

## **The Ancient, Forgotten Song of Love & Death, as in the film *All You Need Is Death***

The reason this Irish film, *All You Need Is Death* (2023), inspired the Gypsy Scholar to create a meme for it is threefold.

First and foremost, the film was discovered on the heels of the second installment of his current Orphic Essay-with-Soundtrack series, “The Troubadours & The Beloved” (which was originally launched for Valentine’s Day), in which *a darker theme of “romantic love”* was presented. As the GS framed it: “a presentation of the theme of *love and death* in the Western world,” which featured the romance of *Tristan & Iseult*. (This very ancient Celtic mythical romance of the star-crossed lovers is the prototype of all tragic love stories and the sad songs that accompany them. As the harper Tristan laments: “Old tune so full of sadness / That sing’st thy sad complaint.”) Thus, the film fit in perfectly with the GS’ musical essay.

(However, in the GS’ opinion, it’s too bad the director had to turn a plot patterned theme of a search for an ancient, forgotten song about love and death into a bloody horror film. Yeah, the GS wanted a darker version of “romantic love” for a reference to his musical essay, but not this dark—a natural, not a supernatural dark! A great concept flawed by a typical horror movie plot of supernatural evil. Thus, the GS has mixed feelings about this film. That said, the GS will concede that there is some justification for the supernatural horror aspect of the film, albeit a weak one. This has to do with the element of the “curse” connected to the fact that (a) none but women are allowed to hear the song and (b) it’s prohibited that the song be recorded. The ancient curse manifests

when an ambitious third party, a woman, secretly records the song the old woman sings, bringing down an ancient, supernatural evil upon the ethnomusicologist's heads. Thus, there is a cautionary tale in the film, having to do with outsiders—song collectors—who take a proprietorial attitude to folk songs and, by extension, to the culture which enfolds them. This touches upon the whole issue of old folk songs becoming saleable artefacts in the capitalist music industry, even when their meaning is lost or obscured. However, while admittedly the curse of retribution is justified in terms of the rules of the old folk-song tradition, the GS' criticism is that the writer-director's horror movie plot is a heavy-handed Hollywood movie one that actually detracts from the main theme the film purportedly deals with.)

Second, the GS (always using songs to highlight the discourse in his musical essays) has an abiding interest in musicology. (In this case, the origin of our modern love song with the 12th-century troubadours.) More specifically, an interest in the ethnomusicology of Irish and British folk songs, such as love ballads. (The "The Child Ballads" are a famous instance of ethnomusicology, a collection of 305 traditional folk songs from England, Scotland, and their American, Appalachian Scots-Irish song variants, compiled by Harvard professor Francis James Child in the late 19th century and published as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. These ballads, often featuring themes of love, tragedy, and the supernatural, were passed down orally for centuries before Child documented them. By the way, Appalachian Scots-Irish songs are a foundational element of American folk, bluegrass, and country music, merging traditional Celtic melodies, ballads, and fiddle tunes with American experiences.)

Third, it touches upon a further abiding interest of the GS'. In terms of the film's musicology stated as a "modern alchemy is contained in old, forgotten songs," the GS' interest in *esoteric lore* also comes into play. There actually is an ancient Celtic tradition of hiding occult wisdom and spells in the verses of poetry and the lyrics of songs by "Bards." And, of course, there have been "secret societies" throughout history that were formed to preserve and promote esoteric knowledge. This all comes together in the plot of the film. (It should be noted that the film features both old Irish singers who remember the old songs and a contemporary Irish band playing in a pub. It is also worthy of note here that the first person the writer-director Paul Duan sent his script to was musician Ian Lynch of Irish doom folk band Lankum. Thus, the soundtrack by Lankum helps convey the atmosphere of the film.) We have a film plot wherein a "secret organization" is seeking a song that has an ancient, tragic history. Through this plot, the film links music, magic, matriarchy (in the form of an undocumented thousand-year-old folk song passed down from mother to daughter), and meaning to explore the roles of language, knowledge and storytelling—at least in theory. (Unfortunately, this "secret organization" of ethnomusicologists, who have an interest in the *alchemical* aspect of forgotten song and "forbidden knowledge," is not developed and satisfactorily integrated into the overall plot of the film. This is, indeed, a major flaw in the film. It had such potential for the theme it concerns itself with, giving someone like the GS high expectations, but a very disappointing execution. It seems that the writer-director, Paul Duane, was more interested in turning his film into a fucked up, stock horror film of supernatural evil than really exploring the deeper topics of love and

death, the musicology of forgotten song, and the esoteric connection to it. But don't take the GS' word for it, take Duane's, who hoped the film would enable "other people taking chances and making weird fucked up movies, because the world needs more weird, fucked up movies." However, the GS begs to differ—no, the world needs more movies that deal with the unusual and neglected topics Duane's movie tried to explore!)

Be that as it may, the GS, for his purposes, will settle for the "love and death" in the tragic love-song theme of the film because it falls within the scope of the "*dark romantic love*" theme of his last musical essay and its accompanying topics of "*impossible*" or "*unrequited love*."