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## TWO MEN IN ONE

### The Strange Genius of Philip Heseltine alias Peter Warlock

HE pitted a sensitive soul against the world in the hope of gaining "recognition in his own time"; suffered defeat; grew a beard "for a purely talismanic purpose"; changed his name, changed his whole being, and actually saw success in his own time; struggled with two personalities, both his own, and suffered a second defeat, his last: for he killed

himself by gas, but did not forget to put his kitten out first, so that it should live.

This was Philip Heseltine, English composer and writer on music, who lived from 1894 until 1930, who is "better known" as Peter Warlock, and whose songs will be heard both in Auckland and in Dunedin next week.

Cecil Gray, his friend and biographer, says that Peter Warlock was "a protection, a facade, a mask, a carapace, a defence erected against a hostile world by a gentle sensitive nature to whom life had become well nigh unbearable without it."

#### Disillusionment Begins

Much of the music which the public liked, upset Heseltine. He complained that at Promenade concerts it was "difficult to escape Walford Davies' 'Solemn Melody' or Gounod's 'Hymne a St. Cecile,' or some such tosh, which invariably gets encored." And after concerts which had injured him, his early experiences with the press (he thought), added insult: "The business of musical criticism for a London daily is really a farce," he wrote to Frederick Delius. "The people who control it and edit it dare not take the risk of offending anybody (except in political matters), and now even my painfully reserved and non-committal style—which it is exceedingly irksome and degrading to adopt—has been called too violent by the wretched news-editor."

His venture upon the production of opera "with a definite artistic policy and no compromise with the mob," was to cause another of the sorrows which accumulated towards Heseltine's final disillusionment. A long enthusiastic letter told Delius in 1916 of Heseltine's plans. Delius replied: "You are going towards disaster with the best intentions possible, and that is what seems to me so hopeless in our country."

In due course (1917), Heseltine was writing to Delius: "I have now thoroughly understood how immature, how really uneducated one is—in every sense of the word—and, most important of all, how necessary it is to be, fully, before attempting to do. For one can create only out of the fullness of being—of this I am sure . . . I am quite overcome with shame and confusion. You have been so good and so tolerant and all the while so right."

Another letter to Delius shows that he would have suffered sad disillusion had he lived longer; Delius was in Norway, and Heseltine wrote (in 1915): "You are greatly to be envied living amongst the mountains that will never re-echo with the sounds or even the news of war."

When César Franck's well-plugged *Symphony in D Minor* incurred his disfavour, he wrote an elaborate parody which Cecil Gray says "has the effect of rendering it impossible for anyone who has once heard it to listen again to the original with due and becoming respect. The themes of the symphony are only slightly distorted, but in such a way



**PETER WARLOCK**  
When was he Peter and when Philip?

that the *Père Sésaphique* of music is made to appear like a saint with his halo over one eye, a red nose, and a hiccough."

#### Altruism—And Drink

D. H. Lawrence was one figure in Heseltine's life whom he might well have regretted. Cecil Gray records: "While Philip was thus altruistically busying himself in the capacity of literary agent to Lawrence, the latter was putting the finishing touches to his novel *Women in Love*, in which there occurs a particularly venomous caricature of Philip."

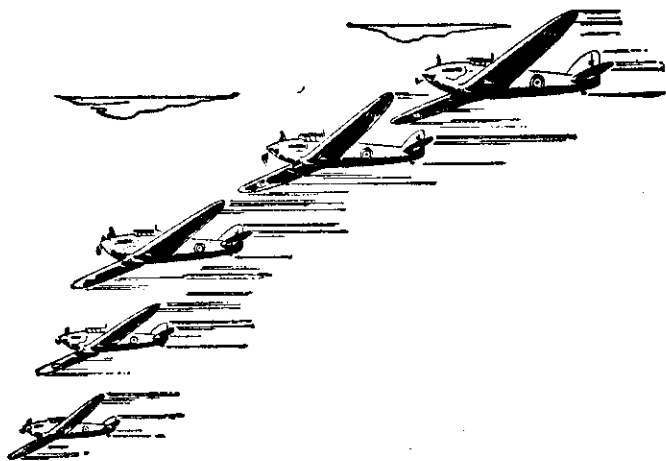
Occasionally alcohol laid him low. Once in Paris he was found lying face downwards in the gutter of the Rue Blanche in the pouring rain, without a penny in his pocket, and removed to the Santé, where he was next day stood in a row naked, together with pickpockets and vagrants, and washed with a long mop dipped in cold soapy water while his clothes were baked under the assumption that they were verminous.

#### A Maori Friend

If Heseltine knew anything of New Zealand, he probably had it from one of his more unusual friends—Te Akau, of whom Gray writes: "A New Zealander, whose Maori grandmother had been a cannibal and used, within his memory, to lament the passing of the good old days when she could feed upon her kind. He was one of those people who, without ever having learnt a note of music, have an inborn technical dexterity and remarkable gift for improvisation . . . A song of his, taken down by Peter, called 'Forget Not Yet,' was published by the Oxford University Press."

Since his fame may yet rest on the song cycle *The Curlew* (verse by W. B. Yeats), and his biographer assures us that this was really by the Heseltine part of him and not by Warlock at all, it might be that he is really "better known as Heseltine." "The predominating mood of the Warlock songs is robust and jovial," Gray says. "The mood of *The Curlew*, on the other hand, is one of the darkest despair throughout."

*The Curlew* will be heard from 1YX at 8.37 p.m. on Thursday, February 12, and two other songs will be heard from 4YO at 9.24 p.m. on Tuesday, February 10.



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