages of high quality found in *Diarmid*.

²⁹⁴ Letter to Janey Drysdale 29 October 1910 *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 262/69.

²⁹⁵ Letter to Janey Drysdale 1 December 1910 *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 262/71.

²⁹⁶ Letter to Janey Drysdale 6 August 1911 *GB-Gu* MS Farmer 263/1.

CHAPTER 7

The Songs

'Dream of new glad melodies, and leave to me my memories'
(Charles H. Taylor 'Lie there my lute')

The Songs

There is no doubting the productivity of British song composers in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century; songs were written to satisfy a wide and varied market, from the music hall and minstrel shows through domestic evenings round the piano, drawing room soirées and ballad concerts to the serious high art songs given in the new solo recital format, this latter being introduced into England only in the 1880's by George Henschel and Raimond von Zur Muhlen.

...the Victorians had to sing. Tunes, in urgent demand, were wanted for the eloquence of Tennyson and Longfellow over chestnut tree, windmill, mountaineering, invitations to the garden, brook, breakers, Arab steed, departing swallows and the Queen of the May. Enraptured sopranos saw in all these the accepted notions of what had always been fit and proper excuses for straining after top notes. Composers, hurrying to please them, engaged in a wild free-for-all, since no copyrights existed to restrain them.²⁹⁷

Harry Plunket Greene, in his perceptive and amusing book *Interpretation in Song*²⁹⁸

paints a gloomy picture of the state of British song at the end of the Nineteenth Century:

In most branches of music England in the last forty years has advanced with giant strides; in one she has stood still, if not actually gone back - England's 'popular' song is utterly unworthy of her. Its popularity and its unworthiness are due to the workings of a certain commercial system [...] which in itself has great possibilities, and if applied to the advancement of good instead of bad song would be of undoubted service to music.

The system to which Plunket Greene alludes is the 'royalty ballad', and associated concerts given over to presenting such pieces. Publishers would pay singers for promoting their house composers' songs. If the song had found favour with the audience at one of the concerts the sheet music's frontispiece would bear the phrase 'As sung by

²⁹⁷ Disher, Willson, *Victorian song from dive to drawing room* (London, Phoenix House 1955), 117.

²⁹⁸ (London, Macmillan 1912), 198.

.....' in addition to the name of the piece and the composer. Boosey was the first publisher to push songs in this way through the establishment of a concert series in the spring of 1867, later followed by Chappell. These pieces were bought in huge numbers for home consumption and drawing room soirées. The types of poetical subject matter listed above hint at a fundamental problem with the lyrics: although many of the poems chosen by English song composers were by no means bad, they did not demand of the composer a deep, complex response which might stretch him in his invention. In contrast, the enduring nature of German *lieder* stems from a willingness of the greatest composers to push themselves towards a profound identification with their more ambitious poetic core material.

If the overall impression of this huge volume of songwriting is one of facility and mediocrity, there were efforts made to establish a tradition of indigenous art song that would rival the quality of German *lieder* and indeed French *mélodies*. The first English song cycle was the Sullivan -Tennyson *The Window, or the Song of the Wrens* of 1871²⁹⁹. This creative pairing evidently produced its own problems: Tennyson wanted to abandon the project in 1870, but when Sullivan insisted on his continuing, he stipulated that the following disclaimer be printed in the prefaratory pages:

Four years ago Mr. Sullivan requested me to write a little song-cycle, German fashion, for him to exercise his art upon. He had been very successful in setting such old songs as 'Orpheus with his lute', and I drest up for him, partly in the old style, a puppet, whose almost only merit is, perhaps, that it can dance to Mr Sullivan's instrument. I am sorry that my four-year-old puppet should have to dance at all in the dark shadow of these days [the Franco-Prussian War]; but the music is now completed, and I am bound by my promise.

²⁹⁹ This was originally to have incorporated illustrations by Sir John Millais.

In the forefront of those composers who saw in song a vehicle for serious artistic expression was Parry; his first set of *English Lyrics* was published in 1885 and treated Sir Philip Sidney, Shelley, Sir Walter Scott and the anonymous 'Willow, willow, willow'. Parry's preference for setting poets from Britain's past continues in later sets. One important source for Parry and other composers was *The Golden Treasury*, the anthology edited by Francis Turner Palgrave, the Oxford Professor of Poetry, which was an attempt 'to include [...] all the best original Lyrical pieces and Songs in our language, by writers not living' so as to teach 'those indifferent to the Poets to love them, and those who love them to love them more.'³⁰⁰ If Parry was guided by the *Treasury* in his choice of texts, then Stanford added contemporary poets, Heine, and Irish works in with this more traditional selection. He and his wife were friends with Tennyson whose poetry was already so full of music that 'it does not ask for notes to make incompleteness complete, and music is set to it rather for additional illustration than from inherent necessity.'³⁰¹ Alexander Campbell Mackenzie established his song-writing credentials with the *Three Songs Opus 17* to poetry by Christina Rossetti, published in 1878. Predating these three songs, but not published until 1892, is an exquisite setting of *Dormi Jesu* with violin and 'cello obbligato, whose spaciouly conceived phrases anticipate the radiant instrumental *Benedictus* of 1888.

If Nicholas Temperley saw fit to partition his *Athlone History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Era 1800 - 1914*³⁰² into a 'Popular and Functional Music' section and an 'Art Music' one, then in the realm of song there were many composers who had a foot in each camp, or who trod a fine line between sentimentality and emotion. Sir Frederic

³⁰⁰ ed. Palgrave, Francis Turner, *The Golden Treasury* (London, Macmillan 1861), Preface and Dedication.

³⁰¹ Stanford, Charles V., *Studies and Memories* (London, Constable 1908), 95.

³⁰² (London, Athlone Press 1981).

Hymen Cowen, though dubbed ‘the English Schubert’ for his 300 songs, was best remembered for his ballads. Sullivan created one of the finest ballads in ‘The Lost Chord’. In the decade MacCunn arrived in London, ballad singers were at the height of their powers, but also the ballads themselves had started to retreat from the formal diversity found earlier in the century and become more of a standardised commodity. For a composer starting his song-writing career in the mid-1880’s, it must have been tempting to go down the relatively lucrative ballad route, and MacCunn *did* in fact produce several such items to order, as we shall see. But the influence of Parry at the Royal College of Music informed and elevated his early forays into the song genre. Parry would have been engaged intermittently on his first set of *English Lyrics* (1881-5) when he made the acquaintance of the 15-year old MacCunn. The four songs contained in his set show the imprint of Schumann - in the web-like piano figurations and *innig* atmosphere of ‘Good Night’ – and Brahms – in the rich chordal/arpeggio patterning of ‘Where shall the lover rest’. Clear cadential points, expressive appoggiaturas, limited word-painting³⁰³ together with a peculiarly English awareness of word setting and weighting are constants throughout Parry’s song output. MacCunn’s forthright setting of ‘There be none of Beauty’s daughters’ (1886) shares a similar atmosphere to that of his teacher’s from ten years later (*English Lyrics Set IV*): both are fast major key affairs whose Brahmsian piano preludes start with octaves in the right hand over an arpeggio left hand part. MacCunn, unlike Parry, chooses to repeat the first four lines of stanza 1 at the end (it’s a two-verse strophic piece plus this abbreviated restatement). Byron’s words (anthologised by Palgrave) are an extended simile, likening the beloved’s voice to the various moods of the ocean. A bracing open-air atmosphere is readily conjured up with ‘horn 5ths’

³⁰³ e.g. in ‘Willow, willow, willow’ at the words ‘the fresh streams ran by her, and murmured her moans’.

figurations in the piano and later with undulating triplets that move through characteristically rich harmonies; the composer's sailing trips down the Firth of Clyde seem to bear musical fruit here. At the end of the first two verses the piano completes and climaxes the musical phrase before leading on to the next section (see example at the foot of this page); this is a typically Parryan procedure as found, for example, in *My true love hath my heart* (*English Lyrics I*) where the piano is left to cadence at the end of the two verses³⁰⁴. The only moment of weakness in MacCunn's version comes towards the end, with the repetition of the opening words: an increase in dynamic level and a more vigorous accompaniment represent a disappointingly conventional striving after a climax. The vowel sound of the word at the high point – 'sweet' – is uncomfortable to pause upon. This song was performed for the first time at the Royal College on 27 May 1886 together with a setting of Thomas Moore 'To Julia Weeping'.

Figure 7.1 'There be none of Beauty's Daughters': bb16-22.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'There be none of Beauty's Daughters'. It consists of two staves: a Tenor staff and a Piano staff. The Tenor staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The lyrics are: 'The waves lie still and gleaming, and the'. The Piano staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features undulating triplets in both hands, with large arched phrasing over the right hand. The score includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs.

³⁰⁴ A very different approach to Byron's words is shown in Stanford's setting (Op.14 no.4) of 1882 – a slow, strophic piece with a move flat-wards in the second half of each verse that inescapably anticipates Elgar's *Ave Verum Corpus*. Stanford rounds off his song with a repetition of the final line 'Like the swell of summer's ocean'.

If the Byron song shows the young composer handling his materials with confidence, the latter piece represents a willingness to embrace harmonic experimentation. Moore's fatuous discourse on the nature of woman's tears (if they're real, I'll comfort you, if they're fanciful, then go on crying because you look nice like that) inspires music of a far higher quality than it deserves. A cycle of fifths and a tertiary modulation to C (the song is in E) in the first verse are followed by another tertiary modulation (from F minor to D flat) at the start of the second verse and a marvellous slip back to the home dominant.

Figure 7.2 'To Julia Weeping': bb20-29.

T
8
p espress
You look so love-ly in your tears

Pno.
p *mf* *f*

Even in this early song there is a suggestion of Wagner's influence: 'You look so lovely...' with its harmony and wide leaps is redolent of bars 24-5 of the *Tristan* prelude. To reinforce the emotion of a song, the composer will often – as here – repeat the last line of words. Perhaps, more remarkably, the first appearance of the tonic chord in root position is held back until the penultimate bar!

Figure 7.3 'To Julia weeping': closing bars.

Tenor
8
p espress.
That I must bid you drop them still!
Adagio. rall. molto espressione

Piano
p *p* *p*

T
8
That I must bid you drop them still!

Pno.
dim.
col. voce
pp

By the time MacCunn left the College in 1887 he had composed at least 15 songs. As with his orchestral technique, he reaches maturity in this genre very quickly – indeed there is a freshness and spontaneity in these youthful works that is not always present in his ‘maturity’. MacCunn would later sum up his own song output thus:

In all I have published over 100 songs, but they are mostly of what I should call the ‘chamber music’ or ‘cabinet-picture’ class, which rarely appeal to the masses as greatly as does a song such as ‘Two Eyes’ or compositions of the ballad concert order.³⁰⁵

From my investigations I have found 118 songs with piano, one with orchestral accompaniment (‘Pour forth the wine’ (John.Stuart.Blackie)), an album of a hundred arrangements of Scottish Songs and 13 songs composed for insertion into musical comedy shows (*Autumn Manoeuvres* - 2, *The Talk of the Town* - 4, *A Waltz Dream* - 7). The output covers MacCunn’s whole creative life from 1882 to the song he wrote in gratitude to Janey Drysdale of the Dunedin Association - ‘There’s a wee, wee glen in the

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Pearsall, Ronald, *Edwardian Popular Music* (Newton Abbot, David and Charles 1975), 86. ‘Two Eyes’ was one of the songs he contributed to the show *The Talk of the Town*. See page 292 below.

Hielands' and a setting of his son Fergus's words – 'With thee', both from 1914. The period of his greatest productivity was the late 1880's and the 1890's.

MacCunn's choice of poets for his 'art songs' is fairly typical of the time albeit with a Scottish bias. Shelley (4), Tennyson (3), Longfellow (2) Byron (2) and Wordsworth (2) all make minor appearances, but it is Burns (9), George MacDonald (11) and William Black (10) who share centre stage with Thomas Moore (14), Lady Lindsay (12), Joseph Bennett (6), Harold Boulton (8) and Robert Bridges (6). The statistical information in Gooch and Thatcher's *Musical Settings of British Romantic Literature*³⁰⁶ shows how popular some of the texts chosen by MacCunn were with other composers, for example:

Table 7.1 Popular Texts set by MacCunn.

BURNS	'Bonnie wee thing' (in <i>Songs and Ballads of Scotland</i>)	44 settings including Myles Birkett Foster and Liza Lehmann
	'Had I a cave on some wild distant shore'	12 settings including H.H.Pierson and Charles Wood
	'Wilt thou be my dearie?'	30 settings including Bantock, Hurlstone, Charles O'Brien
BYRON	'There be none of beauty's daughters'	96 settings including Brewer (for TTBB), Gray (1884), Limpus, Parry (1896), H.H.Pierson, Stanford (1882), Maude Valerie White (1883), Charles Wood (1926)
SHELLEY	'On a faded violet'	30 settings - 2 by MacCunn for solo voice (1893) and for SSA & piano (1914), also Frank Bridge (1904)
	'I arise from dreams of thee'	-50 settings including Bairstow (1903), Bax (1900), Delius (1892), Parry (1883), Tovey (1905)

³⁰⁶ (New York, Garland 1982).

MacCunn also set one of Stephen Banfield's³⁰⁷ 'top 20' Romantic texts - Tennyson's 'What does the little birdie say?' Two other very popular sources for nineteenth-century composers were Thomas Campbell's *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Many songs and part-songs were drawn from these two, whereas MacCunn chose to make cantatas from them.³⁰⁸ In contrast to Parry's songs, hardly any of the poems MacCunn chooses to set for solo voice are found in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.

MacCunn personally knew some of the poets of his songs. It is likely that Lady Lindsay was introduced to the composer - as many creative talents were - by John Pettie. Lady Lindsay was a painter, writer, musician and patron of the arts who, with her husband Sir Coutts Lindsay, founded the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and worked at making it the leading independent gallery in London. William Black, the Glasgow born novelist (1841-1898) was an intimate friend of the Pettie/MacCunn household. He had sat for Pettie in his costume portrait *A Knight of the Seventeenth Century* (1877) and had holidayed with the Petties in Italy. On a later occasion Black wrote to MacCunn for 'insider information' for a short story:

I propose writing a short story about a crisis in the fortunes of a young man who has come to London with the secret ambition of being a musical composer, but who meanwhile, and against his will, is compelled to remain in commerce. Now [...] would you have the good nature to tell me whether something could happen to him, from the musical side, that would justify him in throwing up his commercial pursuits?³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ *Sensibility and English Song* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1985), 9.

³⁰⁸ He wasn't alone in this. Oliviera Louisa Prescott (1881) Herbert Ham (1893) treated Campbell's poem in the same way; John Armour-Haydn had set it for vocal trio with solo passages in 1888 and Arthur Somervell would make a ballad for solo voice, SATB and piano in 1904. T. Mee Pattison's cantata *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* predated MacCunn's by three years; it appeared in 1885.

³⁰⁹ Uncatalogued letter 12 March 18-- --? Watt Library, Greenock. I have not managed to track this short story down. Perhaps it did not get written. cf. Parry first coming to London after Oxford and working for Lloyds' Register of Shipping.

A comparable pull between creativity and commerce would affect MacCunn himself a decade later when he laboured intensely at conducting operettas to bring in a salary, and his composing activities had to take a back seat. From Black to J.S.Blackie, the polymath professor at Edinburgh University, who founded and endowed a Celtic chair there, and who, by the time he made MacCunn's acquaintance, was the most prominent feature of the patriotic and literary life of the Scottish capital. MacCunn was pushing at an open door when he wrote his letter to the professor, maintaining his suitability for the University music chair on account of his own ability and - perhaps more importantly - his Scottishness.³¹⁰

Both Harold Boulton and Joseph Bennett provided words specifically for MacCunn to set. Boulton - the man behind the lyrics of the *Skye Boat Song* and 'Scots wha hae!' - was also a musical anthologist who in 1891 produced a volume entitled *12 New Songs by some of the best and best known British composers*. With his contribution 'A Song of the South' MacCunn found himself in the illustrious company of Barnby, Cellier, Corder, Cowen, C.H.Lloyd, MacKenzie, Parry, Somervell (who had supplied the arrangements for Boulton's earlier publication *Songs of the North*), Stanford, Goring Thomas and Charles Wood. When the publishers Field and Tuer first approached MacCunn on 3 August 1889 they emphasised that 'the book will be sumptuously got up and there will be a beautiful frontispiece by an R.A., for to ensure large sales we *must* give good value.'³¹¹ MacCunn would later set seven of Boulton's poems as his Opus 30 (1895).

³¹⁰ See Chapter 1, pages 15-16 above.

³¹¹ *US-CHH* A.P.Watt papers no 11036.

The subject matter of the poetry which appealed to the composer is typical of the age and circumstances in which he lived: love, nature, dreams and the spirit world - sometimes two or more of these categories appearing at the same time e.g. love in natural surroundings. It is refreshing to come across a song concerned with something other than these, for instance - death ('Her suffering ended with the day'), hatred of an unfaithful woman ('Had I a cave on some wild distant shore') or a nod towards Schubert's 'Der Leiermann' (*Winterreise*) in a setting in German of George MacDonald's 'The Organ Boy's Song'.

Looking at a representative sample of 51 songs, half of them are strophic or modified strophic in form, and of the other half the largest portion is ABA¹, followed by those that are through-composed or that use some other structural arrangement. MacCunn's unquestionable gift as a miniaturist is evident in strophic numbers, as is his lack of desire to develop material. Straight repetition tends to leave a feeling of disappointment, even when the quality of the core material is so high. At the other pole, when one might have expected the composer to take the easiest way out, he can turn in something much more substantial. As early as October 1889, MacCunn received a request from the septuagenarian tenor Sims Reeves to write him a royalty ballad for performance on St. Andrew's night (30 November) that year. What Sims Reeves got back prompted his wife Emma to write to MacCunn, explaining 'Tis not a simple ballad; it requires thought and study to bring out all its beauties.³¹² The composer reconciled himself to a postponement of the first performance, writing to his agent 'Well I suppose we must pin our faith on his singing the song on the 25th January. [Burns Night],³¹³ The

³¹² Letter from Emma Reeves to MacCunn 25 November 1889 in *US-CHH*. A.P. Watt papers no.11036.

³¹³ Letter from MacCunn to A.P. Watt 25 November 1889 in *US-CHH* A.P. Watt papers no.11036.

song in question was ‘I’ve found my mountain lyre again’ – a setting of the Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg³¹⁴; it runs to 15 pages and is structured A A¹ B B¹ C A A¹. The shepherd-poet tells of how he has managed to escape the ravages of the Border weather (A A¹) by losing himself in the music of his lyre (B B¹). The episode – C – in the dominant key, slower and with a different accompaniment pattern is an effective musical equivalent to the poetic reminiscence of young love, before returning to an exact repeat of the opening. The song thus offered the singer opportunities for contrast and dramatic presentation – very much to Sims Reeves’ taste.

MacCunn’s interest in and love of the folk music of Scotland found a publishing outlet in the volume *Songs and Ballads of Scotland* (1891). Of his immediate predecessors in this field Mackenzie is perhaps the most noteworthy, having arranged *106 Scottish Melodies* (?1865), *Scottish Melodies for pianoforte* (?1865), *The Vocal Melodies of Scotland* (1867-70) and *100 Scotch Airs for violin and piano* (?1875). Interest in indigenous folk material was burgeoning in the final decades of the nineteenth century with (among others) Stanford following various Irish composers in his arrangements of 1882 and Lucy Broadwood and Fuller Maitland preparing their *English County Songs* for publication in 1893. These early stirrings of the folksong revival movement were bolstered by the appearance of various national and school songbooks, in which traditional melodies played a large if not exclusive part. So MacCunn’s edition was very much of its time: a hundred songs (32 of which are ‘Burns’ Songs) are arranged, all of them in the most unostentatious manner possible. There is none of the archly self-conscious elaboration later perpetrated by Britten and others on such tunes,

³¹⁴ Reeves had sent the poem to MacCunn, hoping it would awaken his musical utterances.

indeed no varied accompaniments at all are provided for successive verses. There are no piano introductions, merely a 'gathering' semibreve chord. In the manuscript³¹⁵ these gathering chords are written at the end of each song, almost like an afterthought. The melodies are the important things and could, if it came to it, be sung effectively without any accompaniment at all.³¹⁶ 'Tullochgorum' no.99, the tune that would resurface in Act 1 of *Jeanie Deans*, is harmonised with two chords only. MacCunn seems to have been at pains to get at the genuine version of words and melody: in a note written under no.15 'The broom o' the Cowdenknowes' he writes:

This is undoubtedly an air of one strain only. The editions³¹⁷ containing the second strain, (simply a slight melodic variation of the first) and the interpolated two bars at the end are certainly spurious and bad at that.

The two bars referred to would be there to draw the music back to the tonic - the tune being one of those that truly finishes on implied dominant harmony. Under no.59 'O waly, waly' he wrote, 'Better put in as alternative the version contained in your book of Scottish Songs. The accompaniment will be the same in both cases.' This grudging allowance of a different version probably refers to *The Vocal Melodies of Scotland* (1884) also published by Paterson, a handsome volume patronised and endorsed by Queen Victoria herself. For such an emotional musician as MacCunn, his extremely austere collection of *Songs and Ballads* comes as something of a surprise. As the commission came at one of the busiest times of his career, it is quite likely that he dashed these settings off in between more substantial projects.

³¹⁵ UK-En MS21980.

³¹⁶ A procedure advocated by the late Cedric Thorpe Davie among many others.

³¹⁷ e.g. in arr. Dun, Finlay, and Thomson, John, *The Vocal Melodies of Scotland* (Edinburgh, Paterson 1884), 172-3.

Looking at ‘fully composed’ original strophic songs, four-line verses - or at least verses that can be manipulated into four lines of music - are preferred. There is always a strong sense of climax in these melodies, usually occurring at or beyond the three-quarter point of the verse. The phrases themselves are harder to generalize about. In four line verses MacCunn favours the cadence pattern I, V, V, I at the end of the lines. Davidson’s lyric ‘The Ash Tree’ was, in MacCunn’s version, a great favourite in Scotland during the composer’s lifetime. It perfectly illustrates the features above and also shows how the Scottish folk-song idiom intermingled with his art-song sensibility: an avoidance of leading notes, repetition of cadential figures and diatonic harmony speak of the indigenous tradition while the only chromatic chord – a carefully placed diminished seventh - points to the salon or the concert hall. Placing this colour chord at the climax suggests another characteristic scheme whereby having established the dominant at the midpoint of a verse, the music returns to the tonic via a rather more adventurous harmonic path (e.g. ‘Wilt thou be my dearie?’, ‘The Huntsman’s Dirge’, ‘Golden Days’). The harmony (and often the melody) in many songs is permeated by expressively yearning appoggiaturas; ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords are commonplace, as are augmented sixth chords and cycle of fifths patterns.

MacCunn’s choice of a strophic structure can throw up issues of musical aptness and word setting. In ‘Two Lovers’ (no.6 of *A Set of Seven Songs* to words by Harold Boulton 1896) the accompaniment in verse 2 is exactly the same as in verse one, but the words are much ‘noisier’:

‘A soft wind rous’d the trees from sleep,
Up roused the birds as well;
The rill that tumbled down the steep
Made crystal music as it fell,’ etc.

Again, in the first of the *Four Picture Songs* to words by George MacDonald – ‘A Pale Green Sky is gleaming’ – the picture is of a man and his horse returning home at the end of a day; the atmosphere in the second verse is much changed from the first, but the music stays obstinately the same. The accompaniment figure – repeated crotchet chords over a minim base line – reminds one of Plunket Greene’s observations on the versatility of certain patterns:

- The old series of repeated chords [...] forms the main accompaniment of three-quarters of all British so-called ballads.
- In its extended triplet form it is the only authorised ladder to heaven. Its love is like anything from a red, red rose to a Tannhauser Venus. It has not particular drive in its rhythm, no imitation of the voice, no melodic figure, no atmospheric suggestion - just a good roast-beef, up-and-down, accommodating set of plain chords.³¹⁸

In the second of *Three Songs from ‘Within and Without’* (George MacDonald) the exact repetition of vocal rhythms in successive verses leads to an awkward emphasis:

Figure 7.4 ‘My child is lying on my knees’: opening vocal rhythms.

1. My child is lying on my knees;
 2. I also am a child, and I

The signs....

The early comma and *enjambement* in verse 2 lend an unwanted five beat emphasis on ‘I’ that could easily have been avoided by some judicious underlay manipulation. There are other examples of this strophic laziness, and elsewhere we find cases where MacCunn has actually altered the poem’s punctuation to standardise phrase setting and to iron out the *enjambement*. Take Moore’s lyric ‘Tell her, O tell her’: the first verse is punctuated thus on the flysheet -

³¹⁸ Greene, 54-56.

‘Tell her, oh tell her, the lute she left lying
 Beneath the green arbour, is still lying there,
 And breezes, like lovers, around it are sighing,
 But not a soft whisper replies to her prayer.

The voice part includes a quaver rest and a comma after the first line:

Figure 7.5 ‘Tell her, O tell her’: opening vocal line.

Tenor

Tell her, oh tell her, the lute she left ly - ing, Be - neath the green
 ar - bour, is still ly - ing there, And bree - zes, like
 lo - vers, a - round it are - sigh - ing, But not a soft
 whis - per re - plies to their prayer.

But this extract illustrates positive aspects of MacCunn’s word setting as well: the classically balanced antecedent/consequent phrasing, (here the phrases are each nine bars long - 4+5, 4+5) the subtle sequential sub-phrase shaping at ‘And breezes, like lovers,’ , the rhythmic extension of the note on ‘re-plies’ signalling the approaching end of the verse and no fewer than nine appoggiaturas.

‘Tell her, oh tell her’ is a modified strophic structure – AABA¹ where the first two verses each correspond to an ‘A’ section, and the third verse is spread across the ‘BA¹’.

Notwithstanding the word-setting peccadillo mentioned above, it presents the strongest elements in MacCunn's song-writing style. There is limited but apposite word painting in both the first two verses; quaver movement suggesting 'breezes' and 'blowing' respectively. But the loosening of the strophic form allows the words describing the heroine's peregrinations away from her home patch to be matched in tonal wanderings from C major to E flat major and thereafter by way of augmented 6th chords to D flat and back to the home key of C. The singer's line in this 'B' section is closely related to that in 'A'. When the home key is re-reached (A¹), a peroration is engineered in 'ballad' style – with word repetition and the tenor achieving his highest and longest note - before a quiet ending.

Moving from strophic structures to ternary ones, we may consider the Burns setting 'Thine I am my faithful fair' published in 1895. MacCunn will often establish an accompaniment figure at the outset that will obtain throughout most of a song: here a triplet *perpetuum mobile* permeates the piano part. In this respect, the accompaniment thinking reveals a generic stylistic indebtedness, not to the organic approach of Schumann or Brahms, but to the tradition of the *mélodie* as evinced by the works of Gounod, Massenet, Chausson and Fauré. An accompaniment more deferential to the voice, MacCunn's accompaniment reveals a penchant for countermelody and a matrix of 'inner voices' that emerge and retreat, a manner so common in Fauré's 'middle period' songs such as 'Les Berceaux', 'Nell' and 'Le ciel est pardessus le toit,' though also evident in the neglected songs of Gounod. The very 'busy-ness' of this particular accompaniment recalls portions of the operas built on unchanging formats. It means that the 'B' section is not a real contrast as such, but is more like the start of the second half

of a rounded binary form in instrumental music. The passionate love lyric introduces some suggestions of doubt and pain in its middle stanza:

Figure 7.6 'Thine I am my faithful fair': bars 11-21.

Tenor

espress.

To thy bo - som lay my

legato

heart There to throb and lan - guish:

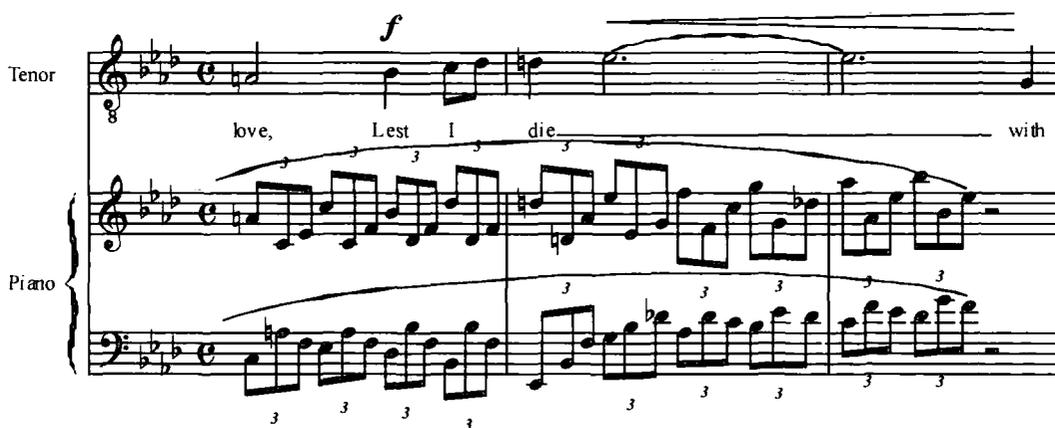
Tho' des - pair had wrung its core,

p



This is mirrored in the vocal line by rests between lines 2 and 3, and between lines 3 and 4 (in the 'A' sections the voice sings continuously.) Gently expressive appoggiaturas mark the words 'anguish' and 'languish'. In the final 'A' section, the appoggiatura at the end of the voice part is ecstatic in effect, not tortured in the least, and is given shape and direction in the approach, by MacCunn's studious voice-leading in the outer parts and additional warmth through the appoggiaturas of the 'tenor' line in the left hand.

Figure 7.7 'Thine I am my faithful fair': bars 30-34.



Again we find the extension of the climactic word ‘die’, the momentary cessation of the accompaniment, and the piano rounding off the vocal line in an ebullient postlude which avoids the platitude of the cadence with a thoroughly Wagnerian dominant ninth of the subdominant (evident in Chausson and early Debussy). Imagine the piano part scored for orchestra and the tenor proclaiming his love on stage and the close relationship between the composer of opera and song is made manifest.

The early song ‘To Julia weeping’, which was examined above³¹⁹ takes a two verse poem but transforms it into a through-composed song. A similar process takes place in a setting of the most well known of James Aldrich’s poems - ‘A Death Bed’. Aldrich was born in Long Island in 1810 and died in New York City in 1856; he founded the *Literary Gazette* in 1840 in which his poems were printed. After his death, his daughter Mrs. Ely, published a small collection of his poetic works in 1884. MacCunn may have found the text here or in an anthology of American verse. The eight lines narrate the girl’s death (1 – 4) and the passage of her soul to Heaven (5 – 8); consequently the song – now called ‘Her suffering ended with the day’ - is in two principal sections. The funeral first part (given the almost meaningless tempo direction

³¹⁹ pp258-260.

Andante molto) is set to a procession of white note values – mostly minims and semibreves – like the whole of ‘To Julia Weeping’ or Davie’s prayer and the Constable’s declaration from *Jeanie Deans*. Serious or religious words and this type of chordal accompaniment would seem to go hand in hand within MacCunn’s creative repository. Unsurprisingly, the harmony is bold and striking with a particularly eloquent use of the cycle of fifths:

Figure 7.8 ‘Her suffering ended with the day’: bb 7–13.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "close, And slept the long long night a-way, In sta-tue like re-". The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. It includes dynamic markings such as *sfp* and *sfpp*, and features a cycle of fifths in the bass line. The second system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats, and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "pose.". The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. It includes a dynamic marking of *pp* and features a cycle of fifths in the bass line.

The second part of the song is more flowing, characterised by a striking set of harmonic progressions which deflect potential moves to (a) F (b) E and (c) A before restoring the

dominant of D flat through the almost leitmotivic statement of the dominant ninth. Such arresting harmony is also undoubtedly invoked to underpin the more ethereal nature of the soul's journey to Paradise.

Figure 7.9 'Her suffering ended with the day': bb21-7.

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is D-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the Tenor vocal line with the lyrics 'skies She passed through Glo - ry's' and the piano accompaniment with a 'cresc.' marking. The second system continues with 'morn - ing gates, And walked in' and features a 'f' dynamic marking. The third system concludes with 'Pa - ra - dise.' and includes a 'p' dynamic marking and a 'rall.' instruction. The piano accompaniment is characterized by triplet patterns and a large, sweeping melodic line in the right hand.

Joseph Bennett, the *Telegraph* critic and librettist, most relevantly of *Jeanie Deans*, collaborated with MacCunn on his *Cycle of Six Love Lyrics* of 1889 – the most significant example of the English song cycle between Sullivan’s *The Window* and Somervell’s *Maud* (1898). Bennett was busy in June of that year trying to construct a workable libretto from Scott’s *Waverley* for the composer’s Rosa commission. It came to nought. In a series of letters now kept in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York³²⁰ the progress of the song cycle project may be traced. All letters are from MacCunn to Bennett.

26 June 1889 ‘There is another idea of which I have been thinking viz. I want you to write an album of, say, six lyrics. Have you any songs for setting? And if so, could I have a look at them?’

11 July 1889 ‘I have begun no.1, & should very much like to have nos. 2 & 3 as soon as you have put the finishing touch to them. As the songs will be in some degree, connected by the music - I mean one joined to the other - you can see how much easier it will be for me to proceed when I have, as it were, a bird’s eye view of them. I think no.1 is excellent but if I might make a suggestion, I would urge you, if you will, to substitute some other words in the 3rd verse, for ‘My love, my life, my light’. That line appears to me to be so intense as to make the reply of the girl, which follows (‘I will come again’ etc.) rather prosaic - as if she were quite calm & put him off with a kind of assurance like ‘All right, dear, keep your hair on, I’ll be around again next Spring’! [Bennett did not change this.]

18 July 1889 ‘I’m getting on ‘fine’, as we say in the North, with the lyrics. I like no.2 immensely, & have quite finished it - I’m now just finishing no.1. No.3 I have not begun, but I like it immensely too.’

26 July 1889 ‘No.4 ‘duly came to hand’, and I was very pleased with it indeed. I’ve finished it, & like *Oliver Twist*, would venture to ask for *more!*’

2 August 1889 ‘No. 5 is finished and I’ve begun no. 6! Can I come round? or will you come here again? - for I am very anxious for you to hear the last two.’

³²⁰ *US-NYpm* MFC M133.B4716.

It seems strange that Bennett did not provide all six poems at the start, given that this is a cycle with a narrative thread running through it. By 10 August MacCunn was ready to send the manuscripts to Novello. It is not clear how close a relationship he had with Bennett. His letters always begin ‘Dear Mr. Bennett’ but this could just be a sign of more formal times.³²¹ He stayed in contact with Bennett after the song cycle and *Jeanie Deans* had come to fruition, and in 1900 was considering working again with him on a cantata. If wags among the critical coterie would attack the Tennyson poems set in Somervell’s *Maud* for their obscurity (‘Mud’) and the untempered ravings of its speaker (‘Mad’), no such criticisms could be levelled at Bennett’s relatively compact lyrics. Indeed the titles of the six songs pretty well delineate the story:

1. A Message came from the East in May
2. Where Palms make pleasant shade
3. He passionately bewails her absence
4. He hears of her death
5. The news turns out to be false, and he hears she is coming back
6. They are reunited.

Remembering the piecemeal way in which MacCunn received the lyrics from Bennett, it is not surprising that the composer makes little attempt to link the songs either tonally or thematically. The keys range widely: the first song (B flat major - G major) is connected to the second by a dominant seventh/augmented sixth bridge passage. This latter, ‘Where palms make pleasant shade’ imagines the distant beloved in India, the ‘otherness’ of which is suggested not only by some muted orientalisms (ostinatos, vocal melismas, unexpected harmonic turns) but also by the key - B minor – the mediant of the G major

³²¹ However, letters to true intimates used Christian names, e.g. *Edward German*

ending to no.1 and as remote as possible from the f minor (flat v) of no.3. From no.4 (c sharp minor = vi in f minor) onwards the keys are at least related in some way: no.5 is in F sharp minor, and, having modulated to A moves easily on to the last song in D major. The clearest thematic cross-relation occurs between the second and fifth song; the 'Indian' ostinato patterns of the former reappear in the latter after the words 'she is not dead'. There is no obvious reason for this in the words. In the same way there are several instances throughout the cycle of a 'note- lower chromatic auxiliary note - note' germ e.g. in the 'Indian' ostinatos mentioned above and at the start of no. 4 (piano) and the start of no.5 (piano). However, MacCunn does not see these ideas through to provide a meaningful structural tool.

The ongoing narrative thread of the lyrics demands - and receives - some non-strophic structuring in the music:

No.1 'A message came from the East in May'

Two main sections

A. B flat major 4/4 - the parting

(including a reprise of the opening at

'I prayed in tears...').

B. G major 9/8 - the transformation

of 'the East' by his love's presence

Note the characteristically 'Scottish'

final cadence pattern familiar

from *Mountain and Flood's* second

subject. (See example on the next

page).

Figure 7.10 'A message came from the East in May': p6 s2.

Musical score for 'A message came from the East in May'. The score is for Tenor and Piano. The Tenor part is in G major, 8/8 time, with lyrics: 'long - ing arms shall glide.' The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a complex rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo). There are also performance markings like *<>* and *ppp rc*.

No.2 'Where palms make pleasant shade'

B minor. This *is* strophic with a major key last verse. The words do not necessitate this change of mode: the whole poem paints a picture of the beloved in India, the last verse seeing the beauty of the Orient being outshone by that of 'my sweet Western dove'.

Certainly the change in modality softens some of the harmonic jumps in the minor and makes others more radiant.

Figure 7.11 'Where palms make pleasant shade': MINOR verse 1.

Musical score for 'Where palms make pleasant shade' (MINOR verse 1). The score is for Tenor and Piano. The Tenor part is in B minor, 3/4 time, with lyrics: 'stand, Each bows its plum - ed'. The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a complex rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *ppp rc* (pianissimo).

poco rall

crest, As wai - ting her be - hest

colla voce *a tempo*

Detailed description: This system contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It begins with a half note 'crest,' followed by a quarter note rest, then a quarter note 'As', a quarter note 'wai -', a quarter note 'ting', a quarter note 'her', a quarter note 'be -', and a half note 'hest'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with the same key signature. It features a series of chords and moving lines, with a fermata over the first two measures. The tempo marking 'poco rall' is at the top, and 'colla voce' and 'a tempo' are placed below the piano part.

MAJOR verse 3

Poco meno mosso *espress*

With my sweet West - ern dove,

p

Detailed description: This system contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. It begins with a quarter note 'With', a quarter note 'my', a quarter note 'sweet', a quarter note 'West -', a quarter note 'ern', and a half note 'dove,'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a series of chords and moving lines, with a fermata over the first two measures. The tempo marking 'Poco meno mosso' and 'espress' is at the top, and a piano dynamic marking 'p' is placed below the piano part.

Piu lento *a tempo*

My maid all maids a - bove.

Detailed description: This system contains a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. It begins with a quarter note 'My', a quarter note 'maid', a quarter note 'all', a quarter note 'maids', and a half note 'a - bove.'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. It features a series of chords and moving lines, with a fermata over the first two measures. The tempo marking 'Piu lento' and 'a tempo' is at the top.

No.3 'He passionately bewails her absence'

Rondo

- A F minor 'They preach to me patience....' [melancholy musings]
B D flat major 'Stand apart from me...' [more declamatory]
A F minor 'O enraptured heart...'
C C major 'I cry over lands and the sea' [quasi recitative then an impassioned plea to the fates (F minor)]
A F minor restatement of verse 1

No.4 'He hears of her death'

A B A C D B A

- A C sharp minor 'Ye whisper she is dead...' [steady, deliberate funereal tread with dropping vocal intervals especially the plangent diminished 4th]
B C sharp minor 'Dead while each day...' [more movement, semiquaver triplets painting the words 'And babbling brooks are brightly flowing']
A C sharp minor 'Yet still.....' [shortened reprise]
C C sharp minor - 'On my brow...' [a feverish short interlude, working its way to B7]
D E major 'Angels who heaven's gate...' [prayer mode cf. Davie's prayer in *Jeannie Deans*, hymn-like chords in piano]
B C sharp minor 'No answer from the skies...' [The semiquaver triplets are still there but the words have *nothing* to do with babbling brooks his time. MacCunn's insistence on straight repetition does him no favours here, as elsewhere³²².]

³²² See pages 267-9 above.

A C sharp minor 'And now I sit...' [sense of climax as the dropping intervals encompass a major 7th at 'White in my heart...' and then a final rhythmically augmented version of the diminished 4th shape.]

No. 5 'The news turns out to be false...'

Two main sections in F sharp minor and A major

A Bare 5ths (unusual for MacCunn) in the treble clef reflect the words 'Pale and wan, the wintry sun...' with further word painting at 'The wind among the leafless trees...'. There is a kinship between the setting of the words 'Wintry too is my heart, And I would fain depart ...' and the start of the third song, where similar sentiments are expressed.

Figure 7.12 Comparison of songs 3 and 5:
3. 'He passionately bewails her absence': opening.

Agitato, ma non troppo vivace

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part begins with a whole rest, followed by the lyrics 'They preach to me'. The Piano part consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system features a Tenor vocal line and a Piano accompaniment. The Tenor part begins with a whole rest, followed by the lyrics 'pa - tience and smile at my heart's sore grief; They'. The Piano part continues with the same accompaniment pattern. The score is in 2/4 time, F sharp minor, and includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *sim.*

5. 'The news turns out to be false...': p28 ss3-4.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for Tenor and Piano. The Tenor part is in a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a rest for two measures, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note F#4. The lyrics 'Win - try too' are written below. The Piano part consists of two staves. The right hand starts with a fortissimo (sf) chord, followed by a piano (p) dynamic. The left hand has a simple accompaniment. The second system is for Tenor (T) and Piano (Pno.). The Tenor part continues with the lyrics 'is my heart, And I would fain de - part'. The Piano part continues with a similar accompaniment style.

Before the change to A major there is an extraordinary and brief hiking up of the key up from F sharp minor to A flat to symbolise another milieu - 'the quiet home of the dead'³²³

B A dramatic and thrilling allegro with an extensive piano postlude, merging into No.6 'They are reunited'

A through-composed piece with a reprise at the end. The opening prelude is long enough to allow for the exciting news of his beloved's return to sink in. Hints of the 'chugging'

³²³ cf. 'Her suffering ended' bb21-27. See p274 above.

rhythms found in the development of *The Ship o' the Fiend* (she would be returning by sea!), horn fifths³²⁴ and Scotch snaps (she'd be returning to Scotland rather than London apparently) alternate with passionate quasi-Wagnerian moments

Figure 7.13 'They are reunited': p35 ss2-3.



Glancing appoggiaturas like those associated with Effie in *Jeanie Deans* appear in the pastoral episode ('A robe of white the thorn...'). This last number conveys the twin feelings of passion and relief with dramatic conviction: the *fortissimo* vehemence of 'The morning breaks! Was ne'er such a morn! Through the Eastern gate to the Westworld borne! Look! Look!' yields to the intimacy of the *piano* coda 'she is here! O my dear, my dear!'

The narrative structure of the cycle forces MacCunn to be adventurous in his approach. We have seen how excited he was with the project in the exchange of letters with Bennett. MacCunn excels when he has a dramatic structure to work to; one need only think of the orchestral ballads, some of the cantatas and the two operas³²⁵. This song cycle is certainly on a par with his most successful works. Bennett's words may not reveal any subtle or unexpected shades of feeling – indeed they revel in the typical

³²⁴ cf. 'There be none of beauty's daughters' – another song with a maritime connection. See p256-8 above.

³²⁵ It is surprising that there are no other narrative songs in MacCunn's oeuvre apart from this *Cycle*.

Victorian preoccupations with love and death - but they give the composer the stimulus he needs.

There are other groups of songs by a single author in MacCunn's output - *Three Songs* opus 11 (Black), *Seven Songs* opus 30 (Boulton), *Six Songs* (Lindsay), and *Four Picture Songs* (MacDonald) - but only the one real song cycle. To conclude this survey of his art songs we shall consider a set of *Six Settings of Poems by Robert Bridges*, which are remarkable for their consistently high quality. In his long life (1844-1930) Bridges abandoned the medical profession at the age of 38 to dedicate himself to writing poetry, plays and commentaries; *The Testament of Beauty* written one year before his death is the pre-eminent philosophical poem before Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Although out of fashion at present, Bridges was hugely popular during his lifetime and was honoured by academic institutions as well as being made Poet Laureate in 1913. His shorter poems appeared in three separate volumes (1873, 1879, 1884), then together with a new fourth volume all were published together for the first time in 1890. MacCunn chooses one poem from Book 3 and four from Book 4 plus some lines from Bridges' play *Achilles in Scyros* which was also published in 1890; his songs come from 1893, by which time Bridges' collection had been reprinted twice.

The familiar triplet arpeggio continuum underpins 'My bed and pillow are cold' the first of the six settings. This suggests the abandoned lover's agitation in the context of the two verse strophic structure. Although we may occasionally feel frustration at a straight repetition of the music for the second verse, there is no need to change here, the poetic sentiment has not altered, and, more importantly the first verse is exquisitely conceived, so we want to hear it again. The piano prelude could come from the pages of

Fauré with its alternation of C minor and F⁷ chords; the music of the Frenchman was known to the English at that time through some of his songs, the violin sonata and the two piano quartets. The establishment of an accompaniment pattern at the outset that obtains through the song, although not the exclusive preserve of French *mélodie*, is nonetheless commonly found in this genre.

Figure 7.14 ‘My bed and pillow are cold’: first verse outline.

(piano harmonic outline) {C pedal underpinning changing harmonies

Voice

My bed and pil-low are cold, My

6 {Bass note starts to move and music modulates.....

heart is faint with dread, the air hath an o-dour of mould I dream I

10 to the dominant) {move to E flat _____ and

lie with the dead. I can-not move O come to me

15 dimax) {post climax sequential pattern} interrupted cadence V - VI

Love or else I am dead or else

20 f sharp minor!!

I am dead.

The repetition of the final line of verse – as we have seen, MacCunn is drawn to regular four line structures here transforming Bridges’ 4+3 layout into a 4+4 - produces a brief detour to F sharp minor before pulling back via a diminished 7th to the home key - c minor. The climax is satisfyingly prepared three quarters of the way through with the voice moving up to its highest note, a minim G appoggiatura, while the bass line pushes downwards. Both piano interlude and postlude use the opening IV⁷ - i pattern and the final cadence is unsurprisingly plagal.

No.2 ‘Fire of Heaven, whose starry arrow’ draws parallels between the heat of nature and the heat of love. Like ‘My bed and pillow are cold’ the two verse strophic structure contains a repeated line at the end of each verse. Again the climax happens on a high appoggiatura ‘G’. The sextuplet continuum is in the left hand this time, with the right - after an initial imitation of the vocal line - playing an independent melody or joining with the left in sextuplets moving to the climax.

Figure 7.15 ‘Fire of Heaven ‘: bb1-2.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Fire of Heaven'. It consists of three staves: a vocal line and two piano accompaniment staves. The key signature is three flats (F major/C minor) and the time signature is common time (C). The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Fire of heav'n whose star - ry ar - row pier - ces the". The piano accompaniment features a sextuplet in the left hand, indicated by a '6' above the notes. The right hand plays chords and single notes, with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The score is marked with various musical notations including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The first verse slows its rhythmic movement to quavers before coming to rest on minims. The whole is then repeated exactly with different words; no attempt is made to link the

verses together. Almost uniquely in MacCunn's output, there is no piano prelude to this song.

The miniature masterpiece 'The Idle Life' (no. 3) is the only one of the set to specify bass voice; MacCunn overwhelmingly favours the higher voices in his song output and usually the tenor over the soprano, which perhaps suggests that here he wanted to explore a more introspective style and manner. Although there is a feeling of reprise ('And every eve....'), the brevity of the song and the ongoing harmonic adventuring give the sense of something through-composed. The unhurried procession of chords in the accompaniment - suggesting the idler's less-than-urgent routine - takes some surprising harmonic turns as early as bar 4. The juxtaposition of unrelated chords has been a feature of MacCunn's agitated style e.g. in *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, but here the atmosphere is urbane and sophisticated: the slip from F sharp major (V) to D minor (iii) and back creates a delicious pointing of the word 'sleep'³²⁶.

Figure 7.16 'The Idle Life': opening.

The musical score for the opening of 'The Idle Life' is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the Bass voice, marked 'Andantino' and 'p' (piano). The lyrics 'The id - le life I lead is like a plea - sant sleep' are written below the notes. The middle staff is for the Piano accompaniment, also marked 'p'. It features a series of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score shows the first four bars of the piece.

³²⁶ This pattern is still holding its appeal as late as 1913 at the opening of the three-part song for female voices 'On a faded violet'.

The striking presence of the minor mediant rather than the major (again with Fauré-esque overtones) may be rationalised somewhat by noticing how the voice-leading of the F natural (= E sharp) functions as a disguised leading-note to the F sharp. It is significant too that MacCunn chooses to cadence this first sentence on D, not necessarily because this is a platitudinous choice of related key, but because it is so obviously motivic, a fact underlined by the immediate negation of D for the dominant of B.³²⁷

A central section journeys from the key of B minor to B flat minor to A minor and back to F sharp – a musical equivalent of the daydreams that flit through his mind. This is effected by the musical ‘punning’ of dominant 7th/augmented 6th chords. Unlike in the outer verses, the harmony changes as often as once a beat; elsewhere it changes twice a bar. The narrow intervals in the vocal line and piano eventually cede to a more shapely, open phrase at ‘.....A nobler than the last’.

The reprise proposes a $ii^7 - V^7$ sequence that again touches remote regions (A minor, B flat minor, C minor), before pulling back to the home key of B minor. MacCunn reinterprets the original D minor chord from bar 4 as the first of these ii^7 (flat 5) chords on the word ‘bliss’. The F natural in this chord becomes part of V of B flat (significant from the central section) and then asserts itself in the augmented sixth on G that *resolves* to F# as part of the $ic - V - I$ progression. (See example overleaf)

The last two lines of Bridges’ poem are unpunctuated save for a full stop at the end; MacCunn sets them with a break after ‘known’, unwilling as he is to interrupt the harmonic rhythm or the amiably ambling exposition of the text. In a mere 30 bars the sense of unity between text and music is so strong that we feel we have experienced something far greater.

³²⁷ Cf. Fauré ‘Après un rêve’ in the bar after the first verse.

Figure 7.17 'The Idle Life': reprise.

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a Bass line and a Piano (Pno.) line. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C).

System 1:
 Bass: *p* And ev' - ry eve I say Not - ing my step in bliss
 Piano: *p*
 Chords: Am: ii7 V7

System 2:
 Bass: > That I have known no day in all
 Piano:
 Chords: B flat min: ii7 V7 C min: ii7 V7 = B min: aug 6 ic

System 3:
 Bass: my life like this.
 Piano: *pp*
 Chords: V7 i

In ‘Angel Spirits of Sleep’ (no.4) MacCunn hits on an ‘arpeggio + added note’ pattern which perfectly conjures up the hovering motion of angels. The semiquavers in both hands in the accompaniment inevitably recall Fauré’s ‘Nell’. As in ‘The Idle Life’ the word ‘sleep’ engenders a marvellous harmonic change – this time to the flat submediant.

Figure 7.18 ‘Angel Spirits of Sleep’ bars 2-3.

The hands play in the treble and tenor registers to start with; by the central section (of the ABA form) both have moved down to the bass (‘Angel spirits of sleep/ Dancing to the weir/ In the hollow roar of its water *deep*’). In complete contrast ‘Crown Winter with Green’ (no.5) is a vigorous, triple measure Wassailing Song. Its robustness anticipates similar drinking songs by Holst and Vaughan Williams.³²⁸ The type of *stretto* counterpoint we will find in *incipits* and short interludes from his operas is occasionally used here, the voice chasing the right hand of the piano at one beat’s distance. An attractive lighter number rounds off the set - ‘Pedlar’s Song’, the words extracted from Bridges’ play *Achilles in Scyros* (first published in 1890). In this latter-day ‘Fine knacks for ladies’ the beguiling harmony and use of appoggiaturas in the piano part do not quite compensate for the feeling of ‘playing safe’ in the three identical verses. The main body

³²⁸ e.g. ‘Bring us in good ale’ for SATB (Holst) and ‘Back and sides go bare’ from *Sir John in Love* (VW)

of the song is preceded by a four-bar 'street cry': 'Come buy my wares: come buy'.

Repeated crotchet chords in this accompaniment and in that of 'The Idle Life' bring to mind certain of Harry Plunket Greene's remarks quoted earlier³²⁹; certainly the adaptability of this figure is its strength, but in both of these songs its use seems entirely apposite, not routine at all.

As we have seen in a previous chapter MacCunn's West End conducting duties sometimes involved compositional tasks as well; he produced additional dances and songs for several shows. The shape of musical comedies in Victorian and Edwardian times was much more malleable than nowadays with numbers and whole scenes being remodelled with considerable frequency. *The Talk of the Town* (1905) was a musical comedy by H.E. Haines and Charles Taylor - the same Charles Taylor who would write the libretto for his opera *Prue*. MacCunn's four contributions were singled out for faint praise by the *Times*' critic: 'the accompanying music, save for some numbers supplied by Mr. Hamish MacCunn, is tinkling and unimpressive'.³³⁰ They included a rollicking and very funny ditty for Walter Passmore called 'Bombay on the Nile' and a surprisingly meaty tenor aria, the popular 'Two Eyes' sung by Robert Evett.³³¹ Here was another occasion on which the composer far exceeded the demands of his brief; it is a curious mixture of Sullivan-esque cliché and reminiscences of Wagner's *Tristan*, and is perhaps emblematic of MacCunn's own position, caught between the demands of light musical comedies and the desire to create something altogether weightier. Whether the inclusion

³²⁹ See page 268 above.

³³⁰ *Illustrated London News*, 14 April 1905, 43.

³³¹ See page 260 above.

of the Scottish tune 'Bonny Dundee' for the song 'When I was a maiden' was down to MacCunn's influence, it is difficult to know³³².

In 1908 MacCunn was commissioned to write extra music for Oscar Straus's *A Waltz Dream*. Straus's operetta had been adapted by Adrian Ross for a run at the Hicks Theatre, London, starting on 7 March that year; and the reviews immediately picked up on the last act's weaknesses. In the event, the composer provided seven numbers, which embraced a wholly remodelled third act. 'You are free' - a number for Niki - features an unusually elaborate (for an operetta) accompaniment pattern while the waltz song 'Her highness is at Hand' contains a melody as radiant as anything by Straus, or indeed by members of the Strauss family:

Figure 7.19 'Her highness is at Hand' (melody in piano R.H.).

³³² The words for this song show Charles Taylor at his wittiest; within a tale of marital strife he shoehorns in references to marmalade (Dundee being traditionally the city of jute, *jam* and journalism) and some mildly risqué stuff at the end.



Another adaptation from the German stage was *Autumn Manoeuvres*, originally by Karl von Balkony and R. Bodanski. The manoeuvres in question concern social junketing at a country hotel. Henry Hamilton adapted it for the English stage (Adelphi 1912) and MacCunn wrote two choruses, 'The 12th Hussars' and a chorus of girls 'What are you going to wear?' Unlike *A Waltz Dream* and *The Talk of the Town*, MacCunn did not conduct this show.

Although the externals of MacCunn's song output suggest a conventional approach to the art, in reality there is rather more to appreciate. From the songs his mother sang him as a boy in Greenock to musical evenings with Alison - who had a useful voice - and the constellation of first-rate singers he drew around him through his opera and conducting work, song would never have been very far from the composer's ambit. Many of the singers he worked with would become personal friends. The first public performances of his songs took place when he was at the RCM: at a pupils'

concert on Thursday 11 December 1884 we come across ‘When thou art nigh’ and ‘When the first summer bee’ sung by a Mr. Jordan; almost exactly a year later Mr. Price performed ‘To Julia weeping’ and ‘There be none of Beauty’s daughters’. From then on, the songs would have been given at ballad concerts, soirées and recitals. MacCunn rose rapidly to prominence in this field - as he had done with his orchestral and choral music at the end of the 1880’s. MacCunn found it difficult to turn out ‘a simple ballad’. His sensitivity and taste would elevate a poetic trifle into something more substantial. The sheer volume of the song output indicates the importance of this genre for him, even given that there will undoubtedly have been some items written to make money. As ever, the dramatic thread in the song cycle brings out the best in him, but he also excels at finding apt musical garb in which to dress the various emotional states expressed in other lyrics: in his finest moments he can rival the best of Parry in his *English Lyrics*. He does not aim for great psychological insights in his settings – indeed the poems chosen do not invite this – but he conveys the essence of the text in his customary forthright and bracing way.

Afterword

Having teased out the characteristic threads in MacCunn's compositions, we may attempt some sort of evaluation of the composer's stature in the musical world. Although any sort of 'conclusion' to a thesis runs the risk of being somewhat perfunctory, it should be evident from the preceding pages what both MacCunn's strengths and weaknesses were. As a person, his precocity and enormous self-confidence undoubtedly made his path to success easier to navigate. But this same self-belief led to some awkward contretemps with his seniors and contemporaries. He was not a clubbable person, but evidently enjoyed entertaining a wide circle of friends and acquaintances at home. Within the music we find a similarly assured composer, possessed of a natural melodic gift, a willingness to experiment with harmony and a highly developed dramatic sense; add to that a rapidly assimilated orchestral technique and a sympathetic understanding of the voice in solo and choral situations, and his credit column seems well supplied. But these qualities are better suited to certain sorts of musical expression rather than others. There is no sense in which MacCunn could be considered an intellectual composer, someone who might convince the listener after hearing a composition that they had been on a journey that embraced the heart, the brain and the spirit. He had no desire to write closely argued symphonic works in the manner of Beethoven or Brahms; even his early orchestral pieces rely on memorable and well-contrasted themes to make their mark, rather than any cerebral rigour in their development. He chose forms that would work to his strengths – cantata, opera, song – all of which involved a text to draw out the composer's ability to portray dramatic and evocative situations. If we occasionally feel frustration that MacCunn allows himself too much simple reiteration in strophic songs and ternary structures, it is rare not to be captivated by the character of the music itself.

He tends to be at his best when dealing with Scottish subjects, which, fortunately for us, is quite a lot of the time. The Scottishness in his music, as was noted in the introduction, was something that he could turn on and off at will, comparable to the Scots expressions he included in his letters, which are always put, rather preciously, between inverted commas - as if to point up his racial distinctiveness, (or even his perceived superiority). However it is this heritage which informs and freshens his already forthright mode of expression, giving his music an immediacy that distinguishes it from that of many of his contemporaries. On account of his limited horizons, MacCunn may not belong in the top rank of composers, but his dramatic and lyrical gifts place him clearly within the ambit of the minor greats.

