

**THE IMORTAL
HOUR: A DRAMA IN
TWO ACTS**

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The immortal hour: a drama in two acts by Fiona Macleod

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A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

BY

FIONA MACLEOD



T. N. FOULIS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

1908

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27/4/09

TO
E. W. R.



FORENOTE

THE IMMORTAL HOUR is founded on the ancient Celtic legend of Midir and Etain (or Edane). I have no doubt that the legend, though only honey for the later Gaelic poets, had originally a deep significance, and that the Wooing to the Otherworld . . . *i.e.* to the Gaelic *Tir na'n Og*, the Land of Youth, of the Ever Living, of Love, the Land of Heart's Desire . . . of the beautiful woman Etain, wife of King Eochaidh, symbolised another wooing and another mystery than that alone of the man for the woman. It symbolised, I think, the winning of life back to the world after an enforced thralldom: the renewal of Spring: in other words, Etain is a Gaelic Eurydice, Midir a Gaelic Orpheus who penetrated the dismal realm of Eochaidh, and Eochaidh but a humanised Gaelic Dis. It is not Persephone, gathering flowers on Enna, whom legend remembers here, but the not less beautiful love

of Apollo's son, slain by the treacherous earth in the guise of a grass-hid asp as she flees from her pursuer: nor is there word of Demeter, nor yet of Aristæus. To the Gaelic mind, remembering what it had dreamed in the Vale of Tempe (or in Asian valleys, long before the Song-Charmer had a Greek muse for mother and a birthright in Hellas) the myths of Persephone and Eurydice might well be identified, so that Orpheus sought each or both-in-one, in the gloomy underworld. And the tale suffered no more than a sea-change when; by the sundown shores, it showed Eurydice-Persephone as Etain being wooed back to sunshine and glad life by the longing passion of Orpheus as Midir. For in the Gaelic mythology, Midir too is a son of light, a servant of song, a son of Apollo, being of the diviner race of Oengus the Sun-God, Lord of Life and Death. By his symbol of the Dew he is also the Restorer, the Reviver.

Of Dalua I can say but a word here.¹ He is the Amadan-Dhu, or Dark Fool, the Faery Fool, whose touch is madness or death for any mortal: whose falling shadow, even, causes bewilderment and forget-

¹ The name Dalua and Etain should be pronounced *Da-loo-a* and *Éh-tain* (short, as in *satin*). The name Eochaidh, who later wins Etain for a time, is pronounced *Yochay*; and that of Midir, *Mid'-eer* (short, as in *Mid-day*).

fulness. The Fool is at once an elder and dreadful god, a mysterious and potent spirit, avoided even of the proud immortal folk themselves: and an abstraction, 'the shadow of pale hopes, forgotten dreams, and madness of men's minds.' He is too, to my imagining, madness incorporate as a living force. In several of my writings this dark presence intervenes as a shadow . . . sometimes without being named, or as an elemental force, as in the evil music of Gloom Achanna in the tale called 'The Dan-Nan-Ron,' sometimes as a spirit of evil, as in 'Dalua,' the opening tale in *The Dominion of Dreams*.

The Black Hawk (or Eagle) alluded to in first 'direction' preceding text is the *Iolair Dhu*, which on the first day of the world launched itself into the darkness and has never yet caught up with the dawn, though its rising or sinking shadow may be seen over the edge of dark at the night-dusk or morning twilight. It should be added that with the ancient Gaels (and with the few to-day who have not forgotten or do not disdain the old wisdom) the Hidden People (the *Sidh* or *Shée*; or *Shée'an* or *Sheechun* of the Isles) were great and potent, not small and insignificant beings. 'Mab' long ago was the terrible 'dark' queen, Maive (*Medb*, *Medbb*, *Mabb*):

and the still more ancient Puck was not a frolicsome spirit, but a shadowy and dreadful Power.

Students of Celtic mythology will be familiar with the legend of the love of Etain or Edane (herself half divine of race), wife of Eochaidh, the High King, for a mysterious stranger who came to the King's Dûn, and played chess with the King, and won Etain away with him, he being Midir, a King in the Otherworld. Some may look upon Midir as another Orpheus, and upon Etain as a Eurydice with the significance of Proserpine: others may see also in Etain, what I see, and would convey in *The Immortal Hour*, a symbol of the wayward but home-wandering soul; and in Midir, a symbol of the Spirit; and in Eochaidh, a symbol of the mundane life, of mortal love. Others will see only the sweet vanity of the phosphorescent play of the mythopoeic Gaelic mind, or indeed not even this, but only the natural dreaming of the Gaelic imagination, ever in love with fantasy and with beauty in fantasy. But, lest the old and the new be confused, this should be added . . . That Eochaidh finds Etain in the way he does, and that Dalua comes and goes between Etain and Eochaidh as he comes and goes, and the meaning that lies in the obscure love of Dalua, and the bewildered love of Etain, and the mortal love of