

Celtic Revival

by Cheryl Lynn George

Submission date: 03-May-2021 02:27PM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 151422780

File name: 24147_Cheryl_Lynn_George_Celtic_Revival_272657_52988721.docx (43.62K)

Word count: 4087

Character count: 21131

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Student Number – 201168

Module – HPCS7003

Assignment 1

Question 3 – Is there any basis on which it can be claimed that there is still such a thing as a ‘Celtic nation’ in the 21st century ?

The three key words in the title are ‘Celtic’, ‘nation’ and ‘basis’. To begin this assignment I have sought a clear and basic definition of the words ‘Celtic’ and ‘nation’ to use. I consider that these definitions are important as with the Celtic nations I am writing about an historic race who do not inhabit a country such as a ‘Celtland’ but mainly apart from Eire, inhabit areas which are parts of other larger countries.

The Oxford Everyday Dictionary defines a nation as ‘a large community of people of mainly common descent, language, history, etc. usually inhabiting a particular territory and under one government.’¹ Then the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Archaeology* defines ‘a Celt (Celtic, Celts) 1. The name given by classical authors such as Hecataeus and Herodotus to the proto-historic peoples occupying Spain, Gaul and central Europe. These writers distinguished the Celts from neighbouring peoples by their appearance, customs, language and political organization’. The text continues to describe the physical appearance of the ancient Celts and then continues with

‘Many authorities extend this fairly narrow, if slightly ambiguous, definition to include the pre-Roman inhabitants of Britain and parts of northern Europe, and even more fancifully to include those communities living outside the Roman Empire who survived down into the later 1st millennium BC and beyond-the so-called Celtic fringe. In fact there is no archaeological evidence for such a widespread and enduring common culture. As a cultural label the term should be seen as a blanket description for a whole series of more or less autonomous groups superficially linked through common ancestries, kinship ties, and shared artistic tastes.

2. A branch of the the Indo-European language group, which is traditionally divided into two main sections: Q-Celtic (Goidelic) which is now represented by Irish, Manx and Scots Gaelic; and P-Celtic (Brittonic), which is now represented by Welsh, Cornish and Breton.’²

These two definitions contain the basis of my assignment and outlines, briefly the historic basis. In the twenty-first century the Celtic nations that are recognised by the Celtic League are: Ireland/Eire, Scotland/Alba, the Isle of Man/Manin, Brittany/Breizh, Wales/Cymru and Cornwall/Kernow. The Celtic League manifesto states that –

‘The Celtic League is an inter Celtic Organization that campaigns for the political, language, cultural and social rights of the Celtic nations. It does this across a broad range of issues. It highlights human rights abuse, monitors military activity and focuses on political, socio-economic, environmental, language and cultural issues which generally or specially affect one or

¹ J.M.Hawkins, E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford Everyday Dictionary*, Oxford, England, O.U.P., P.466, 1985

² Timothy Darvill, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Archaeology*, Oxford, England, O.U.P. P.81/82, 2008

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more of the Celtic countries in some way. The organisation also aims to further each of the Celtic nations right to independence and to promote the benefits of inter Celtic co-operation.’³

From these basic but informative quotes comes the main attributes of what a 21st century Celtic nation needs to fulfil the definition: language, culture and a political/socio-economic system. To this I am adding ‘Celticness or Celticity’ which is a nebulous but highly important factor. In this assignment I will examine the evidence for each of these areas, beginning with language.

For the Celtic League and many knowledgeable academics in the areas of Celtic studies, language is the basic and major factor in determining a Celtic nation. With the six Celtic areas there is a clear and historic basis of the languages and all six Celtic areas still have their languages, though they are all considered to be ‘vulnerable’ (Welsh) or ‘endangered’ in the categories of ‘definitely’ (Irish and Scottish Gaelic), ‘severely’ (Breton) or ‘critically’ (Manx and Cornish) by Unesco⁴. These languages have been spoken in ‘modern times’, they still exist and are used, even if that is by a minority of the population and there is certain evidence of what I would call ‘nurturing’ in the 21st century. Evidence for ‘nurturing’ I would consider to be programmes on local radio and T.V., evidence from government or local government that there is support of the language and that there are modern publications in the language. I take examples of ‘nurturing’ from the two Celtic languages that Unesco consider to be the most ‘fragile’ and ‘critically endangered’, Cornish and Manx.

Philip Peyton, in his book *Cornwall: A History* charts the serious and complex issues with the linguistics of the development of a form of Cornish suitable for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The work of Robert Morton Nance, Ken George and Richard Gendall can all be appreciated as part of the efforts that brought about the **‘British government in 2002 adding Cornish to the list of indigenous United Kingdom languages that it was prepared to recognise under the Council of Europe’s charter on Regional and Minority Languages.’**⁵ Cornish is supported by the County Council in line with the European charter and in 2009 the Council passed a motion in which it promoted the inclusion of Cornish ‘as appropriate and where possible’ in Council publications and on signage. A local independent radio station Radyo An Gernewegva started a 4 minute podcast in the Cornish language in 2007 and over the years this has now increased to 30 minutes and is now broadcast on five community stations across the county. As a resident of the South West, I cannot claim to hear Cornish spoken frequently on the various forms of media, but I do hear Cornish sung reasonably frequently on the regional news programme, BBC Spotlight. Particularly recently this has been by ‘zoom choirs’. A particular local favourite sung in Cornish is ‘Cornwall My Home’.⁶

Manx, as another ‘critically endangered’ Unesco Celtic language is described as **‘Already under threat from the pressure, of English, the language was still widely spoken in the first half of the nineteenth century, appearing in newspaper advertisements and articles, in use in the courts and in churches (there were editions of the book of Common Prayer in 1840 and 1842, and a collection of hymns in 1830 and 1846).’**⁷

³ <https://www.celticleague.net>

⁴ Unesco Languages Atlas Report 2010, www.unesco.org/languages-atlas

⁵ Peter Peyton, *Cornwall: A History*, Exeter, England, University of Exeter Press, P.310, 2017

⁶ Written by Cornishman Harry Glasson in 1997.

⁷ R.L.Thomson, P.312, *The Manx Language, in A New History of the Isle of Man Vol. V*, edited by John Belcham, Liverpool, England, Liverpool University Press, 2000.

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There was also a Dictionary of the Manks Language in 1835 by A.Cregeen. Manx is also available to be taught in schools and checking the schedules of Manx Radio there is evidence of Manx speaking programmes several times a week and three on Sundays.⁸

The strength of the language as a primary factor as the basis for a Celtic Nation in the 21st century can be seen by the issue with Galicia, the sometimes called 'seventh Celtic nation', which applied to join the Celtic League in 1986 towards the end of the twentieth century. At the Annual General Meeting of the Celtic League in that year, Galicia was voted (by a majority of one vote) to become a member of the Celtic League. This caused quite a sensation and the following year Galicia was voted out of the league. The main issue here was the history of language used in Galicia. In an Interview with Peter Beresford Ellis which *Transceltic* published on 29/1/2013 on the web site⁹

Peter Beresford Ellis was asked : "In your 1993 work "*The Celtic Dawn – A History of Pan-Celticism*", you discuss the subject of "who is a Celt ". Do you see Celtic identity going beyond that of language? In response, Ellis gave the following: "Celtic is a linguistic term; a Celt is one who speaks or was known to have spoken within modern historical times a Celtic language. That is central. This brings us back to the future of the languages for if the languages and their attendant culture have no future then the Celts will become as extinct as the Etruscans. Celtic identity is intrinsically linked to language and culture and there can be no dilution of that fact. I was instrumental in persuading the Celtic League to reject an application from Galicia as a Celtic country. The last time a Celtic language was recorded as having been spoken in Galicia was in the 9th Century. The language now spoken there (Galengo) is a dialect close to Portuguese but influenced by Castilian'.

Peter Beresford Ellis continues this theme of the above decision regarding Galicia in the already mentioned book *Celtic Dawn, the dream of Celtic unity*. **'This decision caused an immediate controversy for it implied that the linguistic criterion was no longer valid. How then was a Celtic community to be defined? By race, religion or some other outwardly identifiable form ? The ensuing debate known in the Pan Celtic movement as the 'Galician crisis', caused the definition of a Celt to be thoroughly analysed and assessed. The outcome was that the linguistic definition became firmly reinforced with the League's 1987 annual general meeting'.¹⁰**

Following on from the linguistic criterion which I consider to be the primary one, I now move into the area of the Celtic Culture. Here Galicia rears its head again as a possible Celtic nation contender Celtic Culture appears to be very healthy in the twenty-first century and though Galicia remains out of the Celtic League, it certainly retains clear links with the other Celtic communities. For example, there is a glossy bi-monthly very twenty-first century styled publication called 'Celtic Life International Magazine' which promotes the Arts across the SEVEN (1 heart 7 nations – baseball cap slogan) Celtic nations that includes Galicia. Interestingly, Galicia is also included in the prestigious

⁸ <https://www.manxradio.com/on-air/schedule>.

⁹ transceltic.com/pan-celtic/celtic-identity-language-and-question-of-galicia

¹⁰ Peter Beresford Ellis, *Celtic Dawn, the dream of Celtic unity*, Y Lolfa Cyr., Talybont, Wales, P.21/22,2002,

annual Celtic music and cultural festival, the Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Brittany. This festival runs for 10 days in August and claims to attract around 800,000 people and 4,500 performers over the 10 days, not only musicians but artists, dancers, academics and filmmakers. If the festival runs in 2021 it will be the 50th anniversary. This festival in the early 1990s saw the premiere of 'The Pilgrim', a suite by Shaun Daveys, the Irish musician, which charts the travels of St Colum Cille (St Columba) through the Celtic countries of Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and (surprise, surprise) Galicia. More information can be obtained from the web site ¹¹. This is clearly a major Celtic cultural event and the numbers are startling, when compared to Glastonbury Which has a limit of 203,000 (permission for 210,000 persons is pending) over the 5 days. The organisation arrangements are different for the two festivals but I think this shows that the Festival Interceltique really attracts a wide range of visitors over the festival period and also probably has better weather!

Celtic music has always been a huge part of Celtic culture whether it is a Welsh Choir or traditional instruments like the Breton bagpipes and there are a range of Celtic instruments including the Gaelic harp which features on the currency of Ireland. There has been a real renaissance in traditional Celtic music with musicians such as the well-known Breton musician, Alan Stivell and also the band recently described by the *Radio Times* ¹², as an Anglo-Irish Celtic punk band The Pogues. Perhaps a very 21st century description! Barry Cunliffe, in his volume *The Celts – a very short introduction* alludes to the link between Celtic people and nature, which I will cover later in this assignment.- **'At a less pop level, the compositions and performances of the Breton pianist Didier Squiben, blending the cadences and rhythms of traditional folk music with echoes of the wind and the sea, provide a vivid example of the vitality of modern music in its Celtic guise'**.¹³

Music is not the only area where the Celtic arts have flourished. Celtic art and particularly Celtic style Jewellery is certainly experiencing a revival but interesting it is an artist and designer from the Isle of Man, Archibald Knox (1864-1933) who is credited with designing over 5,000 objects for Liberty of London and many of his designs including fabric designs are still used today. His inspiration for his designs came from the Manx stone crosses that surrounded his home as a child as well as from the Book(s) of Kells and other Irish artifacts like the Tara Brooch.¹⁴

Moving into Celtic politics another criteria for the basis for 'a' or possibly 'the' Celtic nation combined in the 21st century. Writing about Celtic politics the editors and authors of 'Celtic Geographies' comment on the 'revitalism' occurring in Celtic politics -

'Though this is a process which has its roots in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is no doubt that the current period has witnessed a further energisation of Celtic identity politics. This has been most clearly evident in the process of the devolution of power within the U.K. in 1997. Even though this process was couched in terms of democratising politics in the UK, it has served to emphasise the separateness of Scotland and Wales within the UK nation-state. Significantly, for many nationalists in both countries, devolution is seen

¹¹ <https://www.festicket.com/festivals/interceltique-de-Lorient/>

¹² edition wk. ending 13/3/21 BBC Radio Times. Tues. 16/3/21, BBC 4, 10.00pm Crock of Gold: a few rounds with Shane MacGowan.

¹³ Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts: a very short introduction*, Oxford, England, O.U.P., P.2, 2003.

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-Isle-of-Man-48367359>

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to offer a space within which Celtic identities and politics may be sustained and developed'.¹⁵

John Davies writes in *A History of Wales* about the Scots viewing their nationality in legal and constitutional terms, while the Welsh viewed theirs in social and cultural terms. He writes about the importance of -

the distinction between civic and ethnic nationality, and it was argued that the future belonged to those who sought to strengthen the consciousness of Welsh citizenship, a consciousness acceptable to all the country's inhabitants. There is no doubt tension between this all-embracing ideal and the desire to strengthen those characteristics unique to Wales, and the chief challenge facing Wales's nation-builders at the opening of the twenty-first century was the need to reconcile the two aspirations'.¹⁶

This distinction between civic and ethnic nationality is an important point and is covered by Francis Pryor who writes about

'The modern notion of 'Celticity' or 'Celticness' has its origins in British insular independence movements. Many people in Ireland and Wales did not feel part of a Britain that was dominated by England. The situation in Scotland was more complex, because regional differences and traditional frictions between Lowlands and Highlands, Protestants to the east and Roman Catholics to the west, tended to smother the emergence of popular anti-British/English feeling until the second half of the twentieth century.'¹⁷

Now I come to the area of nationality. Looking at the governance of the six possible Celtic nations there is the Isle of Man Del. which is an internally self-governing dependency of the British Crown and its people are British Citizens, with the Queen as the Lord of Mann and Head of State and its own historic parliament, the Tynwald. Ireland (Eire) a republic. Then Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland with devolved governments since 1999 and as well as national versions of the U.K. political parties and the Green Party, there are the national parties the SNP, and possibly soon the latest addition with the very interesting and Celtic choice of name of the Alba Party ! Then Clwyd Cymru, Sein Fein, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail. They are four countries with varied sources of income for their economies. Cornwall is a county of England with a county council and its own Mebyon Kernow which is really more of a political pressure group than a political party and though it does have four elected representatives on the Cornwall Council there are, interestingly, also seven Independent councillors on the Cornish Council. Brittany, however, is a 'Region' of France with a regional council based in Rennes. Though I have read a number of times while researching this assignment that 'Bretons feel both Breton and French' though under French law apparently, since the French Revolution they can only be French living in a part of what is France. Whereas in Britain we can be English and British, Welsh and British and also it would seem Cornish, English and British ! When visiting Brittany (via a Brittany Ferry) which I have done several times, I do get a clear feeling that it is a distinct area, as well as a part of France and that is not just to do with the Breton Flag on the Brittany Ferries or the large ARMORIC lorries which constantly travel up and down the A38. Brittany

¹⁵David C. Harvey, Rhys Jones, Neil McInroy, Christine Milligan, *Celtic Geographies*, Abingdon, England, Routledge, p.1, 2002.

¹⁶ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, London, England, Penguin Books, p.709 revised ed.2007).

¹⁷ Francis Pryor, *Britain AD*, London, England, Harper Perennial, P.9, 2005.

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does have a Cultural Charter (granted in 1977) which recognises its separate culture and that is clearly positive, but for me Brittany appears the only Celtic area not properly recognised by its history. The geographical area of 34,023 kms sq. is larger than Wales (20,779sq. kms) and its population is over 4.5million which is approaching the population of Eire (4.9 million 2019). I wonder that if Brittany was not part of France, but part of the United Kingdom would it be in the same position as Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland?

I am now moving onto the fourth area and the more 'nebulous' attributes of Celticness or Celticity which also have a large bearing on the basis of a Celtic nation in the 21st Century. This is an area which appears recently to be growing in interest. This can be called 'Otherness' or 'the 'Myth of the West' (by Celtic Geographies). The Celtic 'nations' all have large sea coastal boundaries and some have Atlantic Ocean coasts. The Isle of Man being an island and the other five 'Celtic Nations' are surrounded by sea apart from those which have one land border. So these areas are naturally remote with what some people might call a 'romantic atmosphere'. This 'romantic atmosphere' has also been important in the promotion of tourism and in supporting, what is sometimes a fragile economy for the regions. These are the lands of the children of Lir, Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot and Gawain, Magical Lands and more recently and via Daphne du Maurier (with her novels including Frenchman's Creek where the 'hero' comes from Finistere) and then Poldark and Game of Thrones all adaptations of novels into forms of more modern media showcasing the Celtic lands and supporting the economies of the present times. It also promotes what in the book, *Celtic Geographies*, Moya Kneafsey calls 'The Myth of the West', **'there are themes linking a sense of Celtic spirituality and mysticism with a feeling of 'oneness with nature'. The inhabitants of these mystical, almost otherworldly places are often portrayed as being integral to the rural landscape'**.¹⁸

We have gained an understanding of the value of the words 'rural', 'handcrafted', 'ethically sourced', 'natural fibres' and 'locally produced' and these are linked to the rural landscape and rural life which links to the Celts. Going onto the internet and typing in Celtic Jewellery and Celtic clothing manufacturers brings up straight away, a large number of entries with the words above much in evidence. Clearly the term Celtic is still widely in use in the 21st century and like the 'Celtic Nations' it gives people something which they want to aspire to have and reflects a 'romantic' life and that life is a rural life. However, today the geographic nature of basing the production of truly Celtic artifacts in Celtic areas where the craftspeople are of Celtic origin has been pre-empted by the internet and online shopping. I fear the person of the twenty-first century wants all the trappings of modern technology and yet almost yearns for what they think is the ideal rural life.

' The future of the Celtic appears to me to lie in two realms beyond the dwindling geographies of native speech. The first realm is in the global constellation of beliefs, interests and consumption tastes which have been partially detached from the residual core realm. These meanings are expanding to fill (or refill) the outlines of the Celtic, first established by archaic scholarship, and supported by continued use of the term in official and academic contexts. These are the Celts of the spirit – those who choose to be Celtic. The second realm embraces those populations that share a sense of Celtic ancestry, and that 'passionate regret' for language loss which provides motivation for urban language revivals, and much of the

¹⁸ Moya Kneafsey, *Tourism Images and the Construction of Celticity in Ireland and Brittany*, *Celtic Geographies*, Abingdon, England, Routledge, P.130, 2002.

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market for Celtic music and tourism. This realm overlaps with the first in many aspects of consumption, but potential conflicts may arise over ancestry, authenticity, and belonging, where the appropriations of the 'spirit' Celts appear to trespass on the rights and beliefs of the 'blood' Celts.'¹⁹

In conclusion, I believe that there is a basis for a 'Celtic nation' in the twenty-first century and the basis is three clear attributes - a Celtic language spoken within modern historical times, where even if there is not huge evidence of it being (widely) spoken it is in existence and there is evidence of what I would call 'nurturing'. Secondly evidence of the continued culture with music, and the arts and literature and creative activities actively being encouraged and participated in. Thirdly, politics in terms of an area having a devolved government and an opportunity for the people of the area to vote for their own representatives and laws. Also, for there to be a nationalist party to promote the area and its values.

Some countries need a clearer definition than others - Eire, Scotland, Wales and (just about because it is so small) the Isle of Man, qualify as Celtic nations and more or less fit the basis definition criteria I have used. For Brittany it is more difficult because it clearly has a language and a clear and active culture and a history of Celticity. It is though a region, of France with a regional government. So, for that reason I would not class it as a Celtic nation (but I think it should be). Cornwall is a county of England. It has a county council and It is a small geographic area with a small population which deviates in size due to seasonal nature of its current main occupation which is tourism. There are serious issues with the number of second homes owned in the county and the current lack of affordable housing for the young Cornish people. Traditional occupations like fishing are becoming no longer variable and are dying out. Both the language and political party are currently (though hopefully this may change) hanging on by a thread. Despite Tintagel and all the history I do not feel that it is a Celtic nation and sadly, it is also the one that I feel the most concerned about in terms of its future.

'Celticity was thus a potent component in Irish nationalism; it was less so in a Scottish and welsh context. Each country was defining its identity through its own specific past and institutions; the welsh Eisteddfod has no Irish or Scottish counterpart, and the commonbonds which are now seen to unite the 'Celtic' countries were only just beginning to receive academic recognition, for instance in the establishment of the Board of Celtic Studies. It is interesting to reflect on what the difference is between being, say, 'Welsh' or 'Irish', and being Celtic. Generally the two terms are assumed to be the same, when in fact the local term is really the one that gives the sense of local identity; the term 'Celtic' gives both the international aspect (a group of ethnicities that have a common cause in resisting the encroaching English and French ethnicities), and also a much wider and deeper sense of history in linking with the Ancient Celts'.²⁰

I do feel that the word 'Celtic' reaches over and above government, politics, economies and land masses. Culturally and historically the six areas I have written about are special and unique and they are linked into a unified nation by The Celtic League and by their own unique qualities of Celticity.

¹⁹ John G. Robb, *A Geography of Celtic Appropriations, Celtic Geographies*, , Abingdon, England, Routledge, P242, 2002.

²⁰ John Collis, *The Celts origins, Myths, Inventions*, England,Tempus Publishing, P.198, 2010.

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Web Sites

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transceltic.com/pan-celtic/celtic-identity-language-and-question-of-galicia

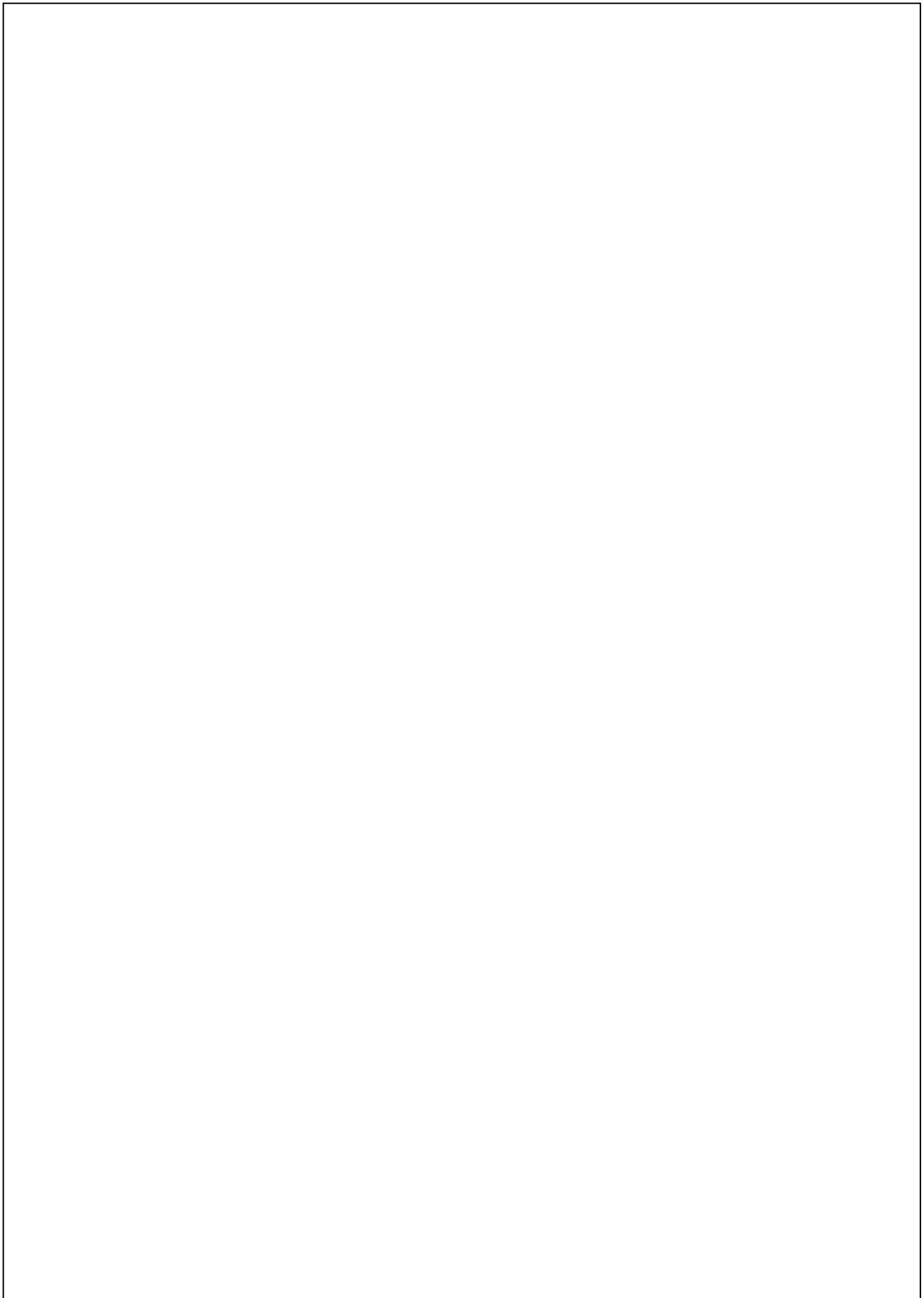
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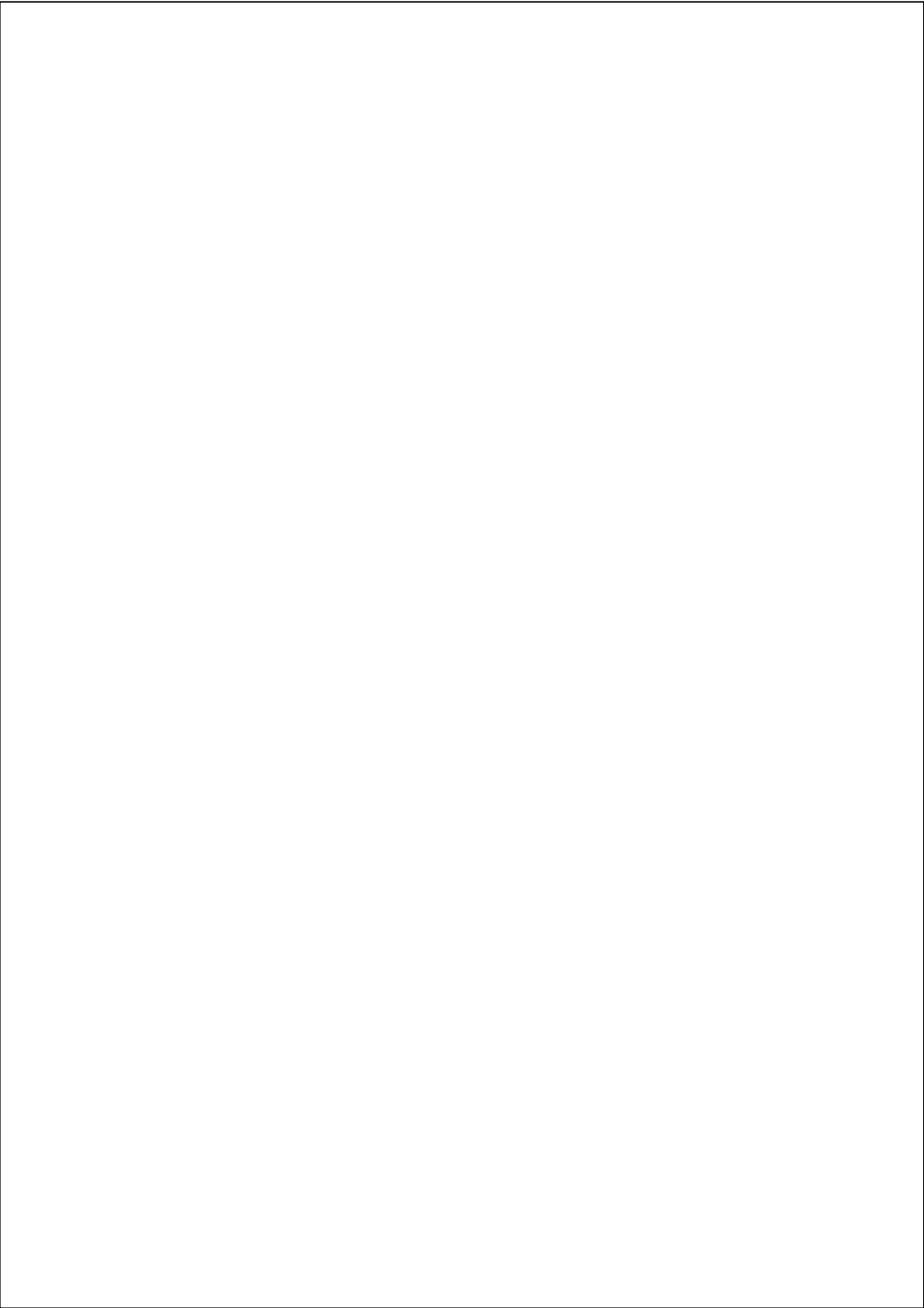
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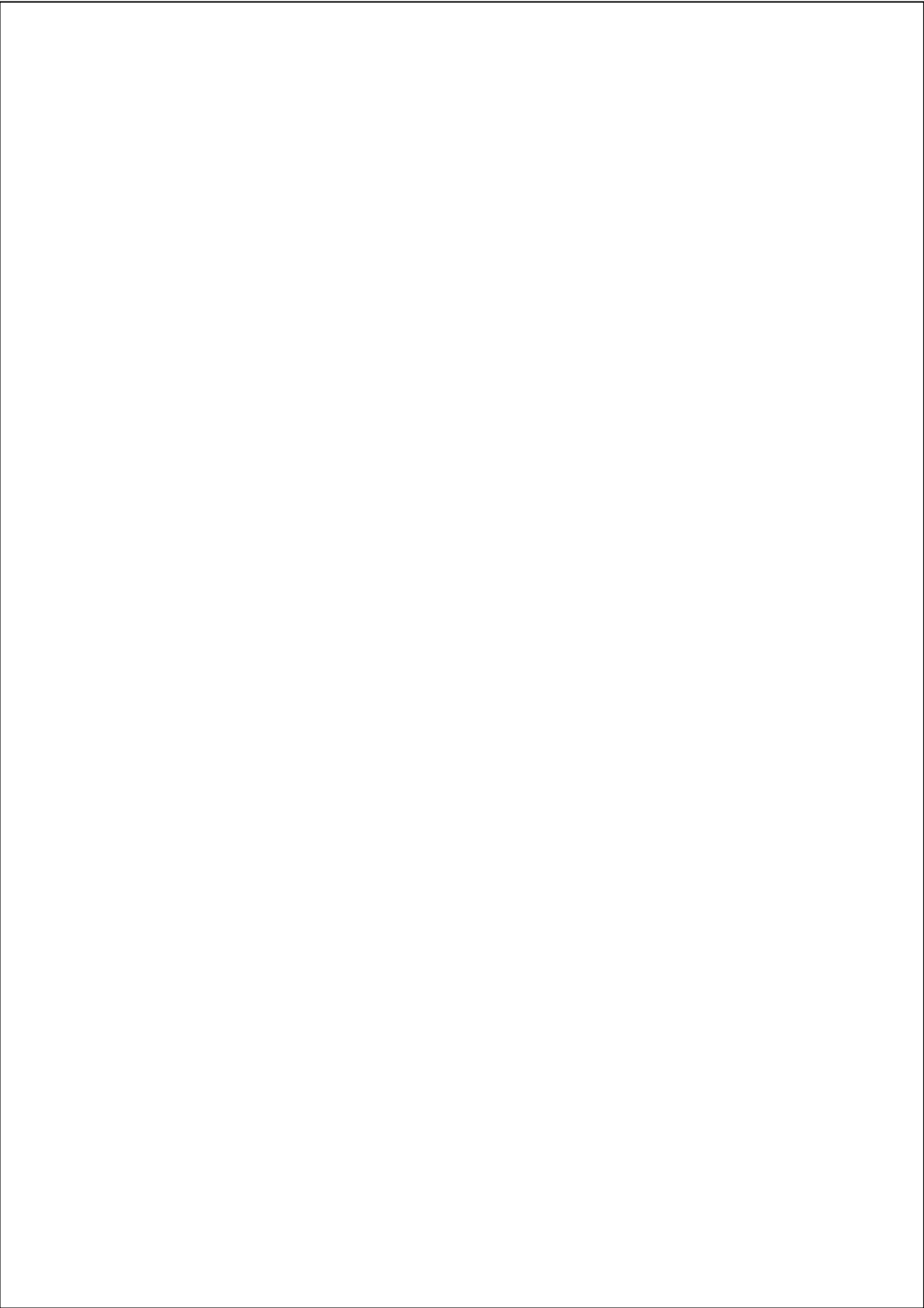
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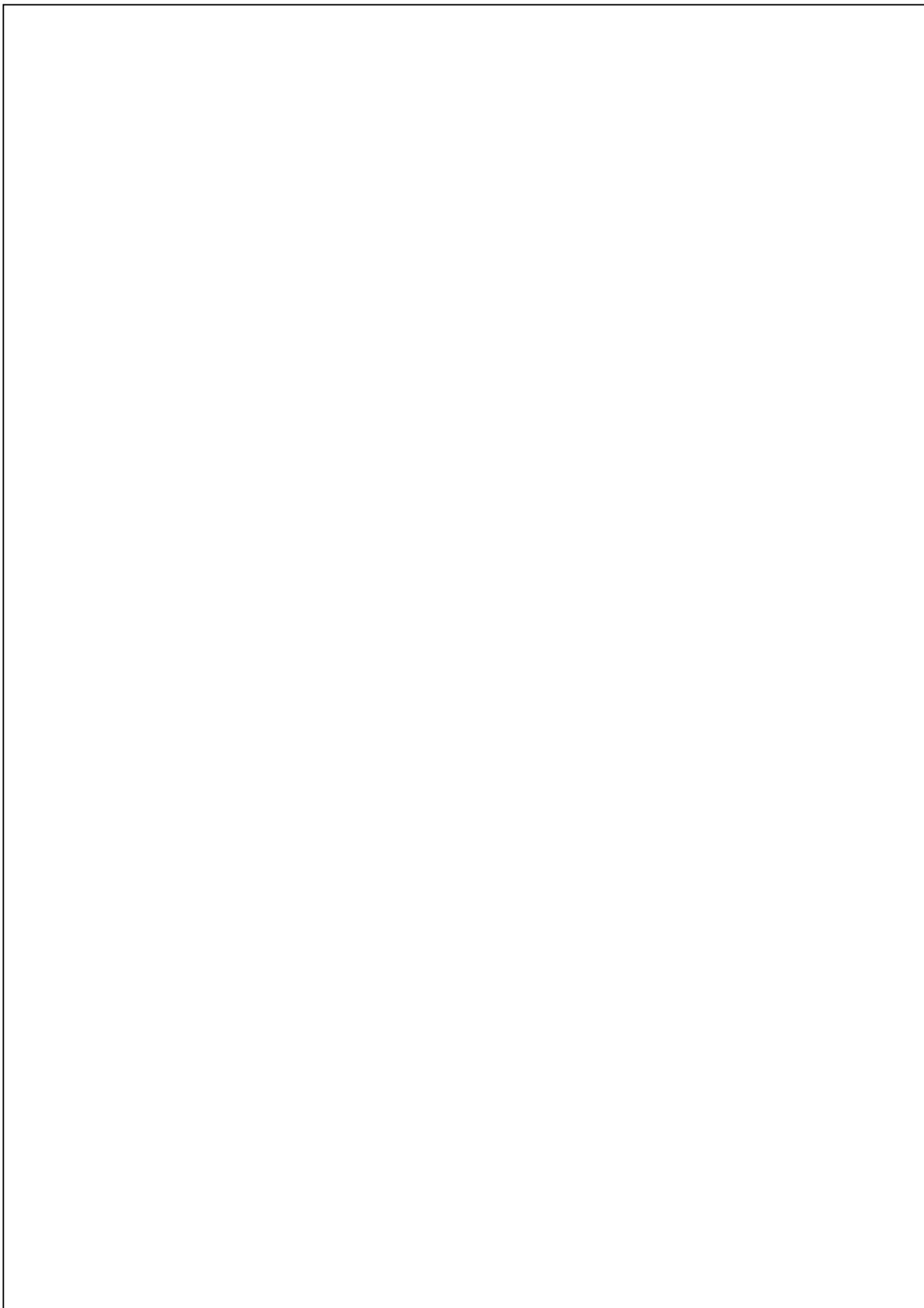
https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/schedule/bbc_radio_cornwall

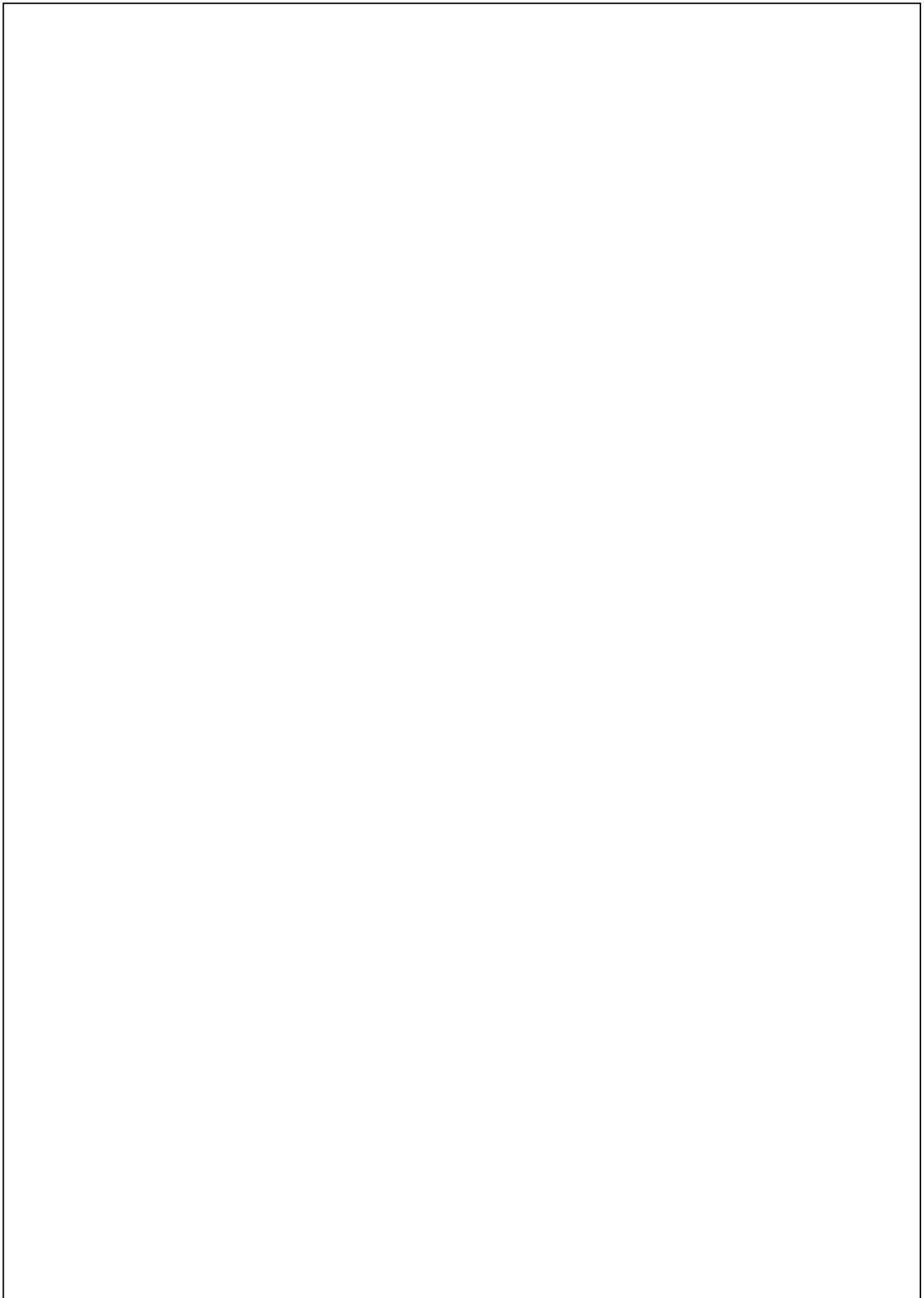
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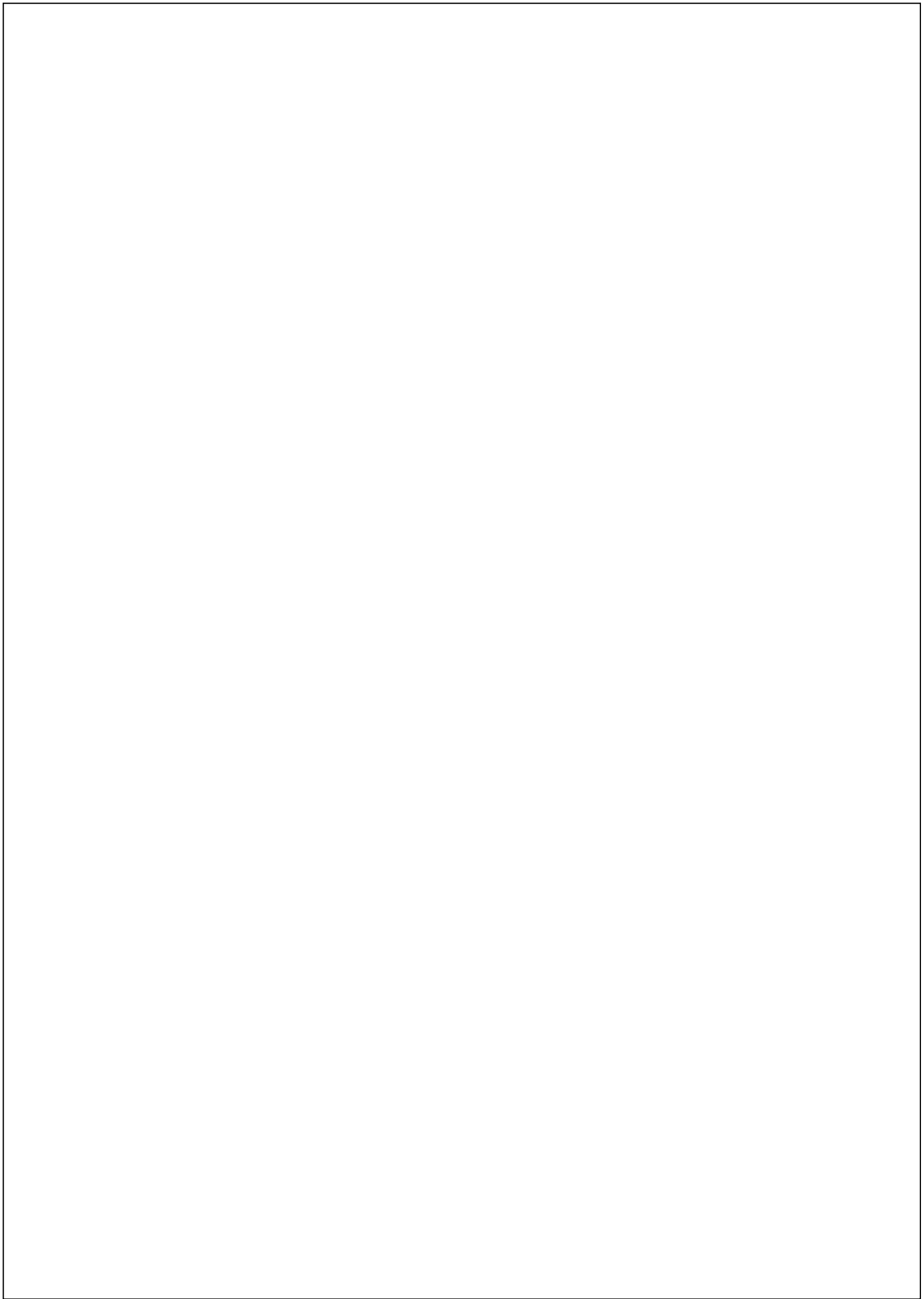












Celtic Revival

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

62/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This essay is generally written in language of a standard wholly appropriate for work at this level. However, it contains some quotes which are rather too long and should ideally be replaced by a greater measure of paraphrasing in the author's own words. There is also no need to highlight these in bold.

The relationship on page 3 between "*The Celtic Dawn - A History of Pan-Celticism*" and "*Celtic Dawn, the dream of Celtic unity*" needs to be clarified, as there is an implication here that they are the same book, despite the titles, although similar, being clearly different. Only the latter appears in the bibliography. Perhaps this is a revision of the 1993 book?

On the same page, considering the linguistic criterion to be the primary one brings issues of its own. For example, does this mean that songs have to be sung in a Celtic language to count as Celtic?

This same question could be asked of the political scenario painted on pages 4 and 5. What is "Celtic", for instance, about Scottish nationalism in a land where 98.6% of the population speak only English?

This point is more or less made in the quote which then follows by John Davies about how the Scots view their nationality. There is little room for Gaelic in either the legal or constitutional sense of Scottish nationhood. Indeed, when referring then to Wales, and "*strengthening the consciousness of Welsh citizenship... to all the country's inhabitants*", this would mean a Wales where the majority of people do not speak Welsh. The opinion expressed about Brittany, however, is a fair one, and its current low status is no doubt tied in to French monocultural ideas of nationhood.

One possible explanation for the easy access to Celtic Jewellery etc on page 6 is that anything labelled "Celtic" sells, largely because of the "Myth of the West" mentioned above it (p. 6). The assessment of the 21st century person seems a fair one.

Although the point about Brittany's regional status (p. 7) is valid, it should not be taken too far. It is, after all, a status given to it by the French state. There are many of the UK unionist persuasion who would willingly argue that Scotland is no more than a "region" of the UK.

Collis' comment about assuming Welsh and Irish to be the same (p. 7) perhaps says more about him than the accuracy of his statement.

It is acknowledged that the question in this assignment has no easy answer to it, and it would be unrealistic (and perhaps a little unfair) to expect one. Nevertheless, this essay has clearly given the matter a lot of thought and made a genuine attempt at undertaking the task as set.

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