‘I WOULD KNOW MY SHADOW AND MY LIGHT’

An exploration of
Michael Tippett’s
The Midsummer Marriage
and its relevance
to a study of Druidism

Philip Carr-Gomm

THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

MOUNT HAEMUS LECTURE FOR THE YEAR 2002

THE MOUNT HAEMUS AWARD

Mount Haemus is a real mountain in the Balkans, and either this or another of the same name was the classical prison of the winds. … The Aeolian isles off Sicily are also, however, given for this windy prison. It was, whatever the location, the allegorical name for powerful inspiration which lurked beneath the surface.
Ross Nichols, *The Book of Druidry*

In 2005 the first five Mount Haemus Award lectures were published, and it was only at this point that I realised that somehow a year had gone by since the founding of the award without a research paper being requested. The series had begun with Professor Hutton's contribution, followed in what seemed like rapid succession by Gordon Cooper, John Michael Greer, John & Caitlin Matthews and Dr Adam Stout. But in reality the year 2002 had 'slipped through the net' leaving a conspicuous gap in the series. I was determined to correct this oversight by travelling back in time to the year 2002 to submit a paper on a topic of particular relevance to contemporary Druidism.

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‘I WOULD KNOW MY SHADOW AND MY LIGHT’

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Abstract

The Bardic Grade teaching of the Order of Bards Ovates & Druids uses an old Welsh story - the Tale of Taliesin - to initiate us into the Druid mysteries and to help us access and develop our creative potential. Michael Tippett’s opera *The Midsummer Marriage* uses the same story to help create an experience of initiation. This paper first examines the common ground that inspired both Michael Tippett and the founder of the Order, Ross Nichols, and then explores the genesis and structure of *The Midsummer Marriage*, with particular relevance to contemporary Druidism.

Preamble

I discovered the work of Michael Tippett in 1997, while working on the revision of the Bardic Grade teachings. In one of his operas Tippett had introduced four dances based on the chase sequence in the tale of Ceridwen and Taliesin. I mentioned this in the revised Gwersu, and gave talks with samples from the opera (and a brief enactment) at a Dutch members’ weekend and at the Order’s Beltane camp in England, but it took a further eight years for the opportunity to arise to study Tippett’s work in greater depth. In 2005 two events conspired to create this opportunity: I was invited to give a talk for the Canonbury Masonic Research Centre’s annual conference on a theme that related to Initiation, and the year 2005 was the centennial of Tippett’s birth. I knew that Tippett’s *Midsummer Marriage* was felt by enthusiasts to be an initiatory experience, and with its resonances with Mozart’s Masonic *Magic Flute*, I felt a study of the initiatic theme in Tippett’s work would be an ideal subject for a Masonic conference.

Although Tippett can be seen as one of the most inspired composers of the 20th century, his work is demanding and for this reason hardly popular and not often performed. But the sudden rash of Tippett performances to celebrate his centennial meant that Stephanie and I could have our own Tippett-fest - giving us the

opportunity to experience his music at first hand. We saw his most well-known work, the oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, performed by the English National Opera in a stunning performance that culminated in a tree bursting into flames on stage as the final words were sung. We would have seen it again on the first night of the Proms if it hadn't been for the London tube bombings a few days before which put us off travelling into town. We saw *The Knot Garden*, his 'most challengingly opaque and densely surreal' opera (as *The Times* put it) at the Linbury Studio Theatre in May, and we were back in Covent Garden at the Royal Opera House to see their production of *The Midsummer Marriage* in November.

As I researched Tippett and his work for the Canonbury talk, I realised that there were aspects of this research that were outside its remit. During that talk it would be unnecessary and inappropriate for me to explore the parallels between Michael Tippett's and Ross Nichols' lives, for example, or for me to analyse in depth the relevance of *The Midsummer Marriage* to Druids in particular. The research then fell naturally into two complementary avenues: for the Masons an exploration of *The Midsummer Marriage* as an initiatory drama, for the Mount Haemus paper an exploration of the parallels between Tippett and Nichols, and of the way *The Midsummer Marriage* (and to a lesser extent *A Child of Our Time*) can clarify for us the journey that Druidry, and the Order in particular, offers us.

Although there turned out to be some material shared in both these projects, I felt they were sufficiently different to warrant including the text of the Canonbury talk as an appendix to this paper.

Children of Their Time

The similarities between the experiences, interests and character of Ross Nichols and Michael Tippett are striking. Both their lives spanned much of the twentieth century, although Tippett outlived Nichols by exactly twenty years. Both experienced the injustices and cruelty of the British public school boarding system, and both by their early forties had experienced two World Wars, the Depression, and the dropping of the atom bomb. Of course the same could be said of many men of that age, but the way that they responded to these events, the subjects that preoccupied them, the books that they read, their politics, their humanitarian concerns, and probably even their sexual orientation[i], were substantially similar.

What they actually did with their lives, and the way they chose to express themselves was, however, totally different, and both men can be considered as original and unique in their own field. Tippett's gift was music, and although as a teenager he had been interested in 'old furniture, architecture, occultism, pogo sticks, mesmerism and drama' (as his biographer Ian Kemp tells us) music was his first love and by the time he was seventeen he was determined to become a composer. He steadfastly and successfully pursued this ambition until the end of his life. For Nichols, it was the magic of the word rather than music that he chose to

master and express. On leaving Cambridge at the age of twenty-two he immediately began to do what he would do for the rest of his life: write and teach, just as Tippett also taught in addition to making music.

Nichols' and Tippett's lives were not particularly eventful if we consider merely the outer details. Both were born in London (1902 and 1905 respectively) and both died there: Nichols at the age of 73 after a heart attack, Tippett at the age of 93 after an attack of pneumonia. Both enjoyed travel and holidayed abroad often, but otherwise moved infrequently: Tippett living as an adult first in Surrey and then in the Cotswolds, Nichols in London, with retreat huts in Hertfordshire and later Buckinghamshire too.

It is to their inner lives and the central themes of their work that we must look to discern their common concerns and to deepen our appreciation of them, both as individuals in their own right, and as 'children of their time'.

Peace and Love, Man

I can still remember meeting Ross one summer's day and finding him transformed into a hippie at the age of seventy. He was wearing sandals, and was sporting one of those fabric shoulder bags with tassels that every card-carrying hippie had to wear. While a part of me found this embarrassing, the better part of me admired him. He was, after all, responding to the wave of counter-cultural idealism that was sweeping the world at that time. In 1969 he had contributed to *The International Times*, a radical hippie paper. In that same year John Michell had published his book about ley lines, Stonehenge and numerology, *A View Over Atlantis*, which rapidly became a cult classic, and John Lennon's 'Mind-Games' was released, which linked together Druids and the search for the grail, together with the two core values of Peace and Love:

We're playing those mind games together,
Pushing the barrier, planting seeds.
Playing the mind guerrilla,
Chanting the Mantra, 'Peace on Earth'.
We all been playing those mind games forever
Some kinda druid dudes lifting the veil.
Doing the mind guerrilla,
Some call it magic - the search for the grail.
Love is the answer, and you know that for sure.
Love is a flower- you got to let it, you got to let it grow[ii].

As the counter-culture began to see the Druid as a magical figure associated with Peace and Love, Ross wasn't going to ignore this. So there he was,

corresponding with John Michell, writing to *The International Times* and wearing hippie sandals[iii].

Tippett got hip to the groove too. Norman Lebrecht, one of his fiercest critics, wrote in 'Michael Tippett - A composer to Forget': 'Discovering America's sexual freedoms, Tippett pranced about in hippie sandals and injected transatlantic rhythms into later works, without winning many new friends.'[iv]

I've taken this detail - Tippett and Nichols 'prancing about in sandals' - because it acts as a glyph, a clue, to the two passions they shared with their younger counterparts: Peace and Love, expressed through their devotion to pacifism and socialist humanitarianism.

In response to the suffering they saw around them during the inter-war years both men espoused left-wing politics. Unemployment, poverty and despair affected much of Britain and Europe after the devastation of the First World War, and Tippett talked about how shocked he was on seeing malnourished children covered in sores grabbing the apple-cores and crumbs he had left behind on a walk[v].

He gladly accepted an invitation to take charge of the music at a work-camp designed to help unemployed miners of the Cleveland district. These were organised by a young idealist, Rolf Gardiner, whose ideas formed part of a vision shared by a number of radical thinkers, and it was this vision that also attracted Nichols.

Rolf Gardiner, a pioneer of the organic farming movement who later became a founding member of the Soil Association, saw a Europe renewed after the devastation of the war by self-supporting communities of young people. To help this come about, during the 1930s he set to work organising camps for the 'revival of rural England' and it was Tippett who provided music for some of these.

To further his aims Gardiner founded a group known as the 'Springhead Ring'[vi], whose descendant, The Springhead Trust[vii] still exists. He visited Germany often, becoming a roving ambassador for the Kibbo Kift, an organisation similar to Woodcraft Chivalry. Each of these groups shared the same ideals – of restoring to the dispossessed, particularly the young, a connection between Nature and Spirit that had been severed by political and economic forces. Taking many of the ideas of the Scouting movement, and of Ernest Thompson Seton's Woodcraft Indians, the KK's founder, and colleague of Nichols, John Hargrave, gave a spiritual dimension to the movement by speaking of a universal religion of the Great Spirit, and teaching the doctrine of karma.

The KK and Woodcraft were both socialist movements which rejected the militarism and Christianity of the scouting movement, to advocate an approach that was clearly to Nichols' liking. Aubrey Westlake, son of Ernest Westlake, the founder of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, expressed one of their aims in a way that Nichols' would undoubtedly have applauded: 'to withdraw the young man for a period from the soul-destroying monster of industrialism and heart-breaking futility of our machine-created unemployment and to put him into a natural and simple environment where he can contact the four primary elements: earth, air, fire, and water.'

Nichols remained a socialist all his life, and was particularly interested in the Social Credit movement (an enthusiasm of his Pendragon Vera Chapman too). This movement grew out of the Kibbo Kift and became for a brief moment a political party. Tippett was influenced by Social Credit ideas too, which found their way into his revolutionary 1935 play 'War Ramp', which deals with the immorality of war funding.

Tippett, however, moved further left than Nichols. After reading Marx, Trotsky and John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, he joined the British Communist Party, but only for a few months. Nevertheless he kept up his sympathy for communist ideals, though he rejected Stalinism and felt more in sympathy with the ideas of Trotsky. In 1938 he joined the Socialist Anti-War Front, led mainly by Trotskyists, which promoted the view that war was inherent in capitalism and would be eliminated only by a co-operative socialist order.

By this time he had already decided to use his musical talents in the service of his political ideals by following the lead of his friends Francesca Allinson and Alan Bush who conducted choirs associated with the labour movement. Allinson conducted the Clarion Glee Club, founded by the left-wing Rutland Boughton[viii], who started the first Glastonbury festival and who composed an opera inspired by the Celtic Revival, and peopled with Bards and Druids, *The Immortal Hour*[ix]. Tippet began conducting for the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, joined the London Labour Choral Union, and sang as a tenor in the first 'International Workers' Music Olympiad' in Strasbourg in 1935.

Both Nichols and Tippett were motivated in their politics by their desire for social justice. They had been exposed to the dark side of the British class system during their school days, and responded to it by wanting equality, not elitism, and by being particularly concerned for the welfare of young people for the rest of their lives. As examples of their life-long commitment to such ideals, James Kirkup wrote that Nichols was still talking enthusiastically about Social Credit ideas in 1970[x], and Tippett's 1989 opera *New Year* finishes with words he heard at a Nelson Mandela concert in Wembley: 'One humanity, one justice'.

They both responded to the sufferings of the First World War by becoming staunch advocates of Pacifism. They joined the Peace Pledge Union – Nichols' leaving in his 1941 Will £2,000 (a considerable amount in those days) to the Union to be 'applied towards the equipment or maintenance of Pacifist hostels or settlements'. As a mark of his equal commitment to socialist ideals, he bequeathed the same amount to John Hargrave – for the 'founding or support of a Youth Movement ancillary to or co-operating with the Social Credit Party of Great Britain.'

The Peace Pledge Union was founded in 1935 by Revd Dick Sheppard who had invited whoever was opposed to war to send him a postcard containing the pledge: 'I renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly will I support or sanction another.' Sheppard received 100,000 postcards – one from Tippett, and (presumably) one from Nichols.

During the war Tippett became a prominent member of the PPU, visiting Conscientious Objectors and speaking at meetings. Nichols never needed to register as a CO – probably because as Principal of a college his job was considered necessary. But Tippett's job – teaching music, conducting and composing - was not considered vital and when he registered as a CO he was first given non-combatant military duties. On appeal this was changed to working as an air raid warden, on the land, or with the fire service. Believing his work to be important, Tippett refused to do any of these jobs and was sent to jail for three months.

One CO who did accept a job on the land was the poet and pacifist James Kirkup, who received a letter from Ross one day admiring his poetry and suggesting they meet. A ten year collaboration began which resulted in their working on a book together, *The Cosmic Shape*. Kirkup was, in later years, to achieve fame in an unusual and spectacular way – writing a poem entitled 'The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name' which in 1977 was the subject of the first successful blasphemy prosecution in fifty years in England. The poem describes the Roman centurion taking Jesus from the cross and in his grief, making love to him[xi].

While Tippett was developing his skills as a composer, Nichols was becoming an accomplished poet who was considered good enough to be reviewed in the national press. His poems were published in *Horizon*, *Poetry Quarterly, Poetry* (London) and *Poetry* (Scotland), the *New Saxon* and the *New English Weekly*, and reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement, The Listener, The Birmingham Post, Scrutiny*, *The Yorkshire Pos*t, *The Manchester Evening News*, *New English Weekly*, and *Poetry Quarterly*. He was a contemporary of T.S.Eliot and W.H.Auden, both of whom Tippett had met. We don't know whether Nichols ever met them, but in his last Will and Testament he asked that "Eliot be consulted by my Literary Executors for technical direction and advice generally offering him the sum of fifty pounds if he should do this, as a small mark of my admiration for his poetic work."

The Cauldron of Inspiration

While Nichols wanted Eliot's direction after his death, Tippett wanted it very much before he died. He asked Eliot to write the libretto for *A Child of Our Time*. Eliot initially agreed, but on reading through Tippett's draft refused the invitation - encouraging him to continue working on it. Critics have bemoaned this event in Tippett's career, since from that moment onwards he wrote all his own librettos, but Eliot's argument was that the text was already there in embryo, and 'anything I add to it will stand out a mile as so much better poetry'[xii].

Eliot was just one of a set of influences which played upon both Nichols and Tippett. In the mid twenties Tippet's friend Aubrey Russ had given him the complete set of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which – as he says 'opened my eyes to the ritualistic origins of theatre, affecting considerably the way I was later to

conceive of opera.'[xiii] We can see its influence clearly in *The Midsummer Marriage* in the figure King Fisher and his sacrificial death.

When Nichols became an undergraduate at Cambridge, in 1921, Frazer was a fellow of Trinity College and was at the height of his fame: the Frazer lectureship in Social Anthropology had just been founded at Cambridge, Oxford, Glasgow and Liverpool Universities, and over two hundred of the most prominent figures in the world of learning had subscribed their names to an address presented to him that year[xiv]. *The Golden Bough* spanned twelve volumes, but the abridged edition in one volume appeared during Nichols' second year at Cambridge. Its influence upon Nichols is most clearly seen in arguably the best essay he ever wrote 'An Examination of Creative Myth' in *The Cosmic Shape*[xv]. Here he talks about the 'rich mine systematically opened up by Sir James Fraser.[xvi]'

This rich mine was soon exploited in dozens of works. One of the most important to Tippett was Jane Harrison's *Themis,* which presented the theory that the origins of drama could be found in the rituals explored by Frazer, in which the power of fertility, and the mystery of the death and rebirth of the year was ritually enacted in the death and resurrection of the god-king.

Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* strongly influenced both Tippett and Nichols too. Her study argued that the foundations of the Grail mystery lay in the ancient fertility rituals that Frazer also explored (Weston and Frazer were also cited by Eliot as key inspirations for his most famous poem *The Waste Land*).

The writer Naomi Mitchison was also influenced by Weston when she wrote her historical novel *The Corn King and The Spring Queen*, and Tippett explained in his autobiography that Mitchison's book 'whose climax is a public copulation to fertilise the fields...had a big influence on the final Ritual Dance in *The Midsummer Marriage*.'[xvii]

The theme for the centre-piece of *The Midsummer Marriage*, the four Ritual Dances, derives however, not from Mitchison but from the Tale of Taliesin, which Tippett would have read probably first in the *Mabinogion* and then in Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* which appeared in 1948.

Tippett and Nichols were also fascinated by Jung's ideas about the Collective Unconscious and the way this was expressed in dreams and myth. They both read Wollheim's translation of the *I-Ching* introduced by Carl Jung, with Nichols writing an essay on it[xviii] and Tippett noting that a study of the I-Ching was occupying his attention during the years he worked on *The Midsummer Marriage*. They both also had an interest in Celtic myth – an interest shared by a Jungian analyst, John Layard, who was influential for both men. Layard's interest is shown in his *A Celtic Quest – Sexuality and Soul in Individuation*, which offers a Jungian analysis of the Mabinogion story of Culhwch and Olwen[xix].

It is often said that Tippett underwent a Jungian analysis, but this statement needs qualification: it was a self-analysis initiated after four months of informal analysis with Layard. The self-analysis lasted for nine months and involved Tippett recording and analysing his own dreams. In struggling to come to terms with his

homosexuality, he had read Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* and *Psychological Types*, and had decided he was the 'introverted intuitive' type. He had been introduced to Layard in the 1930's but he had no money to pay for an analysis. Even so he used to visit him, and a friendship (or at least a relationship of some sort) developed which continued certainly into the 1960's when Tippett's lover Karl Hawker had three sessions with Layard during a difficult period.

The initial period of contact (during which Tippett took accounts of his dreams to Layard[xx]) came to an end, however, when Layard informally analysed one of Tippett's dreams in which he saw a male friend's face shining like the sun, which was followed by a girl falling dead into his arms. Tippett said of this: "According to Layard's analysis, the dream told me that if I didn't give up homosexuality, the anima would die. A few days later, I ventured an alternative interpretation: if you cannot accept love with the shining face, then the soul is dead. That ended my consultations with Layard.[xxi]" Ironically it has subsequently been revealed that Layard himself struggled to repress his own homosexuality[xxii]. Tippett chose the path of expression rather than repression and exhibited a quality of self-determination that would also help to ensure his professional success. Deep down he knew where he was going.

The list of literary influences on both men continues. Tippett was sufficiently inspired by W.B.Yeats that he used two lines from his poem *Lapis Lazuli* to finish *The Midsummer Marriage*, and Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah* provides the opening scene and some of the characters for the opera. Tippett does not seem to have shared Shaw's and Nichols' interest in Naturism, but Ian Kemp does recount that soon after Tippett was released from Wormwood Scrubs prison he was caught nude bathing with friends by a coastguard. He was saved a summons through the intercession of his friend, the historian A.L.Rowse, with the local magistrate[xxiii].

By now we can understand how an opera like *The Midsummer Marriage* might have emerged from the heady brew of this cauldron of inspiration, with its evocative and varied ingredients. From a very similar brew Nichols was inspired to write poetry, found an Order of Druidry, and offer initiation into the Mysteries. Tippett composed some of the most interesting music of the twentieth century, and offered initiation too - but through the vehicle of an opera rather than an esoteric school.

Opera as Initiation - Tippet's *The Midsummer Marriage*

It's quite a claim to suggest that an opera can offer initiation, and we might consider such a statement a symptom of the temporary blindness of an enthusiast. But once you know of the thinking, and of the influences that played upon this work that took ten years to create[xxiv], and if you have been lucky enough to experience the opera, you may well agree that this work can indeed act as an initiation in itself.

Let's look first at what two critics have said of the work. Nicholas Kenyon writing in the Glyndebourne Festival Opera programme for 1990 wrote: 'It is a glorious visionary opera... whose protagonists pass from blindness to knowledge through self-awareness and ritual observance. The theme is that of Mozart's Magic Flute, plus all the ramifications of twentieth century psychoanalysis...Jung's ideas on the development of personality, coupled with references to many primitive myths, lie beneath the surface of the opera.'[xxv]

A moment in the fourth ritual dance of The Midsummer Marriage, from the Chicago Lyric Opera's 2005 production. Photo courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

It was this multitude of references, coupled with a psychoanalytic theme and resonances with Mozart's Masonic Magic Flute that confused most critics when the opera was first performed in 1955. But not all were confused, and Ian Kemp, writing in the definitive study of Tippett and his work in 1987, believed he appreciated the opera's true power: '[The Midsummer Marriage] is not an opera in the conventional sense...it is more a dramatic allegory...[that] attempts to illuminate the unconscious and to encourage the capacity for renewal such illumination brings with it...' And then, in explaining how the opera can take us on a journey into the Underworld to experience how in order to live one must undergo a death, he concludes that the work is 'therefore an initiation ceremony, a baptism, a *rite de passage*.[xxvi]'

Daring the Grave Passage - *A Child of Our Time*

To understand *The Midsummer Marriage* we need to look first at the work that preceded it. Ian Kemp explains that the guiding idea of *The Midsummer Marriage* can be seen as an exploration of the meaning in the final lines of the oratorio Tippett wrote before he began work on the opera. In this, *A Child of Our Time*, the protagonist sings: 'I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole,' to which the reply comes: 'Then courage, brother, dare the grave passage.'

Kemp suggests that Mark, the main protagonist of *The Midsummer Marriage*, is following this advice and is 'daring the grave passage'. The 'grave passage' is the journey towards wholeness that so preoccupies Tippett (and of course every spiritual seeker). The passage is 'grave' because it is serious (and even dangerous) and the word's obvious association with death is significant, since Tippett is conveying the idea that the journey to wholeness necessitates a confrontation with the mystery of death.

This journey to wholeness is so important to Tippett, that he said in 1977 that these closing words of *A Child of Our Time* 'I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole.' make up 'the only truth I shall ever say.[xxvii]'

It is tempting for those of us familiar with Jung to pass by this idea with a cursory glance – this isn't new information for us. But let's look at what Tippett did with this idea: he used his oratorio to expound one of the most challenging aspects of Jung's concept – that these two parts of the psyche are also related to our experience of good and evil. He chose one of the greatest manifestations of the struggle between good and evil in world history, perhaps the greatest in many people's minds, and made that the subject matter of an oratorio that recommends finding wholeness by knowing both.

A Child of Our Time takes a true story related to the beginnings of the Holocaust and uses that to convey the pacifist message that violence can never be an effective response to violence, and in addition to convey the Jungian message that the journey to wholeness requires us to withdraw our projection of our Shadow on to the outside world[xxviii]. The Shadow is a Jungian term that describes the unknown, often denied, aspects of ourselves. Jungians believe that much of our judgements about the nature of evil are coloured by these denied aspects of ourselves that we see instead reflected in people and events around us. To gain any kind of objectivity in our assessment of the nature of an event or person, we need to see beyond these reflections (which are caused by the projection of our denied fears and desires). The relationship between human psychology and the nature of evil is an enormously difficult issue to tackle - and by choosing such an emotive setting, Tippett risked being dismissed - at the very least - as a fool. Of all world events the Holocaust is one of the hardest to evoke if we are trying to promote pacifism.

Tippett took the story of Herschel Grynszpan, a young Jewish man who had fled from Germany to Paris in 1936. When he heard that his family had been arrested and deported to Poland by the Nazis, he wanted to protest in a way that would draw attention to their persecution of the Jews, and so he went to the

German Embassy in Paris and shot dead the Third Secretary[xxix]. This act did indeed generate publicity but it also helped to precipitate the events of *Kristallnacht,* 'the Night of Broken Glass.' Grynszpan had provided Goebbels, Hitler's Chief of Propaganda, with the excuse he needed to launch a pogrom against German Jews in which 91 people were murdered and 26,000 arrested and sent to concentration camps[xxx].

Tippett saw this event as a tragic example of the dilemma we face when confronted by evil. Grynszpan's act was understandable and yet its consequences were disastrous. This begs the question "So what are we supposed to do in such circumstances?" Tippett's answer is pacifist and Jungian, and the oratorio leads us inexorably to this answer.

A brief survey of selected lines from the libretto demonstrates this, and shows how the idea of seasonal change mirroring collective psychological change, that Tippett found in a poem of Wilfred Owen, is combined with Frazer's ideas about the scapegoat and the Jungian concept of seeking wholeness through knowing both darkness and light.

The oratorio begins: 'The world turns on its dark side. It is winter.' It finishes with the words: 'The moving waters renew the earth. It is spring.' During this journey from darkness to light, Grynszpan emerges as the everyman protagonist: 'A star rises in midwinter. Behold the man! The scapegoat! The child of our time.'

Soon, however, we realise that Grynszpan is fated: 'His other self rises in him, demonic and destructive. He shoots the official – But he shoots only his dark brother – And see – he is dead.'....'The cold deepens. The world descends into the icy waters where lies the jewel of great price.' By now the oratorio is dealing with two levels – the individual and the collective. The Nazi shot by Grynszpan is controversially depicted as his 'dark brother', and the act of killing him deepens the collective darkness in which – crucially – Tippett suggests there lies something positive: 'the jewel of great price.'

Part Three of the oratorio continues: 'The soul of man is impassioned like a woman. She is old as the earth, beyond good and evil, the sensual garments. Her face will be illumined like the sun. Then is the time of his deliverance. The words of wisdom are these: Winter cold means inner warmth, the secret nursery of the seed. How shall we have patience for the consummation of the mystery? Who will comfort us in the going through? Patience is born in the tension of loneliness. The garden lies beyond the desert.'...

These extraordinary and inspired words are soon followed by Grynszpan singing what Tippett called the motto of the oratorio: 'I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole.' which provokes the Bass response: 'Then courage, brother, dare the grave passage', and the soprano's response: 'Here is no final grieving, but an abiding hope'. The Alto then sings the final words of Tippett's text: 'The moving waters renew the earth. It is spring.' And then the whole work ends with the last of five Negro Spirituals: 'Deep River, my home is over Jordan.'

Tippett's stroke of genius had been to incorporate five spirituals in the oratorio which create memorable and haunting moments between the less easily absorbed music of his own composition. One of his reasons for choosing these were his belief that despite their being Christian, they conveyed a generalised sense of spirituality which could be appreciated by listeners of any or no faith.

To structure the oratorio he utilised the scheme used by Handel in his Messiah, of having three parts: the first prophetic, the second narrative, and the final part meditative and metaphysical. In this way the audience is moved from the general to the particular, and back to the general – the cosmic even. So in the first section no mention is made of the particular – the child of our time. Instead the scene is set: 'We are lost, we are as seed before the wind. We are carried to the great slaughter...' In the second section Grynszpan's story is told: his mother sings to him of her suffering, as a result 'the boy becomes desperate in his agony', he shoots the diplomat, *Kristallnach*t ensues and he sings from his prison: 'My dreams are all shattered in a ghastly reality.'

The final section begins with the 'Words of wisdom' already quoted and the boy is mentioned only briefly: 'He, too, is outcast, his manhood broken in the clash of powers. God overpowered him – the child of our time.' Despite the awfulness of the story, its apparent hopelessness, the oratorio finishes with an 'abiding hope' as 'the moving waters renew the earth', and the spiritual asks us: 'O, don't you want to go, to that gospel feast, that promised land, that land where all is peace?'

Despite the controversial implications of the libretto, with its fundamentally alchemical ideas, the oratorio's powerful evocation of the horrors of mass hatred, and its equally powerful evocation of hope and peace, meant that it met with appreciative audiences as soon as it was performed[xxxi]. As Europe emerged out of the chaos of war it was a monument to the suffering that had occurred, but at the same time it opened the listener to the possibility of rebirth - the promised land. As a result it has become Tippett's most frequently played work.

No commentator failed to notice the significance when the spirituals from the oratorio were performed on the last night of the Proms in London's Albert Hall just after 9/11 on September 17th 2001, and again when the entire work opened the first night of the Proms on 15th July 2005, just a few days and a few miles away from the London tube bombings. As Tippett said: "It is I, who, when I hear the piece, go back to those terrible events, the rise of Hitler and the concentration camps; but younger people find in the piece, as equally terrible, a relevance to today. When I wrote the work, I was so engulfed in the actions of the period, I never considered its frightening prophetic quality. But it seems that the growing violence springing out of divisions of nation, race, religion, status, colour, or even just rich and poor is possibly the deepest present threat to the social fabric of all human society.[xxxii]" *A Child of Our Time* had achieved the goal of all art – to transcend particularities of time and place to become universally relevant.

'You shall say: I am a child of earth and of starry heaven'

During the seven years following the end of the war Tippett set to work writing and composing his first opera. He had begun work tentatively on it several years before in the 40s, but it was from 1946 to 1952 that he focussed on this work that he first entitled *Aurora Consurgens* or *The Laughing Children*. The Latin title refers to a 13th century alchemical treatise discussed by Jung[xxxiii], the English one is an allusion to Eliot's *Four Quartets*, in which - in *Burnt Norton* - we read:

> Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
> Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.

Everywhere the theme of the child follows Tippett: from the days of his youth when he was struck by the plight of near-starving children, to his being moved by the account of the seventeen year old Grynszpan. And so his next opera provisionally carries the title *The Laughing Children* and its motto, which Tippett takes from the 4th century Orphic Tablets reads: 'You shall say: I am a child of earth and of starry heaven'. This interest in the idea of the child, is no mere romanticism or regressive tendency – the depth of his thought can be seen when we read of how, as he incubated the idea of *A Child of Our Time*, he was interested in the way the once universally accepted image of the Christ-child seemed to have lost its emotive power[xxxiv].

In the end, though, Tippett dropped the title and moved his attention away from what Druids would term the Mabon, the archetype of the divine child, to focus instead on what makes the child – on the moment of union between masculine and feminine. The initial alchemical title, *Aurora Consurgens*, although later dropped too, provides us with the clue that this is indeed an opera about the Great Work.

The action begins in a clearing in the wood. It is a sacred place, with a temple nearby and a stairway to the Upperworld, and a cave that leads to the Underworld. Here otherworldly beings, and their music and dances, appear. It is truly a sacred grove which connects the three worlds. Kemp describes it as 'a clearing in a wood [which] suggests an ancient magic circle within which the sacred ritual could be enacted safe from outside interference[xxxv].' The sacred ritual is none other than the Great Rite, in which the Mystical Marriage is consummated.

Just as contemporary Druids sometimes combine the earlier pre or proto-Druidic image of a stone circle with that of the Druidic *nemeton* (sacred grove) - to the extent of placing stones in a circle within their forest clearings - so does Tippett add to the opening setting of a woodland clearing the idea of 'ruins and stones silhouetted against the sky'. Kemp says: 'Tippett obviously wanted his [stage]directions to lead to the mythology behind them, but it is difficult to see how allusions to Stonehenge can be avoided if they are to be observed reasonably faithfully.[xxxvi]'

With the scene set, the opera begins to weave its spell. It is a long opera - just over three hours - and the entire action can be seen as a dream. Tippett's final

choice of title reinforces this, with its allusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Midsummer is traditionally a time when the inner and outer worlds can mingle, and the entire action takes place on the day of the summer solstice - which forges another association with Stonehenge whose summer solstice alignment is widely known.

Tippett means us to understand the dream not as something insubstantial and unreal, but quite the opposite: as a voyage into the Unconscious to be renewed by its healing power. The action clearly takes place 'out of time' or in 'dream time'. Although it starts on midsummer morning and takes us through a night to morning again, we cannot be totally sure whether it is the same morning or the following day. As the opera moves to its finale the chorus sings: 'Was it a vision?/Was it a dream? /In the fading moonlight what shall be seen?' What is seen is a repeat of the beginning of the opera – with the two lovers meeting in the clearing in the morning, but this time dressed for their wedding. In the intervening vision or dream we have travelled through midsummer's day, and have witnessed the setting of the sun and the rising moon, as the chorus has sung to us: 'When the midsummer sun goes down/Down the long tunnel to the east/And the moon at the full, the White Goddess starts/Her airborne journey to the west at night.'

What has taken place? What is this dream that took Tippett over seven years to fashion in word and music? It is quite simply the biggest dream we can have - the dream of the soul for divine union - the dream known by the alchemists as the Great Work - the achievement of the Mystical Marriage.

To emphasize the idea that the whole action of the opera might occur in a dream, Peter Hall's production for the Chicago Lyric placed the protagonist Mark in bed during a part of a ritual dance. Photo courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

In the Bardic Grade teachings of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, we take the story of Ceridwen and Taliesin as a tale which depicts this Great Work symbolically, and by immersing ourselves in it and exploring its depth and resonances for us, we attempt to achieve the Great Work ourselves - or at least to walk a little further upon the path towards wholeness. Tippett, I believe, is trying to achieve exactly the same end with his opera - he is trying to immerse us in a drama that allows us to move a little closer towards a 'reconciliation of the opposites' - towards greater self-knowledge and a sense of wholeness. In this way he is continuing the project that he started with *A Child of Our Time*. There he finished his oratorio by enjoining us to know our Shadow and our Light. Here, in *A Midsummer Marriage*, he takes us on a journey to do just this.

ACT ONE - Morning

And so the opera begins with the two central figures, Mark and Jenifer (whom we can take as representatives of our inner Masculine and Feminine natures) exploring the worlds of darkness and light. Mark arrives in the clearing thinking they will soon be married, but instead they argue and Jenifer decides to climb up the stairway saying: "For me, the light! For you the shadow! O magic staircase that I've always known in dreams since childhood at my mother's knee, at last, at last I set my feet upon the stairway to heaven. Up, up I climb to paradise."

Just as later in the ritual dances it is the Feminine principle which leads, so here at the beginning of the journey, it is Jenifer who takes the lead. Mark responds by going down into the cave whose entrance is also in the sacred grove, saying: "Then let me go to darkness as she told me. For her the light! For me, the shadow! Gates I have always longed to enter, open to receive your child."

Notice how both protagonists evoke their childhood and the inner yearning they have felt for these realms: the Masculine (traditionally associated with light and the Conscious) for the shadows and the depths; the Feminine (traditionally associated with darkness and the Unconscious) for the heights and Light. From the very beginning of the opera this yearning of the Opposites for each other is evoked: the Conscious for the Unconscious, the inner Masculine for the inner Feminine, and vice versa[xxxvii].

The yearning is evoked and then immediately acted upon. The journey has begun! Jenifer ascends to explore her opposite principle, Mark descends to explore his. In alchemical treatises the Masculine principle was usually depicted as King, and the Feminine as Queen, so to reinforce the idea that we are witnessing an alchemical operation, Tippet - proud of his Cornish and Celtic roots - named the protagonists

after royalty: King Mark, and Jenifer as the Anglicised version of Queen Guinevere (Gwenhwyfar).

Staying with the theme of royalty, Jenifer's father is called King Fisher and is clearly the Fisher King of the grail legend, who represents both woundedness and sterility - and the old order which must die to allow the new one to emerge. He appears on the scene: he doesn't want her to marry Mark and is determined to prevent this. He tries to force open the gates to the underworld cavern which closed behind Mark. He is warned off by two mysterious figures, the He-Ancient and the She-Ancient, who tell him that 'the gates are strange, and open only for the proper people.' And of course, not being the 'proper person' he fails to open them, just as we fail to penetrate the depths, the mysteries, if we approach them wrongly.

By now we have been confronted with three pairs of male and female: the alchemical King and Queen who will unite at the end of the work, the Ancients who represent the guardians of the Otherworld, and Jack & Bella - King Fisher's assistants who, echoing Papageno and Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, represent Everyman and woman. Whereas the story of Mark and Jenifer represents the process of Jungian individuation, or alchemical union, John Lloyd Davies suggests that the parallel story of Jack and Bella represents the growth of social maturity: 'During the opera they change from being the unquestioning servants of King Fisher to responsible adults who decide their own future and that of their children.'[xxxviii]

Act One ends with all three couples on stage. Mark has emerged from the cave, Jenifer has descended the staircase. She takes a mirror to show Mark his 'True Self' that hides beneath the mask (the *persona*): 'See by a heavenly magic in this glass, the fearful face behind the mask.' They have become polarised - Jenifer is fully identified with the Light and believes she can see the demonic 'dark' Mark hiding behind the mask of his personality. She moves 'slowly and triumphantly across the stage' holding the magic mirror out towards Mark: 'Look as I bring it near you, look, Mark, that you may see the truth. Are you so easy shamed to turn aside?' And in a display typical of the hubris of the Conscious cries out 'exultant': 'Ah, what a triumph for the right!'

Jenifer sings to Mark holding the mirror in Act I, with the He-Ancient and stairway in the background. Photo courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

Relating this to the everyday, the couple has clearly moved from the first stage of being in love (the phase of romantic idealisation) to that second most difficult phase of seeing each other's worst characteristics (the *Nigredo* in alchemical terms). In viewing the mirror Mark is unrepentant. He is equally sure he sees rightly, and says: 'Did I not learn magic too from all that happened in the cave? Here I take this golden branch whose vital virtue now lets me turn in power. Jenifer, prepare to see your mirror - fall.'

She is furious: 'What an evil devil's stroke!' And as the Act ends they take the next step towards individuation: she descends into the cave, while Mark ascends up the stairway. Just before doing this Jenifer says: 'Are you a serpent, I become a saint? Then am I Mark, and go to find the beast.' They are determined to explore the extremes, to experience to the full the mystery of human consciousness - that it is both bestial and divine.

The chorus concludes the act by singing 'Let Mark and Jenifer endure for us the perils of the royal way. We are the laughing children.' Tippett has managed to mention here his original title for the opera, and succeeds too in evoking both alchemy and Freud. The alchemical process has been termed the 'royal way' and Freud termed the analysis of dreams the 'royal road' to understanding the unconscious, and as noted earlier, the whole action of this opera can be interpreted as a dream.

From the point of view of the contemporary Druid, or of anyone interested in studying the opera for clues about how they should proceed along the path of self-development, this first act has much to say.

David Cornfield, in *When Masculine met Feminine*[xxxix], summarises the process that Tippett's opera is depicting, and that starts at the very beginning of Act One, in this way: 'In many mystical traditions, divinity is seen as a unity that differentiates itself into the masculine/feminine polarity. The mystical experience of enlightenment is symbolized by the sacred marriage, the coming together of the masculine and the feminine to reclaim the unity which is divinity. The chemistry that draws masculine and feminine together can be seen as a spiritual yearning to return to divinity. The journey that re-unites the masculine and the feminine is one that takes place on both the inner and the outer planes. A change on the inner plane is very quickly reflected in your outer relationship and a change in the way you deal with your partner has its counterpart in your inner life. Embark on this dual journey, for at the end of the road lies not only a relationship that works, but also spiritual fulfilment.'

We often imagine that an outer marriage will in itself bring us that fulfilment, but the opera begins with the necessary but difficult realisation that the need for the inner marriage in the final analysis has supremacy over the need for the outer one. It is Jenifer who realises this - the representative of the so-called feminine qualities of

intuition, feelings and the Unconscious senses this need for inner spiritual union, whereas Mark, the representative of the so-called masculine qualities of reason and external preoccupations is unaware of it.

The first lesson, then, suggests how we should prioritise our lives. And it is the lesson that was carved over the gateway to the temple at Delphi: 'Know Thyself'. By angrily rejecting Mark's urging to marry and instead ascending the stairway, Jenifer is saying 'First I have to know myself better.'

And this is the realisation that spiritual seekers have by definition grasped. They have begun this journey. They are seeking enlightenment by seeking the Light. But later the realisation comes that this isn't enough. As Jung says: 'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.[xi]" Jenifer and Mark must explore both light and dark.

Unlike certain spiritual approaches which stress always the Light, and which are fearful of the darkness, Druids - in common with pagan, shamanic, and Jungian approaches - understand the need to explore the depths as well as the heights, and Tippet displays these two realms for us as cave and stairway. A Druid might say that as well as dwelling in the forest sanctuary of their sacred grove, they must explore the mountain-top and the cave's depths too. The journey begins by accepting a model of reality or consciousness that is fundamentally shamanic - that of three levels: the Lower World, the Middle World and the Upper World. And it was the tree in Norse and Saxon mythology which united these realms and which makes Tippett's choice of a forest grove so meaningful. Jenifer and Mark explore the roots and branches of the world tree before finally marrying in the Middle World.

Assagioli's Psychosynthesis offers a further clarification: our consciousness is seen as existing on three levels - waking consciousness as the Middle World is connected both to a Lower Unconscious, or subconscious, and an Upper Unconscious or superconscious. The path to wholeness requires an exploration of both the lower and upper realms.

Rather than being presented as a purely psychological work that needs doing, though, Tippett recognises the fundamentally spiritual nature of this task, by having - from the very start - guardians of the Otherworld present. These are the He & She-Ancient and their troupe of dancers. Mark says of them: 'I don't know who they really are, but I've seen them since my boyhood. I've come here on summer nights and mornings such as these. Then is the temple nearer. They are close, and if I wait eventually they appear. I call them the Ancients...' In other words they are not incarnated human beings, but beings from another plane, the Invisible or Spiritual Otherworld that is recognised by Druidry and all spiritual paths, but not by materialistic science.

The scene is set: the three worlds in a spiritual context that recognises the existence of another dimension. And then the 'work' begins and there are two important features to note. Firstly that it requires the aspirant to explore the territory of their contrasexual self. Secondly that in order to do this they may well have to accept conflict initially rather than harmony.

The contrasexual self is that gendered aspect of ourselves which seems the opposite of our everyday self. In other words if our waking self is 'feminine', then our contrasexual self will be 'masculine', and will appear in dreams as male and may also symbolise to us our soul, or inner self. Likewise if we are generally 'masculine' in our outlook and consciousness, then our contrasexual self will be feminine. The Jungian terms applied to the contrasexual self are *animus* for the masculine and *anima* for the feminine, and it is often assumed that if we are physically of one gender, then our contrasexual self will automatically be of the opposite gender. In other words all men will have a feminine *anima* in their unconscious, while all women will have an *animus*. It seems more reasonable to suppose that whilst this might generally be the case, a particularly 'feminine' man would in fact be in possession of an *animus* as a contrasexual self, just as a 'masculine' woman would possess an *anima*, rather than an *animus*.

Until the spiritual quest, or at least the quest for greater self-knowledge, is begun we tend to be unaware of our contrasexual self. Instead it appears in our dreams or we project its image outward on to another and fall in love with this image. Our outer self is seeking union with our inner self - our personality with our soul - but it acts out this search in the outer world rather than pursuing it in the inner world.

An important step on the spiritual path occurs when we become aware of the need to seek this inner union: to stop projecting the image of the *animus* or *anima* outward, and to go in search of it within instead. And this is exactly what Jenifer has realised at the beginning of Act One, which is why she says 'Today there'll be no wedding....I must go further...It isn't love I want, but truth.'

We could expand this to suggest that what Jenifer has intuited is the message which says "As long as you think you will find truth in another person you will delay your self-realisation. No guru, no lover, no wedding will satisfy the inner longing you experience. Only the inner quest will do this, and you must begin by exploring your opposite, that which is unconscious, unknown."

If we compare the opera to the Bardic training course of the Order of Bards Ovates & Druids, we discover startling parallels. In the course we are urged to create the scene that opens Act One in our inner world: a sacred grove. We are taught to be respectful of the guardians of the inner realms, and the He & She-Ancient can be said to be present at the beginning of our training in the initiation ceremony, just as they are present at the beginning of Mark & Jenifer's story.

Later in the training we are urged to visit the 'sacred summit', and we visit the cave too by entering into the story of Taliesin to experience his cave-like initiations in the womb of Ceridwen and in the leather bag or coracle that floats upon the sea. The exploration of the opposites is carried out sequentially - through working with the figures of Afaggdu and Creirwy - the 'dark and light twins', and then Morda and Gwion representing inner and outer worlds, age and youth.

In a more generalised sense we embark on a voyage that will help us to come to know our contrasexual self. If that is our *anima*, then the so-called feminine

qualities of sensitivity and intuition will be awoken on this journey, and we will find the training evoking new depths in us. If instead it is our *animus*, then we will find the course educating us, stretching our minds and helping us to engage the world more effectively.

All of this will not necessarily make for a 'smooth ride' however. And if this first act of *The Midsummer Marriage* offers any guidance it suggests that progress often results from conflict. In seeking the greater harmony we must risk initial disharmony; opening ourselves to the 'bigger story' of our lives may mean we have to assert ourselves against opposition, perhaps prioritising our needs before our partner's and so on. We need courage to 'dare the grave passage' - as the chorus says at the end of *A Child of Our Time.*

ACT TWO – Afternoon

In the initiatory journey offered in the Order's Bardic training we move from an exploration of the opposites to undergoing a four-fold process that carries us through an experience of each of the four elements. In traditional 'secret societies' or mystery schools such a process was often depicted as an ordeal or trial - and so, for example, in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* we see Tamino and Pamina going through the ordeal of fire and water with the help of a magic flute, which was carved by Pamina's father from an ancient oak tree.

In the Order's training the process is seen not so much as an ordeal as a journey of education and deepening in the qualities associated with each element. The story which we use as a mythical framework in which to take this journey is supremely appropriate for a Bardic training because it is a tale about how a young man or boy becomes the finest poet in the land - the greatest Bard of Britain - Taliesin.

At the heart of this tale is a chase in which the young boy, Gwion, is pursued by his employer, the formidable Ceridwen, who shape-shifts from greyhound to otter, to hawk then hen, before she finally captures the boy and swallows him.

The tale, found in twenty different manuscript versions dating from the sixteenth century, but clearly of earlier origin, is filled with mythical, psychological and literary resonances, and offers an extraordinarily powerful vehicle for spiritual growth when explored as a teaching tale that can be entered into and experienced in the soul and the imagination.

Michael Tippett clearly realised this, and made the chase between Ceridwen and Gwion the centrepiece of his opera. Act Two begins with Bella asking Jack to

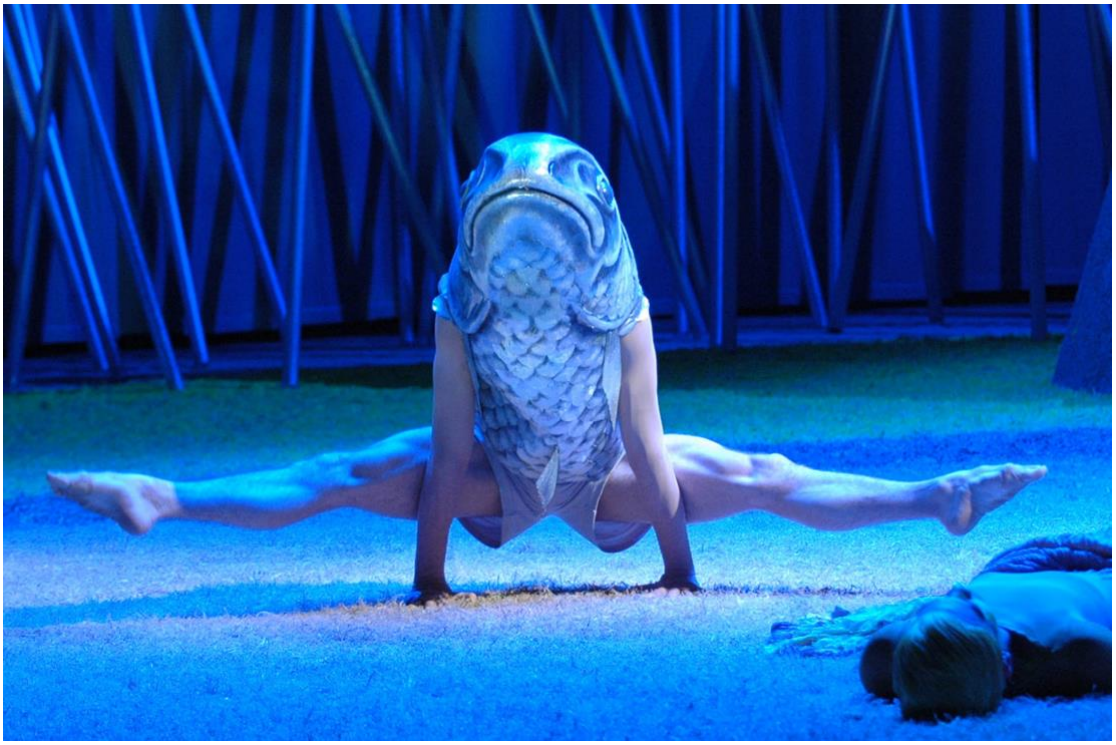
marry her. This detail follows a pattern: Ceridwen takes the lead in the Taliesin story by telling Gwion he must work for her, and then later chasing him. Jenifer takes the lead in starting the quest by delaying marriage and ascending the staircase. Act Two opens with the chorus singing 'In the summer season on the longest day of all...She must leap and he must fall...' And then our 'everyday' couple appears and the woman takes the lead once more.

Once Jack has agreed to marry, he and Bella sing a duet that echoes the famous 'Mann und weib' and 'Kleine Papagena' duets between Papageno and Papagena in *The Magic Flute*: 'And so as girl - and man - we come – together....For soon - there'll be - a little Jack - or little Bella...'

This brief light moment serves as a prelude to the ritual dances which take up most of this next act. In the first dance, entitled *The Earth in Autumn*, a female dancer dressed as a hound chases a male dancer dressed as a hare. The hound is Ceridwen, which means 'Bent White One', which suggests that she is a Moon Goddess. The hare is the young initiate: the poet-to-be Gwion Bach.

Photos courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

In the second dance, entitled *The Waters in Winter*, Ceridwen has become an otter, and she chases Gwion who has turned into a salmon:



Photos courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

In this second dance, Tippett adds a detail to the original story - the fish is wounded in trying to escape. And now in the third dance, *The Air in Spring*, the male dancer appears as a bird with a broken wing. The female dancer has become a hawk, and at the end of this dance she descends on him. The stage directions tell us that: 'He makes one last attempt to fly, but falls utterly exhausted. He does not move when the Hawk descends. The stage darkens nearly to black-out.'

Photos courtesy of Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric Opera

There is one more ritual dance to come but this must wait for the final act, since it represents the culmination of the alchemical and psycho-spiritual process the opera is depicting. Instead Act Two ends symmetrically: Jack and Bella have been watching the dances, and when the hawk pounces on the wounded bird she screams, then sings 'Ah! They'll kill him! Take me away. Take me away. I can't bear it.'

Jack reassures her it 'was only play' and Bella tells him she 'wasn't born for all these mysteries.' With yet further symmetry the act ends with a mirror, as did Act One. But this time it is a mundane device that mirrors not the hidden self but the mask. In a satire on the quest for the 'real self', Bella combs her hair and applies make-up, asking Jack to 'hold the glass now, then you'll see how the real Bella's made.' Whereas Mark and Jenifer's search for the Real needed a certain determination and even harshness - involving separation and an exploration of the Shadow and what is hidden behind the mask of the personality - here all is sweetness and light as surface, not depth, is sought. Like Papageno and Papagena who are not ready to seek deeper meaning, Jack and Bella's priorities revolve around earning a living, building a home and raising children.

In this second act the radical difference between the journeys of the two couples becomes highly contrasted. The audience might be tempted to feel some supercilious satisfaction in observing the superficiality of Bella's inability to face the 'dark' side of life, as manifested in the third dance, and her denial and naivety in turning immediately to a preoccupation with her appearance. But Tippett seems to be making a much more important point. Couples have a choice in whether they focus on building a family and establishing themselves in the 'mundane' world, or whether they - as individuals and ideally also as a couple - strive towards a deeper

union within themselves and with each other, and some might say also with Deity. Neither the exteriorised nor the interiorised goal is 'superior', and in the real world both objectives can be pursued simultaneously, but in *The Magic Flute* and *The Midsummer Marriage* their creators have chosen to present us with two couples who act out these different goals for us separately.

In many ways these varying goals equate with the two halves of life. Until mid-life we tend to focus on establishing ourselves in the world - building our careers and homes, and often fulfilling the biological imperative that ensures the continuation of the species. Having done this, we can turn - in the second half of life - towards the more inner task which Jung has termed Individuation, and which in alchemical terms is known as the Mystical Marriage or Chemical Wedding.

In reality, though, many young people are concerned with the inner quest, and Jung's suggestion that analysis for Individuation should wait until the second half of life seems too unilateral. Even so, we ignore developmental stages at our peril and too much inner searching at an early age can sometimes indicate avoidance, in the same way that too much focus on 'outer establishment' can indicate this in the second half of life.

Jack & Bella act out for us the needs of the first half of life, while Mark and Jenifer are driven by the needs of the second. But what other insights can we gain from this second act? Most of the act is taken up with three of the four ritual dances. Tippett derived these dances from one of the most powerful stories of Welsh folklore, and they act as the medium which conveys the central drama of his work. If we agree with commentators who say that the opera is an initiation, then we must say that the initiation is conferred during the performance of these dances.

The chase that occurs through these dances is a chase around the wheel of the year - through the four seasons and their corresponding elements. These match the four Jungian functions of Sensation, Intuition, Thought and Feeling, and in the training of the Order we use the metaphor of the chase as a means of exploring and developing these functions, and as a way of exploring the seasonal cycle and the power of the four elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Within this fourfold pattern of the chase between Ceridwen and Taliesin, the eternal dance of duality - between God and Goddess, Yin and Yang, Force and Form - is acted out for us. And what is the climax, the purpose, of this chase-that-is-a-dance? At first sight it seems a chase to the death - which is why Bella screams at the end of the third dance. But in reality it is a chase towards new life - towards sexual union and the married state in an everyday sense for Mark and Jenifer, but symbolically towards birth, towards a climax that will result in cosmic terms in the creation of a new world, and in human terms towards the rebirth of the Self, a significant maturation of Soul or character (or put in a simpler way 'to make one a better person').

Already in *A Child of Our Time*, Tippet had explored the relationship between Light and Dark, suffering and redemption, and here, with the chase sequence of the

Taliesin tale he recognised a story capable of conveying the paradoxical relationship between death and life, pain and pleasure, woundedness and wholeness. Tippett clearly grasped this, since he chose to emphasise this Cheiron theme by showing the bird as wounded in the third dance. And in the Royal Opera House 2005 production the director Graham Vick and choreographer Ron Howell chose to emphasise this too - with the female dancers acting as dominatrices forcefully hurling the male dancers about the stage and pulling them by their neck-ties.

If we are being initiated into the Mysteries, though, we will have to wait until we have survived the equally masochistic experience of an interval in the crush-bar before experiencing the fourth and final phase of the initiation in the last act.

ACT THREE - Evening and Night

The chase that was begun in Act Two is compelling because of its inherent aggression. The seed gives birth to a plant or tree because it is cracked open at the coldest time of year. Conception occurs because one being is penetrated by another. As Jean Houston says in *The Search for the Beloved*: 'An abundance of sacred wounding marks the core of all great Western myths and their attending gods and humans... As seed making begins with the wounding of the ovum by sperm, so does soulmaking begin with the wounding of the psyche by the Larger Story. *Soulmaking requires that you die to one story to be reborn to a larger one.* A renaissance, a rebirth, occurs not just because there is a rising of ancient and archetypal symbols. A renaissance happens because the soul is breached.'[xli]

Here, in the aggression of the chase and in the subsequent wounding, is the source of the dramatic tension and the discomfort we experience as we watch the dances unfold. It was too much for Bella, and it will prove far too much for King Fisher.

The fourth sequence of the chase corresponds to the season of Autumn, and hence the harvest and evening. The final Act opens with exactly these themes - it is sunset and the chorus is celebrating the day's end 'at sundown... with bread, the fishes and the wine,' which are of course reminiscent of the Jesus story and prepare us for the sacrificial death that is to come.

King Fisher appears on stage determined to regain his daughter, and after speaking to the He-Ancient and She-Ancient whom he believes are keeping her, summons a clairvoyant, Madame Sosostris (familiar to many as the clairvoyant in

T.S.Eliot's *Wasteland*) who is carried in on a throne. This is in fact a trick, and beneath a mask, green cloak and conical hat sits Jack, who is presumably going to prophesy in such a way as to gain Jenifer's release. The chorus sings: "See! Where we carry on our mighty shoulder the Sphinx and the Sibyl rolled in one. Behold the Oracle!"

But Jack is unable to carry out the ruse. Bella rushes from the crowd to embrace him and he gets up, allowing the disguise to fall from him. This farcical moment creates the perfect light relief to contrast against the bizarre and solemn apparition that is then revealed.

Tippett at this moment introduces an extraordinary device which undoubtedly presents an interesting challenge to any opera company and its props department. A gong is sounded and the chorus lowers the flags and banners or branches they have been holding to disguise the entrance and positioning of, in Tippett's words, 'a huge contraption of black veils of roughly human shape, though much more than life-size.' Inside this contraption is the real Sosostris, veiled, with Mark and Jenifer hidden beneath or behind her.

King Fisher immediately asks the seer 'to use your visionary powers to see my daughter where she is, that I, sustained by your device, may go to succour her and set her free.'

Sosostris obliges by scrying in a crystal bowl and recounting her vision to an infuriated King Fisher: ' I see a meadow, fragrant with flowers, and someone walking there - a girl... Fragrant as a flower herself she opens her body to the sun.' Tippett now builds on this imagery which is classically alchemical: 'But now a lion - a winged and royal lion - enters the flowered field, moving with majesty towards the girl...As the beast rears rampant, now I see the face is human...The glorious lion of love, with symbol erect he...' King Fisher can take no more, he grabs the bowl from her and flings it into the wings. He orders Jack to rip away the veil that shrouds Sosostris, but at this moment Jack becomes his own man, saying 'Young though I am, this is my choice. I choose to put away disguise. I choose to strip the veils not from Sosostris but from myself.' He rejects King Fisher and turns to Bella singing 'Bella, riding on the great wave's crest, I call.' And they exit to begin their life together freed from the grip of their tyrannical employer.

King Fisher, undaunted, starts to rip the veils from Sosostris himself as the chorus sings 'Look, the sacred veils are flying, torn by King Fisher's violent hand. Black snow flung up against the moon, darkening further the darkest hour.'

This phrase suggests we are at the nadir of the solstice and it is precisely at this moment that the death and rebirth of the sun occur. As King Fisher is about to remove the last veil the prop makers' skills are revealed - the 'huge contraption' begins to glow, and the veil falls of itself, revealing an incandescent bud. King Fisher draws back as this bud starts to open. As Tippett describes: 'The stage is now dark...as the bud opens. When the bud is fully open like huge lotus petals on the stage, there is still a gauze over the inner shrine. The Chorus turns away and the

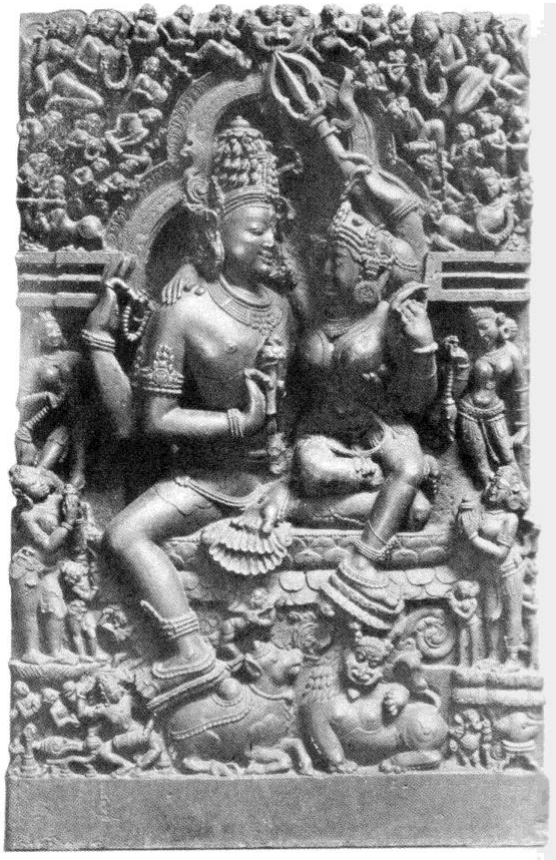
gauze falls before the radiant transfiguration, in reds and gold, of Mark and Jenifer posed in mutual contemplation. The open petals of the bud form a circle on the ground. Sosostris has vanished.'

The sight of his daughter seated with Mark in this way is too much for King Fisher. He raises his gun crying 'Jenifer, I free you.' But instead of freeing her of her lover, he frees her of her dominating father since he dies of a heart attack before he can pull the trigger. King Fisher's body is covered with Sosostris' veils and is carried off-stage. With him out of the way, the fourth dance begins. Strephon the dancer emerges and twirls a pointed stick within a wooden block in front of the united pair, who are then instructed in the stage directions to relax their compassionate pose and 'assume one of increasing vigour and ecstasy.'

At the 'darkest hour' Tippett reveals an extraordinary daring. He interprets the Taliesin story as a story about the primal union of God and Goddess, and whereas the story depicts this union symbolically in the final sequence of the chase as a hen eating a grain of wheat to become pregnant, Tippett chooses to 'unmask' Ceridwen-as-hen to show her as Goddess-Moon-Queen, and to unveil Gwion Bach-as-seed to reveal him as the God-Lion-Sun-King.

If Tippett had created his opera today he might have been tempted to reveal at this moment Jenifer and Mark naked and sexually coupled, since this is clearly the meaning he wished to convey. As he said in his autobiography, the public copulation to fertilise the fields in Naomi Mitchison's *The Corn King and The Spring Queen*[xlii], 'had a big influence on the final Ritual Dance in *The Midsummer Marriage*.'[xliii]

But his creative instincts married with the restraint of his era produced a less provocative, and perhaps in the end more effective result. To reveal these two figures as Goddess and God, Tippett turned to images from Indian mythology. Tippett's notes to the stage directions indicate his intention: 'In Indian mythology, Mark and Jenifer would be transfigured as Shiva-Shakti (Shiva and Parvati). All their gestures and poses are heiratic.' He was particularly influenced by Heinrich Zimmer's *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*[xliv], and when he specifies that in the first pose 'the outside of Jenifer's right leg is resting on the inside of Mark's left thigh, as they are seated facing the audience, but with their heads turned to each other,' his biographer Ian Kemp notes that this suggests a 10th century Bengalese relief of Shiva-Shakti depicted in Zimmer's book, and shown below. Critics at the time accused Tippett of jumbling together ideas from Wales and India, ignorant of the uncanny connections that exist between the



mythologies at each extreme of the Indo-European arc.

And so from observing the chase of two animals across the Welsh landscape we come to see the Goddess Parvati seated beside her consort Shiva, gazing into his eyes with the desire that will give birth to worlds. In the relief shown in Zimmer's book, the figures are naked except for jewellery. Future productions would do well to follow suit, since much of the symbolism is lost when the figures are clothed, even when Tippett's directions are followed and Strephon is shown making fire by rubbing a stick on a block - to reinforce the message that we are to understand this image sexually. However much this symbolism has been conveyed in previous productions, the figures standing above in their priest-like robes exude no sexual dynamism at all, as we can see from this photograph of the Chicago Lyric's 2005 production.

photo courtesy Dan Rest/Chicago Lyric

When the stage directions instruct Mark and Jenifer to relax their compassionate pose and 'assume one of increasing vigour and ecstasy,' Tippett gives no further hint as to what they must do. But turning to Zimmer's book provides the clue. The image next to that of the Bengali relief is a statue of the God and Goddess united in a tantric embrace, and shown below. Tippett was surely wishing to suggest a similar image but felt restrained by convention from elaborating beyond the suggestion of 'vigour and ecstasy'.

Freed of such constraints, a modern production might have Jenifer turning from being seated side by side, to mount her consort as in Zimmer's illustration.

As God and Goddess move with increasing vigour and ecstasy so too does the music and the libretto. The music swells and roils with trumpets and drums while the chorus shouts: 'Fire! Fire!' and Mark and Jenifer proceed to sing about Sirius, blood, sperm, and fertility. Slowly the lotus petals close around them, until we no longer see them, and the Ancients sing a verse that is perhaps the most profound in all the opera: "From heavenly One the Two divide/And three as Paraclete can make/Symbolic union with the Four,/The messenger, the path, the door/Between the light and dark, the guide./Wonder! Praise! Rejoice exceedingly!"

Here Tippett reveals his true colours. He sees sexuality as both divine and human, as a cause for celebration, not denial. He brings the sexual act to centre-stage and displays it to us as the central mystery, just as Gerald Gardner did when he suggested that the central mystery of his new/old religion of Wicca should be a Great Rite in which the High Priest and High Priestess would ritually make love in the semi-public context of a coven working (even though this is apparently a rarity in contemporary Wicca, since it is most often depicted symbolically in the union of a chalice and a ritual knife - the athame - and if it ever does occur, coven members will usually either turn to face outside the circle or will leave the circle to return *post coitum*.)

But let us not be distracted by a scene whose potential was so shocking to Jenifer's father that he died. As the music suggests the outpouring of energy that occurs after a couple climax, the secret is given to us: 'The messenger, the path, the door/Between the light and dark, the guide.'

Tippett has returned to his favourite message - that if we will be guided we can walk the path that denies neither light nor dark, that mysteriously weaves its Middle Way between the opposites to arrive at the door of the Mysteries - there to meet, perhaps, the Messenger of the Gods: to receive the divine message, the creative impulse, the seed of inspiration - Awen as it is known in the Druid tradition.

Tippett now wants the 'huge contraption' to burst into flames: 'the veiled mass glows from within and breaks into flame.' The production that I have seen avoided this extravagant finale but managed nevertheless to convey the required emotion as the chorus brought the opera towards its close by singing 'Let us go down the hill with joy to the bounteous life of this midsummer day.'

Summary - The Great Work & The Great Rite

In old alchemical illustrations, a King and Queen are sometimes depicted together naked in a glass retort. Burne-Jones, in the painting that is shown on the cover of this essay, uses a similar motif to display the Divine Feminine and Masculine. In the *Aurora Consurgens*, which inspired Tippett with the initial title for his opera, we see a related image of a male and female fused together. In Eastern iconography the image of the God and Goddess united was considered an image of great sacredness.

One understanding of alchemy suggests that the alchemist achieved illumination by observing the changes that occurred in the alchemical retort as the *prima materia* was heated. At a certain stage, it was said that the alchemist would see a King and Queen copulating. In other words the alchemist would observe the beginning of creation.

In *The Midsummer Marriage* we are led precisely to this point. Tippett takes the name opera at its word and turns his into a demonstration of the alchemical operation - the Great Work - leading us finally to a vision of the primal union of the two forces which bring the world into being. He has led us into the inner sanctum of the Mysteries to observe an act which under normal circumstances it is taboo to witness. But we have been prepared, and our vision is momentary as the lotus petals close upon the vision. A contemporary version of this final scene could afford to be daring, and if done with taste could render this moment compelling, and could redeem a work which is often criticised as obscure.

Where with pornography we ‘see through a glass darkly’, with such an enactment of sacred sexuality the aim is illumination, not titillation. Much of pornography can be seen as a pale reflection, a distortion, of our desire to receive initiation, to witness the birth of creation, to see the God and Goddess moving together in the Divine embrace. With this understanding we can perhaps observe the divine, archetypal root that lies behind the phenomena of voyeurism and exhibitionism. The urge to simply see and be seen, to witness or indeed enact this primal scene is buried beneath layers of narcissism and neurosis, which is then exploited by the vast resources of the pornography industry which draw upon this basic human need to experience the Alchemical Wedding, the Great Rite.

In *The Midsummer Marriage* we have been prepared for this vision through being drawn into the magic circle, the clearing in the wood, just as in witnessing a Tantric or Wiccan rite we must first enter the enchantment of the sacred circle.

The opera ends with celebration after consummation - the marriage which seemed doomed to failure at the beginning has finally been achieved. Whether or

not we ourselves, as the audience, have been transported or confused, initiated or simply puzzled will depend to some extent on the degree to which the production succeeds in conveying Tippett's final daring message.

End Note

Although I have explored the symbology and potential meanings of the opera in some depth I have hardly mentioned the music itself, or even Tippett's own comments about the opera, which he made mainly in an essay in his collection of essays entitled *Moving Into Aquarius*[xlv]. In order to maintain a focus I have even avoided discussing Tippett's idea that the opera is also a comedy. Instead I have chosen to write about what ideas and meaning the opera might be conveying - particularly to those who are interested in the spiritual quest in general, and Druidry in particular. Although some might argue that such analysis detracts from experiencing a work of art, I believe that *The Midsummer Marriage* is so layered, so filled with allusions and quotations, that if we do not try to look deeper than the surface, we risk experiencing it as quite simply incomprehensible, and dismissing it as flawed.

Candidates for initiation into the Mysteries were and are not simply inducted without any preparation. If we are to accept Ian Kemp's suggestion that *The Midsummer Marriage* is not an opera in the conventional sense at all, but an initiation ceremony, a rite of passage, then it follows that to experience it as such, we too must be prepared.

APPENDIX

OPERA AS INITIATION
THE WORK OF SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT

A talk given on 6th November 2005 For 'Seeking the Light: Freemasonry & Initiatic Traditions' - a conference held at the Canonbury Masonic Research Centre, London

We're all here because we're interested in the question of initiation, and many of us will be familiar with a number of initiation ceremonies, systems and techniques. But I'd like to introduce to you today a novel method of initiation. (And it will only be an introduction, unfortunately, because we only have a brief time together). And in doing this I'm going to suggest that you don't need to join a mystery school, you don't need to fast, or eat exotic plants with indigenous shamans in South America, or indeed join your local masonic lodge. All you need to do is turn up at the Royal Opera House one evening over the next few weeks.

Because this year is the centennial of one of Britain's foremost modern composers - Sir Michael Tippett - and the Royal Opera House is putting on a

production of one of his operas - *The Midsummer Marriage* - that, it is claimed, can act as an initiation, a rite of passage in itself.

That is quite a claim - let's explore this and see whether this can really be true.

First let's look at who might be about to initiate us. Let's look at who created the opera: the man, in this case, who wrote both the libretto and the music. Who was Michael Tippett?

Quite simply, along with Benjamin Britten, he was one of the greatest composers of his generation - his lifetime spanning almost the whole of the twentieth century - from 1905 to 1998. From the age of 17 he steadfastly focussed on his desire to become a composer and led a simple life dedicated to his vocation, which resulted in him writing 5 operas, 4 symphonies, 4 Concertos, 5 sonatas, 5 string quartets, a host of other music, an autobiography and several books of essays. He gained a knighthood in 1966.

Although he achieved this recognition and success, he was by no means a conventional figure. When a young man he was deeply upset by the carnage of the First World War and became a lifelong pacifist. He was imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs during the Second World War war for refusing to contribute to the war effort in any way - he wouldn't even work on the land or act as an air raid warden when they asked him. Principled, stubborn, selfish - you decide. But he was deeply conscious of the social injustices and the poverty that was rife during the inter-war years, and he became a socialist and then a Trotskyist for a while.

He became involved in work camps for the unemployed and met a man named Rolf Gardiner, who had a vision of a Europe renewed after the devastation of the war by self-supporting communities of young people. During the 1930s Gardiner set to work organising camps for the 'revival of rural England' and Tippett provided music for some of these.

Listen to what the novelist D.H. Lawrence had to say to Gardiner about his project, in a letter he wrote to him in 1926:

'I'm sure you are doing the right thing, with hikes and dances and songs. But somehow it needs a central clue, or it will fizzle away again. There needs a centre of silence, and a heart of darkness - to borrow from Rider Haggard. We'll have to establish some spot on earth, that will be the fissure into the underworld, like the oracle at Delphos, where one can always come to. I will try to do it myself. I will try to come to England and make a place - some quiet house in the country - where one can begin - and from which the hiker, maybe, can branch out. Some place with a big barn and a bit of land -- if one has enough money. Don't you think that is what it needs? And then one must set out and learn a deep discipline - and learn dances from all the world, and take whatsoever we can make into our own. And learn music the same.'[xlvi]

Gardiner didn't wait for Lawrence, but set about buying land and a barn and doing exactly as Lawrence had suggested. Tippett didn't stay with him, but moved on in his own way. He had already started to breathe in the fumes from that fissure in

the Underworld that Lawrence had mentioned. He was reading Jung, Frazer, Jane Harrison, Blake, T.S.Eliot, Jessie Weston, Bernard Shaw, and the Chinese wisdom of the I Ching. Ideas of the Collective Unconscious, of the roots of religion lying in the sacred marriage of a risen god and a mother Goddess, of the importance of the seasonal cycle in man's spiritual life were bubbling to the surface in the cultural life of the inter-war years and Tippett was there breathing and drinking it all in.

Lawrence said 'There needs a centre of silence, and a heart of darkness.' We don't know whether Tippett read this letter, but this was soon to become a major preoccupation for him. The mysterious necessity of light to have darkness, of the Self to have its Shadow, as Jung expressed it, became a central theme of his for exploration and articulation.

At a personal level this meant a descent into the underworld of dreams. In 1939 the Jungian John Layard analysed some of Tippett's dreams, and then Tippett continued this analysis on his own for seven months, before feeling that his therapy had reached its conclusion.

In many ways Tippett belonged to that group of intellectuals of the same era, of whom many were from Cambridge, who were often pacifist and socialist, and sometimes communist, such as W.H.Auden, E.M.Forster, T.H.White, Siegfried Sassoon, and Antony Blunt. And like that group he was also gay. And he began analysing his dreams in an attempt to come to terms with this.

Layard, was a repressed homosexual[xlvii] who cautioned Tippett against giving in to his natural inclination, and it was at this point that Tippett no longer accepted the analyst's interpretations but embarked on his own solitary analysis at the age of 34.

The fact that he trusted his own interpretation of his dreams more than the older and apparently more experienced (and trained) analyst, provides us with a vital clue as to his character. He was determined to say the least.

Even when a relatively young man, he knew himself better than perhaps most, and he knew where he was going. Composing music was his great love and he dedicated his life to it.

I believe that most creative people prefer to be understood and judged by what they love and what they give to the world, rather than by attention to their everyday lives. So let's now try to get a sense of who Tippett was in the way he'd most want us to: by listening to his music and to the words he wrote to accompany some of this music. During the course of this talk I'll play five sections from his work, each lasting just a minute or two.

First let's hear a section from his most famous work, out of which, in many ways, *The Midsummer Marriage* grew - his oratorio *A Child of Our Time*. This is an extended meditation on the problem of good and evil, exploring an incident that sparked *Kristallnacht*, and hence the Holocaust. It strikes such a chord in most people, that it has been performed at the Proms twice recently - after 9/11 in 2001 and this July after the London tube and bus bombings. As chorales for the oratorio, Tippet takes well-known negro spirituals, and develops them sublimely. This first

one, 'Steal Away', is sung by Jill Gomez and John Shirley-Quirk with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and chorus.

First audio sample

Now for another glimpse of the man through his work, but this time through his words, taken from the end of the libretto of *The Knot Garden,* Tippett's third opera which explores love, sexual relationships and forgiveness, through seven characters.

To fully appreciate *The Midsummer Marriage* and its power we really need to study both *A Child of Our Time* and *The Knot Garden*, because they form a trio that all deal in different ways with the Jungian and alchemical theme of the reconciliation of the opposites.

If, for a timid moment
We submit to love,
Exit from the inner cage,
Turn each to each to all...
Within this theatre, upon this stage,
Here, now, beyond the end-game

I put away the seed-packets,
I put away the factory papers.
I encompass the vast night with an image of desire.
Now I stand up: Faber: man: maker: myself.
Now I stand up: Thea: woman: mother: myself.
Our enmity's transcended in desire.
Memory recedes in the moment.
I am all imagination.
the curtain rises.

As we hear these words the curtain in fact falls and the opera is over.

Let's see how *The Knot Garden* can help us to understand its creator. Tippett builds continuously on heritage and the past but he is also a breaker - a breaker of traditions and new ground - and in that sense he truly is an initiator. So while *The Knot Garden* draws on Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and Shaw's *Heartbreak Hous*e for its structure, it is inspired by Jung's work, and as two firsts for opera, features a Jungian analyst in the central role, and a gay couple. It's music is equally a mixture of the old - including a sublime quotation of a Schubert song - and the new: a blues septet and an extraordinary sound collage which includes off-stage howls, wolf-whistles and declarations by the analyst to the audience.

The Knot Garden has been described by *The Times* as 'challengingly opaque and densely surreal' - but Tippett wasn't afraid of flouting convention at the risk of losing his audience. He was an extraordinary combination of the highly cultured and the populist. In his sixties he organised the Bath Festival of the Blues and Progressive Pop, and in his eighties he was inspired by the movie *Fame,* in his portrayal of a virtuoso dance group in his opera *New Year*. He finished this opera with words he heard at a Nelson Mandela concert in Wembley: 'One humanity, one justice'.

To finish this rapid picture of the composer, let's hear one more quotation from him. In his autobiography he tells us that he believes his work continues an ancient tradition:

" I know that my true function within a society which embraces all of us, is to continue an age-old tradition, fundamental to our civilization, which goes back to pre-history and will go forward into the unknown future. This tradition is to create images from the depths of the imagination and to give them form - whether visual, intellectual or musical. For it is only through images that the inner world communicates at all. Images of the past, shapes of the future. Images of vigour for a decadent period, images of calm for one too violent. Images of reconciliation for worlds torn by division. And in an age of mediocrity and shattered dreams, images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty."[xlviii]

Clearly he saw himself performing a healing role in society in which he - like the psychpomp - mediates between the inner and outer worlds.

A vital element in this mediation involves reconciling light and dark - the known and the unknown. This process is at the heart of the experience he offers us in *The Midsummer Marriage*, but he first began to articulate it in the work that preceded it - *A Child of Our Time*. So let's now finish this very brief picture of Tippett the man, by listening to Lesley Garrett singing from it Tippett's rendition of the spiritual 'By and By' with the Britten Sinfonia.

Second audio sample

Let's move on now to examine *The Midsummer Marriage* itself. I became interested in this opera because it unites two subjects that have inspired me for years, and which are rarely combined: those of Jungian psychology and the inner mysteries of Druidism.

Certainly, their combination in opera is unique. Druids appear in Bellini's *Norma*, and in Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*, and Jungian themes and a Jungian analyst appear in Tippett's later opera *The Knot Garden*. But only in *The Midsummer Marriage* are the two themes combined[xlix].

The opera tells the story of a couple, Mark & Jennifer, who can only truly marry after they have been through a process of spiritual and psychological change. Tippett loves creating resonances with other works - and so the story reminds us of that of Tamino & Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, and the pair of lovers in the magic wood of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

The opera takes place during the day and night of the summer solstice. Moments into the start of Act One the sun rises into the sacred woodland clearing as the chorus sings, 'The sun, the sun! Ah, midsummer morning!' And the opera ends with the sun rising again on the following morning, with the hero Mark offering his bride a wedding ring 'here in this magic wood on this midsummer day.'

Let's hear how the opera begins as the curtain rises to reveal the woodland clearing. This is performed by the chorus and orchestra of the Royal Opera House, conducted by Colin Davis.

Third audio sample

Right from the beginning we have an association with Druidry. The opening scene is a *nemeton*, a sacred grove in the woods. The stage directions suggest a semi-circle of ruined stones hinting at Stonehenge. And of course Stonehenge is famous for its midsummer sunrise orientation, a fact which has a direct bearing on the climax of the piece.

Within this *nemeton* are the entrance to a cave and a flight of stairs leading up to the heavens. In this way the three worlds are depicted: the Underworld of the Unconscious or subconscious, the Middle Earth of everyday consciousness and the personality, and the Upper World of the superconscious.

Straight away the lovers begin to explore these worlds. And they do this in a very Jungian way: with each of them exploring an aspect of themselves, their inner contra-sexual soul which acts as the liaison between the personal psyche and the collective unconscious. For the man this is the *anima*, or feminine soul, and for the woman, the *animus*, or masculine soul.

Tippett depicts this journey very simply. They have a row, and they realise they have psychological 'work' to do. She ascends to the heavens, up into the air, via a staircase, while he enters a cave, down into the earth, singing: 'For her the light! For me the shadow! Gates I have always longed to enter, Open to receive your child.'

This reminds me of the time Jung talks about descending into the Underworld himself. There in a waking dream-state he found himself in what he describes as a Druidic sacred place with Elijah. Elijah climbed on to a druidic altar, and then Jung descended into the Underworld, where he had an experience of Mithraic inititiation, in which he became the *Deus Leontocephalus* - the lion-headed man with a snake coiled about his body[i].

Mark who descends at the opening of the opera into the Underworld will later be described by the clairvoyant Sosostris scrying in a bowl, as a 'winged and royal lion' who...'enters the flowered field' and approaches Jennifer: 'As the beast rears rampant, now I see the face is human and the wings are arms, strong sheltering arms of a manly youth.'

So the Mithraic mysteries are suggested here. But there are more associations to come.

The opera has a Greek motto, which translated reads 'You shall say: I am a child of earth and of starry heaven.' And these two places have right at the start of

the opera been evoked by Mark and Jennifer who have gone to one or other of these places. As the opera progresses the couple will reunite and hence so will heaven and earth, suggesting a marriage which is essentially alchemical, which explains Tippett's first choice for a title: *Aurora Consurgens*, after a 13th cent alchemical treatise.

The Greek motto comes from the Petelia Tablet - one of the Orphic tablets from 4th cent BC graves which were used as amulets, the text engraved in gold leaf, rolled up and enclosed in a tiny cylinder which hung around the neck of a dead person and was designed to offer formulae to help them in their passage in the Otherworld.

By using this motto as the gateway to the opera, it suggests that, as Ian Kemp says, 'the opera itself will act as an amulet, a ritual protection during the journey the listener will make into the underworld, the unconscious.'[li]What a fantastic idea!

So what happens on this journey? First there is the encounter with a figure layered with a multitude of associated meanings: Jennifer's father who opposes the marriage and is a difficult character. He is called King Fisher - an obvious reference to the Fisher King of the grail story, and he needs to die in order for the work to proceed. Tippett was greatly influenced by *The Golden Bough* of James Frazer and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* - and in particular he was impressed by the work of the Cambridge Ritualists - Harrison, Cornford and Murray - who applied Frazer's theories about the priest-king being ritually sacrificed to suggest a scheme relevant to classical drama.

At the heart of the Cambridge Ritualists' theories was the concept of the *Eniautos-Daimon* - the Year-Spirit who ritually dies each year and is reborn. But this process of death and resurrection is also the initiatory process too - where all is lost and then all is found again. And here is Tippett's stroke of genius. Here is where he brings the Druid mystery into the heart of his opera and creates an experience which perhaps some of us at least can experience as an initiation: he takes the story of Ceridwen and Taliesin, the story from the Welsh *Mabinogion* which I believe contains encoded within it a process of Bardic and Druid initiation, and which is the story of how a boy becomes a man and how he also realises his deepest potential. And he places the key element in the story in the centre of his opera.

In the story, the neophyte is chased by the initiator who swallows him and gives birth to him as a realised being, the finest poet in the land. This occurs by the Goddess Ceridwen chasing the boy through a series of four transformations. In the original tale she chases him as a greyhound chasing a hare, an otter chasing a salmon, a hawk pursuing a weaker bird, and finally as a hen eating a speck of grain, which renders her pregnant.

Tippett probably learnt about this story through reading Robert Graves' *White Goddess*, who is Ceridwen, the bent White One, or Moon Goddess, and he refers to her at the opening of Act 3, when the chorus describes the scene:

‘When the midsummer sun goes down, down the long tunnel to the east, and the moon at the full, the White Goddess, starts her airborne journey to the west at night.’

Tippett takes the four transformations of the White Goddess and her candidate Gwion, which are related to the yearly cycle of the four seasons, of fertility and harvesting, and of the elements, and turns them into four ritual dances. In the first three, the dancers wear animal costumes to act out the chase.

But Tippett recognised the fundamentally erotic, spiritual and alchemical nature of this sequence which culminates in pregnancy for Ceridwen and both death and rebirth for Gwion, and so he depicted the final chase sequence in a direct way that is possible today, but which couldn’t have been done in an old Bardic tale that was first written down from the oral tradition by Christian clerics in the 12th century, but which undoubtedly comes from a much earlier time. He depicted it quite simply for what this final sequence represents: the union of man and woman, of God and Goddess.

So this is what the opera is about - the *Coniunctio*, the Mystical Marriage, the Great Rite, the Alchemical Wedding. It is about the mysteries expressed by Tantra, alchemy, modern-day Wicca and some interpretations of Druidism.

Before the opera reaches the *Coniunctio* however, the old King must die and again it is the Goddess figure who initiates this. This time she is represented by Sosostris, a clairvoyant brought in by King Fisher to find out where his daughter is.

Listen now to a section from the opera in which Sosostris speaks before beginnning to scry. She sings:

‘You who consult me
Should never never doubt me.
Clean let the heart be
Of each seeker.

Truth shall shine through me,
Once more endue me.
Humble yourselves now,
I speak as a seer.

Acolyte, acolyte,
Lift up the bowl that I may look’

Fourth audio sample

‘Acolyte, acolyte, Lift up the bowl that I may look’! And what she then describes as she looks into the bowl is Mark as the Leontocephalic god approaching Jennifer ‘fragrant as a flower herself’ having opened ‘her body to the sun’.

King Fisher is furious, snatches the bowl from her, only to come upon the couple moments later locked together in a formalised and heiratic embrace - and in this moment Tippett performs a mysterious alchemy. Here we are at the deepest part of the opera. Clutching our amulet we have taken a journey into the Underworld of the Unconscious. We are about to experience the climax of the opera and hence the initiatory process which will explode in a kind of incandescence in just a moment. But for now we are at the deepest darkest point and we experience a necessary death to make way for the marriage.

Rather than Freud's child reeling from the primal scene of his mother and father copulating, in the opera it is the father who reels at the equally primal scene for him of his own child entwined with her lover. As a result he collapses and dies. Like the *Eniautos-Daimon*, the old king has died and Mark can now metaphorically take his place on the throne. Mark is the name of a Cornish king, with Jennifer being Guinevere - Tippett was Cornish. Again we have a splendid resonance with alchemy here: the lovers become King and Queen, and assume their sovereignty.

Once King Fisher is dead the fourth ritual dance begins. Since this is an opera about the process of marriage, not only in the everyday sense, but also in the inner or mystical sense, so the fire of passion and relationship in both its erotic and spiritual sense is present throughout the opera. It drives it along, just as fire drives the alchemical process. You've heard something of this fire in the opening sample I played you. Now listen to another example of triumphant exuberant fire as the opera reaches its climax.

The dancer Strephon creates fire by twirling a stick within a wooden block and raises it aloft. The hero and heroine, Mark & Jennifer, with legs and arms entwined assume a pose of 'increasing vigour and ecstasy' as the discreet stage directions indicate. What we are witnessing is the Great Rite, the *Heiros Gamos*. And as the opera reaches its climax so do Mark and Jennifer: 'Fire! Fire! St John's Fire in the middle of the night! sings the chorus.

Fifth audio sample

Despite their 'increasing vigour and ecstasy' - or perhaps because of it - they manage to sing words of wisdom that express the central mystery the opera is trying to convey:

'Carnal love through which the race of men is everlastingly renewed, becomes transfigured as divine. Consuming love whose fires shine from God's perpetually revealed face. Wonder! Praise! Rejoice exceedingly! The world is made by our desire, its splendour, yes, even its pain becomes transfigured in the bright furious incandescent light of love's perpetually renewed fire. Wonder! Praise! Rejoice!'

We realise now that the journey the opera has taken us on is a journey that leads to this point – to love's perpetually renewing fire where heaven and earth unite, where divinity and carnality unite, where the mystery that we are both beasts

and angels is fully realised. We have been led towards transmutation in the furnace of the Great Alchemist. The most sensible thing to do at this point is to let go to the clashing of cymbals and trumpets and the almost cacophonous music that cascades over us.

By now the work of the opera has been done, the moonlight fades on stage, and dawn appears, with the sound of birdsong. The chorus sings 'Was it a vision? Was it a dream?' and we indeed wonder whether it was all a dream: a deliberate device of Tippett who believed strongly in the power of dreams to help us achieve the quest of Individuation.

Mark and Jennifer meet in the clearing this time ready to wed, and they and the chorus sing the opera's closing words, which are a quotation from W.B.Yeats' *Lapis Lazuli*: 'All things fall and are built again, and those that build them again are gay.'

Death and rebirth, the cyclicity of life, is affirmed and we are assured that happiness is found in construction, in creation.

It's been quite a journey. Can it represent an initiation? Ian Kemp, who wrote that the opera was, 'an initiation ceremony... a rite of passage,' realised that *The Midsummer Marriage* is not an opera in the conventional sense at all, but instead a dramatic allegory which – as he puts it - 'attempts to illuminate the unconscious and to encourage the capacity for renewal such illumination brings with it'[lii].

In this way the opera fulfils the role of the sacred dramas of the ancient Mysteries, by allowing us to observe the interactions of archetypal figures which represent aspects of our own Unconscious. We emerge from the opera as we might emerge from a healing dream, or from a ceremony we have participated in, changed perhaps, but not quite knowing how.

I hope this presentation has helped to excite you about the potential this opera, and the work of Michael Tippett in general holds, while at the same time not explaining too much, since - after all - to retain their ability to effect transformation the Mysteries must remain fundamentally mysterious.

NOTES

[i]Until now I have not mentioned Nichols' sexual orientation because I have no certain knowledge of this. Professor Ronald Hutton at an open talk during an Order Assembly in Glastonbury in 2004 did, however, comment on this subject, and so perhaps some clarification is needed. In talking with an old friend of Nichols, The Comtesse de Frenay, she told me that everyone around him believed him to be gay, and James Kirkup wrote that his sexuality was 'ambiguous to say the least' (letter to author). Some of his poems support these views too, but apart from these snippets I have no further information. When I knew him, which was in his later years, he was a life-long bachelor who by that time I believe was no longer interested in sexual relationships and therefore provided no clue as to his orientation. If he was gay, then

he would be yet another member of that influential group of sensitive, artistic left-wing intellectuals, many of whom were educated like Nichols at Cambridge during the inter-war years and were pacifists and sometimes communists. This roll-call includes W.H.Auden, E.M.Forster, T.H.White, Siegfried Sassoon, Antony Blunt, and Michael Tippett.

[ii] Lyrics reproduced with permission Lenono Music (John Lennon copyright 1973).

[iii] In those latter years of his life he also became involved in trying to help Marc Bolan's wife (or friend), but unfortunately I cannot remember the details of this when he discussed it with me.

[iv] Norman Lebrecht
http://www.scena.org/columns/lebrecht/041222-NL-tippett.html

[v] Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.30

[vi] see http://www.utopia-britannica.org.uk/pages/Springhead.htm

[vii] see http://freespace.virgin.net/springhead.trust/about.htm

[viii] "Rutland Boughton (1878-1960), a pupil of Stanford at the Royal College of Music in London, first became known as a composer of orchestral and choral music. But opera was his real love and in 1914 he established the first of his Glastonbury Festivals in order to provide a platform not only for his own operas but for any music that accorded with his artistic ideals. The Festivals continued with increasing success and sophistication until 1926, by which time he had mounted over 300 staged performances and 100 chamber music concerts, besides related lectures, exhibitions, and a series of innovative summer schools. In 1922 his opera 'The Immortal Hour was produced in London where it enjoyed a phenomenal success, setting a still unbroken world record for the longest continuous run of any opera. It was followed by notable London productions of Bethlehem and Alkestis. After Glastonbury, Boughton took up residence in Gloucestershire to complete the cycle of five Arthurian music dramas he had begun in 1908, and to hold further festivals at Stroud (1934) and Bath (1935). It is only in recent years that the true measure of his originality and importance has begun once more to be appreciated." From http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/societies/boughton.html

[ix] The libretto of Boughton's 'The Immortal Hour' was created by adapting text and poetry from the work of Fiona MacLeod. Nichols' also borrowed from MacLeod by using excerpts in the Druid Grade ritual that he wrote.

[x] Letter to author 21/7/01.

[xi] The anti-pornography campaigner Mary Whitehouse brought a private prosecution against *Gay News* who had published the poem. After a highly publicised trial at the Old Bailey, Denis Lemon, the publisher, was found guilty and fined £500 with a nine month suspended prison sentence, which was later quoshed. Kirkup was not allowed to defend the poem in court, but he later (letter to author) said of the poem "I disowned it long ago. It was part of the sequence I called, in homage to Picasso, ''My Blue Period'."

[xii] Quoted in Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.153

[xiii] Tippett, Michael. 'Those Twentieth Century Blues', Hutchinson, 1991 p.19

[xiv] T.E.B.Howarth, *Cambridge Between Two Wars*, Collins 1978, 131.

[xv] Nichols, R with Kirkup, J. *The Cosmic Shape*, Forge Press, 1946.

[xvi] The misspelling of Frazer's name is Ross' – as is his citation in essays of C.J.Jung rather than C.G.Jung, and Jolan Jacobi rather than Jolande Jacobi.
[xvii] Tippett, Michael. 'Those Twentieth Century Blues', Hutchinson, 1991 p.259
[xviii] Nichols, R. 'General Ovate Instruction: A Comparative Chinese Study.' Private paper in the OBOD archive.
[xix] This was published in 1974, after Layard's death. Tippett and Nichols would certainly have read his *The Lady Of The Hare: A Study In The Healing Power Of Dreams(*1944) and in *The Book of Druidry* Nichols cites Layard's *Stone Men of Malekula* (1942).
[xx] Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.37
[xxi] ibid. p.63
[xxii] "Layard was a repressed homosexual and when he finally left the New Hebrides and returned to Europe in, I think, 1917, he joined up and was sent to the front in France. Between his old problems and the trauma of the trenches he had a bad nervous breakdown and wound up in Jung's clinic. Mightily impressed he then received training in Jungian analysis and spent many years practising as such in Wales. He gradually began to return to his fieldnotes and wrote a number of brilliant ethnograhpic pieces in psycho-analytic journals [mostly dealing with aspects of homo-eroticism in Malekula] - as also his *Stone Men of Malekula*. But psycho-analysis was dismissed in British anthropology, and Layard remained an eccentric figure at the margins of the discipline. In my view a man of towering talent...". Email to author from Michael Allen (Retired Professor of Anthropology, University of Sydney) 22.11.01.
[xxiii] Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.43
[xxiv] Although Tippett worked specifically on the opera for 7 years, for three years prior to this he had been 'incubating' and developing it in notes.
[xxv] Kenyon, Nicholas, Towards the Far Horizon – Tippett's Operas and New Year, Glyndebourne Festival Opera programme 1990.
[xxvi] Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.216
[xxvii] ibid
[xxviii] "The best political, social, and spiritual work we can do is to withdraw the projection of our shadow onto others." Carl Jung
[xxix] The situation was more complicated than first appears. In the 2005 Programme notes to the Prom performance Ian Kemp states: 'Thanks to the research work of Hans-Jürgen Döscher (kindly conveyed to me by Michael Foster), it is now clear that the Nazi diplomat Vom Rath and Grynspan were lovers. Grynspan expected to obtain an exit visa from Vom Rath, who then reneged on his promise. The assassination was not only a protest against Nazi anti-Semitism but the result of other factors as well – blind fury, attempted blackmail, a *crime passionnel*.'
[xxx] 'Grynszpan's attack was interpreted by Goebbels as a conspiratorial attack by 'International Jewry' against the Reich and, symbolically, against the Fuehrer himself. On the nights of November 9 and 10 [1938], gangs of Nazi youth roamed through Jewish neighborhoods breaking windows of Jewish businesses and homes, burning synagogues and looting. In all 101 synagogues were destroyed and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 died.'

(Snyder, Louis L. Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. New York: Paragon House, 1989:201).

[xxxi] Although Tippett does say in an interview that after its performance there "I was Persona Non Grata in Israel." He also mentions "The father [of Herschel] was already in Israel and was brought to that performance. He was in tears most of the time and had no idea what had happened to his son." Interview with David Peat at http://www.paricenter.com/library/papers/tippett01.php

[xxxii] A Child of Our Time, English National Opera Programme, 2005

[xxxiii] See Von Franz, Marie Louise *Aurora Consurgens*, Inner City Books, 2000

[xxxiv] Interview with Tippett in The Listener, 18 January 1945

[xxxv] Kemp, Ian. 'Tippett, The Composer and his Music', OUP 1987, p.235

[xxxvi] ibid. p.235. In his Foreword to Rodney Castleden's *The Stonehenge People* (Routledge 1987) Tippett confirms his interest in megalithic monuments, such as Stonehenge, by saying: 'My interest in the stone monuments is instinctive, not archaeological. What I know about them I have read in Rodney Castleden's books. He sent me *The Wilmington Giant* when it came out, because he thought my intuitions of the life-style of these ancestors, as implied in my opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, and in what I said, standing among the Avebury stones, once, on BBC television, were perceptive.'

[xxxvii] To clarify this definition of masculine and Feminine: 'when Jung talks about the masculine and the feminine, he is not talking about men and women (gender) or about gay people and straight people (sexuality). He is talking about images in our psyches - about complexes of qualities and attributes that we label as masculine or feminine. He calls these images archetypal. By this he means that they arise out of a heritage of wisdom and experience that is common to all humans. He supports his thesis by pointing out that archetypal images are found in every culture and every tradition and these images, no matter where they are found or from what period they date, bear an astonishing resemblance to one another. He concludes that archetypal images are the same everywhere because the human mind is the same everywhere. From this point of view, the cluster of qualities and attributes that form our idea of what is masculine and what is feminine is not something specific to our time and our culture. Masculine and feminine are fundamental and universal images, common to all humans... From a Jungian point of view, masculine and feminine are not alien to one another because we are not limited to one or the other end of a polarity. At the level of the Soul, there are no opposites. The deep self carries the potential for both sides of every polarity.' *When Masculine Met Feminine b*y David Cornfield http://www.soulmaking.com/MandF.htm

[xxxviii] 'A Visionary Night' by John Lloyd Davies, in *The Operas of Michael Tippett*, ed Nicholas John, John Calder 1985.

[xxxix] http://www.soulmaking.com/MandF.htm

[xl] Quoted in Zweig & Abrams, *Meeting the Shadow*, Tarcher/Putnam, 1991

[xli] Jean Huston, *The Search for the Beloved*, Crucible 1990.

[xlii] "When *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* first came out, it was heralded by Winifred Holtby as being of Nobel Prize calibre. In my opinion Holtby's praise was well merited: *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* is one of the defining works of

Scottish magic realism." Greg Michaelson 2005 http://textualities.net/writers/features-h-m/mitchisonn01.php

[xliii] Tippett, Michael. 'Those Twentieth Century Blues', Hutchinson, 1991 p.259

[xliv] Zimmer, Heinrich *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* Princeton University Press 1972

[xlv] Tippett, Michael, *Moving Into Aquarius*, Paladin 1974.

[xlvi] D.H. Lawrence Letter To Rolf Gardiner.3 December, 1926. Essay on 'Organic Nationalism' at http://www.utopia-britannica.org.uk/pages/Springhead.htm

[xlvii] See endnote 22.

[xlviii] Tippett, Michael *Those Twentieth Century Blues*, Hutchinson, 1991

[xlix] One could argue that Druidism is not a feature of *The Midsummer Marriage*, since the story of Taliesin is not overtly about Druidism, but I am using this term to mean 'Druidism as studied by the majority of contemporary Druids', for whom the Ceridwen and Taliesin tale acts as a central and guiding myth. I also believe that the story may well represent a survival of the oral teaching of the ancient Druids.

[l] Noll, Richard, *The Aryan Christ - The Secret Life of Carl Jung,* MacMillan 1997. p.123

[li] Kemp, Ian, *Tippett - The Composer and His Music,* Oxford University Press 1997.

[lii] ibid. p.216

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