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**Rosemary T McAuley**

**The Mysticism of William Sharp (1855-1905) and the  
Celtic Renaissance:  
Spanish Carmelite and Symbolist Influences**



**William Sharp, aka 'Fiona MacLeod'  
Author and Poet  
1855, Paisley - 1905, Sicily**

**Master of Theology**  
**Department of Theology and Religious Studies**  
**University of Glasgow**

## **MTh Thesis**

# **The Mysticism of William Sharp (1855-1905) and the Celtic Renaissance:**

## **Spanish Carmelite and Symbolist Influences**

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# **The Mysticism of William Sharp (1855-1905) and the Celtic Renaissance: Spanish Carmelite and Symbolist Influences**

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the mysticism that shaped the life and work of William Sharp and the Celtic Renaissance. It aims to argue that Sharp was a mystic and to investigate what was shaping his mysticism. To that end it uncovers two key influences on Sharps mystical writing: Symbolism and the spirituality of the Spanish Carmelite mystics. In relation to this it argues that Sharp's friendship with Arthur Symons was pivotal in this endeavour with Symons three month trip to Spain in 1899 culminating in the release of his two books: *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and *Images of Good and Evil* with its chapters on Carmelites St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila. It looks to Coventry Patmore as the original source, eight years earlier of Symons' first introduction to the Carmelite mystics. It argues, then that Spain was a central influence to Sharp in that it's Carmelite Mystics and in its folktales and romances (which is evident in his writing) and looks to the original Celtic presence in Spain as source. The Carmelite influences are examined in Sharp's later writing as 'Fiona Macleod' in particular the Dark Night Spirituality of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*. It argues, too, that the lyrical, passionate poetry of the Carmelites influenced Sharp and others in their own mystical writing and linked to the musical qualities of the Symbolists. Sharp's mystical development is examined in relation to his choosing to write as a Catholic and a woman as Fiona Macleod from 1895. It argues that



Sharp's relationship with significant women such as Christina Rossetti and Olive Schreiner shaped his writing as well as the influence of key academic women including his wife and his friendship with Edith Rinder Windgate. His early vision of the 'Lady of the Woods' also is seen to have influenced his search for the sacred feminine ideal and I argue that he was a visionary, ahead of his time ultimately looking for a feminine renewal. This was shared by the Marian charism of the Carmelites. This thesis argues that Sharp became more Christological in his mysticism, later writing as 'Fiona Macleod' and that his twelve year friendship with Christina Rossetti was a pertinent Christian influence on Sharp.

In summary, this thesis argues against previous assertions by Alaya and Meyers that have undermined Sharp had sexually conflicts was and minor literary player or Blamires' claim he was of the fairy world. Instead it maintains that Sharp was a prolific and creative writer and mystic who should have a place as a significant figure at end of the nineteenth century. I demonstrate that his mystical experience and writing were visionary and were pivotal to the development of a purified mysticism. I argue that Sharp was a strong masculine spirit who saw the significance of the feminine choosing to write as a woman from 1895. I argue that Spanish Carmelite spirituality was being discovered by his close friend Arthur Symons in the 1890's and I hypothesise that there is a strong probability that Sharp would have been exposed to the writing of the Spanish Carmelites through Symons and Patmore and their writing.

# FIGURES OF THE CELTIC RENAISSANCE

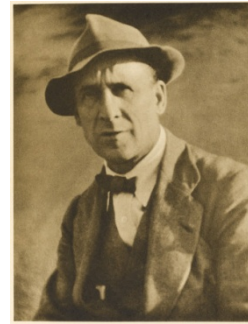
George MacDonald



W.B. Yeats



John Duncan



William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)



George Russell ( A.E.)



Arthur Symons

# **Chapter 1: Introduction:**

## **Setting the Scene**

### **a. William Sharp 1855-1905: An Overview**

In this thesis I will be arguing that William Sharp was a self-confessed mystic and like other members of the Celtic Renaissance his mysticism is evident in his writing. I will be uncovering a mysticism that demonstrates the influences of Symbolism and has a growing Christological stance through the influence of Spanish Carmelite Mysticism. To this end I aim to re-assert Sharp as a key figure in the late nineteenth century producing literature that incorporated Christian ideals.

#### **i) Background**

William Sharp was born in 1855, a Scot by birth, living in Paisley and Glasgow in his youth but always combining a rebellion towards convention and parental control with ill-health. This gave him a gateway and space to explore the inner side of his life. By his own admittance he “was a rather delicate and sensitive child” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.4)<sup>1</sup>. Although he had little academic success he was “an attentive scholar” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.5) and used his short time as a student of Glasgow University (1871-73) to study everything from “literature, philosophy, poetry, mysticism, occultism, magic, mythology and folk-lore” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.5). He was driven and would spend only four out of twenty-four hours in sleep,

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 reprint

assimilating a wide ranging knowledge and acquainting himself with mystics of East and West. In 1884 he married his childhood friend and cousin Elizabeth. It was a happy marriage but despite wanting children they remained childless. Although largely a forgotten figure he reached the height of popularity with his *Immortal Hour* (first performed in 1914), an opera based on his poems as ‘Fiona MacLeod’<sup>2</sup> which was popular through the twenties and thirties after his death in 1905.

## ii) An International Man

There are three distinct hats that William Sharp wore in his short life of fifty years; that of critic and biographer, writer and poet, and mystic. This international man mixed with numerous prominent writers and artists of his time, travelled round the world by the time he was twenty-five and was praised and encouraged by such as D.G. Rossetti and W.B Yeats. His extensive letter writing, memoirs and critical work lay testament to his wide circle of friends and influences from Walter Pater and Sir Noel Paton to Olive Schreiner and Patrick Geddes. He was an impressive man, tall and good-looking, a confident mix of Scandinavian and Celtic blood which belied his weak constitution. According to his wife he was aware early on of his ‘special’ character and suffered from being misunderstood. A fact that remains today.

## iii) Previous Works on Sharp

There have been three books written on Sharp. Flavia Alaya wrote a critical overview of Sharp in 1970 (*William Sharp-‘Fiona Macleod’ 1855-1905*) but pointed out that “...the mysteries of Sharp’s internal life (are) practically untouched...” (Alaya, 1970, p.3). I hope to redress this and establish Sharp as a man wholeheartedly striving for mystical perfection and

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Fiona Macleod’ was the pseudonym Sharp used from 1895. I refer to Sharp’s writing always in the masculine form including as ‘Fiona Macleod’.

not a man grappling with complex inner conflicts. He was a man who Flavia Alaya, (1970, p.8) believed had to unite his “cosmopolitanism with his problem of personal identity... (which) was no private eccentricity.” This image of Sharp and a man grappling with his identity is supported by Terry Meyers, (*The Sexual tensions of William Sharp*, 1996) who theorizes about his sexuality believing him to have homosexual and transvestite tendencies. Sharp was searching for meaning in his life and Meyers believes it even extended to his sexual identity when he chose to write as a woman called ‘Fiona MacLeod’. I will be arguing that other factors were the cause such as his hope for a feminine renewal and his sympathy for women, (discussed further in Chapter 5c) and that his personality and sexuality were not only balanced but that his integrity and nobleness of spirit shines forth from his letters and output as a man fired up to give soul food with morality at its base to his friends and readers. Steve Blamires, (*The Little Book of the Great Enchantment*, 2010), has made a comprehensive account of his life but his basic standpoint and belief that Sharp was early baptised “into the world of faery” (Blamires, 2010, p.27), I believe undermines Sharp’s authentic mystical experiences and sound theology particularly in his later works written as a Roman Catholic, under the pseudonym of ‘Fiona Macleod’. Alaya paints the picture of a renaissance man of many talents but master of none. Neither Alaya nor Blamires analyse his writing or establish sources of influence and I would disagree with Alaya’s view of Sharp as a minor literary player. He was driven to produce imaginative stories and visionary poetry that reflected his profound mystical experiences and contributes through them insights into his own interior life while showing a comprehensive grasp of the word.

#### iv) Man with a Secret and a Mission

His writing under the pseudonym of ‘Fiona Macleod’ from 1895 provided the secrecy he felt was essential to his inward life and which he protected fiercely during his lifetime. So

principled was his belief in his interior life, that he even forwent a civil pension with “serene acceptance and confidence” (letter to Hon. Alex Hood, 21 Aug 1902, E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.106) because he would not reveal the identity of ‘Fiona Macleod’ to parliament saying in the same letter that there was “a deep spiritual impulse and compelling circumstances of a nature upon which I must be silent.” Ernest Rhys writes that he was “an insatiable wanderer....a romanticist” (*The Century Magazine*, 1907) and Sharp did believe that “...a Romantic Revival is imminent in our poetic literature” (writing in 1888, E.A Sharp, 1910), but Sharp was more. He was a man on a mission to find the truth of himself and the ultimate truth common to many faiths. This led him to the dawn of the Celtic Renaissance in the arts and to the marriage of Celtic myth with Christian faith and led him on to embrace elements of religions of both East and West. This was a deep yet humble man, who could say at the end of his life, “I am glad and content to be a ‘messenger’, my concern is not to think of myself or my name or reward but to do...my truest and best...I have faith you see in the inward destiny.” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.106). So intense was this dual existence that emerged of Sharp the critic and biographer, and MacLeod the lyrical, mystical writer that he sometimes wrote as ‘Wilfron’, his inner third self. But what was he trying to protect and what was he a messenger of? What were the mystical experiences that shaped his writing?

#### v) A Prolific Writer

As a writer he was prolific yet is seen as a man of his time not able to stand today with the great literary figures he mixed with. I would disagree with this general assumption. His critical and biographical work was well received and still gives unique observations of the many literary figures he was connected with, his aloofness only sharpening his critical skills. In William Sharp’s short stories there is evidence I believe to accredit him as an author worthy of greater standing in the literary world. In comparison to the esteem given to other

Christian/mystical storytellers like C.S. Lewis or George MacDonald, William Sharp is largely forgotten yet his stories while containing religious and visionary truths still make for enjoyable reading. He is masterful at creating character and gives insight into both body and soul with subtle descriptions. His characters are visibly portrayed with great detail and insight. For example in the *Sin-Eater* (1895) his description of an old woman the character Neil Ross encounters reads; “The rain trickled down her withered brown face, over which the thin grey locks hung limply. It was only in the deep set eyes that the flame of life still glimmered through that dimly”. (Macleod, 1895, 2012 reprint, p.2) His characterisation is strong and imaginative to match any descriptive passage of say Dickens. He utilizes quirky simile phrases like “He was shaking like a sail two points off the wind.” (Macleod, 1895, reprint 2012, p.55), or metaphors like the “weary lapping of the water.” (Macleod, 1895, reprint, 2012, p.16) At other times he gives us exquisite and imaginative passages for example “I heard his sunwarm breath come across the honeysuckle by the roadside” or joyous celebrations of nature such as “The air was filled with the poignant sweetness of the loneroid or bog-myrtle, meadow sweet and white wild-roses the green smell of the brackens, the delicate woodland odour of the mountain-ash I floated hitherward and thitherward on the idle breath of the wind...” (Macleod, 1900, p.38)<sup>3</sup>. Added to these fine, if florid, passages Sharp also imaginatively creates visionary worlds such as his description of the forest chapel in *The Divine Adventure* (1900) where it is filled with “a vast throng, ever growing more dense as it became more multitudinous, till it seemed as though the walls fell away and that the aisles reached interminably into the world of shadow through the present into the past, and to dim ages. /Behind the altar stood a living Spirit most wonderful clothed with Beauty and Terror.” (‘Fiona MacLeod’, *The Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.73). This would match any visualization of MacDonald.

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<sup>3</sup> From the 1912 edition

In *The Divine Adventure* (1900), for example, Sharp displays interesting variations in sentence structure and length for example he says; “We were alone. we two.” with the uses of a lower case letter “w” in the second short sentence. He also uses an interesting grouping of comparable threes. In the three companions of the Night (note the capital N here) he groups Laughter and Wine and Love but compares them to Tears and Weariness and the Grave giving an insightful image. Throughout Sharp’s short stories we enjoy good dialogues between characters to reveal Christian truths, such as between the soul and the speaker in *The Divine Adventure*, p.33;

“The soul looked at the speaker.

“I do not know” he answered simply; “but I believe in God”

“In the love of God?”

“In the love of God.”

“He dwells everywhere?”

“Everywhere.”

“Then I will find Him. I will find His love here.”

I would argue that Sharp’s writing shows a command of the English language able to give visionary descriptions and insightful revelations of character. While conservative in his style he creates stories that are alive with imagery and detail while portraying some hidden meaning or mystical truth. In this respect and as a prolific writer Sharp, I believe, should have a place amongst the renowned writers who wrote from religious/moral grounding such as MacDonald. He was I believe successful in creating stories that engage the reader on many levels and reveal hidden truths and should be reassessed as a man using storytelling imaginatively to re-educate his readers and stretch towards mystical expression.

## vi) His Poetry

As a key figure of the Celtic Renaissance in Scotland he also contributed to the collection and publication of poetry from all the Celtic countries in the *Lyra Celtica* of 1896



with his wife Elizabeth, a significant achievement, and wrote a weighty number of poems and prose-poetry himself. He was a central player in the progression in mystical poetry from the heights of Symbolism to the purity of the Celtic Renaissance and I hope to demonstrate through examining his texts that he was at the forefront of this development and spearheaded the integration of both while assimilating the theology of the great Carmelite mystics. His death in 1905 left the movement bereft of its visionary anchor and he did not live to see the revolutionary movements in Ireland or the subsiding of his hope for a feminine renewal. In a late letter dated 12 September, 1905 he writes; "Let the ignoble pass, and the noble remain" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.126). I hope to contribute to the uplifting of his life and works to place him as a well-versed mystic and a visionary writer of significant standing.

## **b. What is Mysticism?**

In his book , *Jan van Ruusbroec, Mystical union with God*, 2009, Paul Mommaers writes; "...in order to know who is a mystic, we need to know what mysticism is" and Mommaers continues "...if we want to know what mysticism is, we should ask the mystics themselves. After all, only they can give us firsthand accounts..." (Mommaers, 2009, p.7). It is through the study of the texts of great mystics which descriptively reveal their consciousness of God that we gain knowledge of mysticism. I hope in this thesis to expose the accounts of Sharp and others associated with the Celtic Renaissance and to examine their writing in order to explore their mysticism and here to reflect on the mystical tradition in the West to contextualise it.

### **i) Mysticism Explored**

So how is mysticism defined? One of the definitions given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is that mysticism is "Belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the

spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect, may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender.” The word has a Greek root, ‘mu’ meaning closed and the associated words, *mysterion* and *mystikos* evolve from the Greek mystery religions. In the Christian context *mysterion* defines the secret mystery of God’s love shown in Christ which remains hidden as it is revealed. *Mystikos* tells of the mystery of God’s love which is demonstrated through the scriptures, the sacraments and theology, knowing God through baptism, the sacramental life and with faith hope and love. Origen (184/185-253/254) and the Desert Fathers approach to studying the scriptures believed the mystic meaning came through prayer. Denys the Areopagite (writing before 532) also took *mystikos* to represent the finding of meaning in the scriptures and the participation in the sacraments and mystical theology. From the roots of the Greek mystery religions he formed three moments when man is touched by God: purification (fall), illumination (restored life of grace) and union (life of paradise) The latter being associated with phenomena like reading others thoughts. (Andrew Louth in his book *Wilderness of God*, 2003).

The Middle Ages saw a shift from participation in sacraments to the subjective experience of the individual. This was the bridal mysticism of courtly love with St Bernard *Sermons on the Songs of Songs*, 1137 and the female mystics like St Catherine of Siena recording visions. It culminated with the great Spanish Carmelites, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross.

## ii) The Carmelites

The Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel or Carmelites began in the twelfth century. They were a community of hermits living on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land between 1190’s and 1291 when they left but returned on the 12 June 1836. By 1242 they had settled in Aylesford, Kent and by 1274 there were 22 houses in England alone. By

1452 there were nuns and by 1476 the Lay third order was born. A decline in the order and the growth of Protestantism led to reform of the order in the 1560's led by the strong spirit of St Teresa of Avila (1515-82) with the support of St John of the Cross (1542-91). The new Discalced or barefoot Carmelites were welcomed by King Philip II of Spain. St Teresa had been endowed with mystical graces and had reached the state of transforming union, the height of mystical experience. These spiritual favours gave her the strength to turn from the lax rules in the cloister and return to a stricter primitive rule combining eremitical life with community. Her rule was again Marian with strict enclosure and the first Discalced convent began in 1562. She had to face much opposition including the Inquisition, and St John of the Cross was imprisoned in Toledo by the unreformed Carmelites. By 1580's there was official approval of the Discalced Carmelites and there were seventeen reformed houses by her death.

### iii) Carmelite Mysticism

Carmelite spirituality seeks a direct and intimate experience of God. It believes that the soul receives the divine presence through solitude and recollection. God is sought as the object of knowledge and love. Its love is wild and passionate and wishes to "drink deeply the torrents of divine presence." (Paul Marie de la Croix ODC, *Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, 1959). To love God for the Carmelite is to surrender to love without reserve and that love is lived intensely. Carmelite spirituality is centred on Christ (God has spoken one word and it is Christ) and Mary is patron of the order. Carmelite spirituality is emotional and deals in the sensations of the soul in the deepest love exchange. Its lyrical and feminine qualities were praised by Arthur Symonds and its pursuit of beauty is reflected in their patron Mary, 'Queen Beauty of Carmel' resonated well with both the Symbolists and those of the Celtic Renaissance. Both St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross are Mystical

Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church who attracted Symons, Sharp and others because they wrote under the power of spirit.

#### iv) St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila

St John of the Cross discussed theories of a reciprocal relationship with God in his book , *The Dark Night of the Soul* where he discusses that in active purification one purifies oneself according to human feelings or one submits to God's action (passive purification). These were defined as evident in the Dark Night of the Soul, the Night of the Senses and the Night of the Spirit. He writes that the soul is united to God by love and through renunciation of all we come to know God and embrace him in the darkness. Walking the steps of Cavalry God reveals the wisdom and knowledge of the Christian mysteries. St Teresa contributed immensely by defining the stages of mystical prayer from recollection, to prayer of quiet ending in a union of love. She reached transforming union and to her Christ was all, the object of her passionate love. Linking this with psychological states has given a universal definition allowing common aspects to appear in a wide range of religions and has obvious appeal to visionaries like Sharp and others looking for religious unity.

#### v) Natural Mysticism

As part of the forming of a mystic many like Sharp looked to creation for their initial trigger into ecstatic union experiences. Discussed by many mystics like Ruysbroeck and experience by writers and artists, such as Romantic poets like Wordsworth, it seems to be part of the awakening of the mystical journey in a personal overwhelming experience which draws one out in love towards creation. Natural mysticism comes from the Greek root, 'theoria physike', and it is seen as a gift of God that gives delight to the soul. St Francis and St Columba are typical examples of this type of mystical experience where creation is the focus to give a direct experience of God.

## vi) The Growth of Mysticism in the late Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century the meaning of mysticism was narrowed down as an effect of the competition between theology and science with much mystical experience being now termed psychological phenomena. By the nineteenth century there was a renewed interest in the occult and Eastern mysticism as well as a growth in Perennialism (evident in the Gifford lectures, University of Edinburgh, 1901&1902 by William James, published as *The Variety of Religious Experiences*). Perennialism was the philosophy of a single, universal truth and experience common to all religions of the world. This bringing together of the traditions of East and West saw the development of Transcendentalism and Theosophy.

The Theosophical Society was formed in 1875 and Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-91), a Russian, was one of the founding members. She was known to many of figures of the Celtic Renaissance, including William Sharp, Arthur Symons, W.B. Yeats, John Duncan and George (A.E.) Russell who were members of the Society. Blavatsky published *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888 and the society mixed Eastern and Western religious traditions and covered everything from Monotheism to Pantheism. It is very much was and developed into a New Age Movement embracing world religion, astronomy, ecology, environmentalism and UFO religions. In 1809 Blake had first used the term 'New Age'; "when the new age is at leisure to pronounce all will be set right." (quoted by John Sampson, 2007). Theosophy on the fringe of religions held the attraction for Sharp and others as a 'spirituality without borders' that appealed to their visionary outlook and personal mission that influenced their creative output.

## vii) Carmelite Mysticism in Nineteenth Century

The secularization of Germany and the French Revolution took its toll on the Discalced Carmelites. By the end of the nineteenth century there were only 200 men in the order. By the beginning of twentieth century a rebirth took place under new leadership and

with less political interference. In 1911 they built a priory of Elijah on the site of his epic contest with the prophets of Ba'al, southeast of Carmel in the Holy Land. Added to this, significant saints emerged from the end of the nineteenth century which gave the order much publicity. Notably there was St Therese of Lisieux (1873-97), 'The Little Flower' (made famous for her autobiography- 'The Story of a Soul', 1897) who was made a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church along with St Teresa of Avila and another of their saints, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (nee. Edith Stein), who was martyred at Auchwitz. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) and Sr Lucy Santos (1907-2005), (Fatima visionary and Carmelite nun) also gave the order attention.

The order's charism is contemplation with prayer, community and service. Their patrons are the Prophet Elijah and the Blessed Virgin Mary with strong Marian devotions. Their brown habit was thought to be a gift given to St Simon Stock from the Virgin Mary during a vision.

### **c.The Mystical dimension of the Celtic Renaissance**

*"To live in beauty-which is to put into four words all the dream and spiritual effort of the soul of man." ('Fiona Macleod', E.A. Sharp Memoir, 1910, p.130)*

#### **i) The Celtic Faith Rediscovered**

Reacting to the naturalism and realism of the century the Celtic Renaissance in Scotland and the Celtic revival in Ireland together produced literature and art steeped in mystery and the 'spiritual'. It was the world of the ancient Celts that fired their imaginations. Victorians had shown an interest in the Celts but they focused on Christian motifs of the sixth and seventh centuries. Writer Ernest Renan (from Brittany) had described the Celts as; "instinctively religious" which "...offered an ideal of Christian perfection so pure as the Celtic church of the sixth, seventh and eighth century." (Bradley, 1999, p.120) Matthew Arnold, like Renan, saw

an easy transition from pagan to the Christian Celtic religion. In the Western Isles early Celtic pagan myths mixed with untouched Roman Catholicism to produce a pure and inspirational expression. Douglas Hyde maintained that Columba's first teacher was a druid and John Duncan forges this link in his painting of *Christ walking on the Water* inscribed, 'My Druid is Christ' (Studio, 1925) That cross-over was essential to the Renaissance and produced a uniquely beautiful and fresh approach capturing ancient Celtic myths and natural mysticism with Christianity while absorbing the inner quests for beauty etc, of the Symbolists /mystics like Maeterlinck before them.

In Scotland the publication of the *Evergreen Magazine* was central to the revival. Printed under the influence of Patrick Geddes (biologist, town planner and visionary), it brought together artists, poets and writers who emerged during the Celtic Renaissance and published articles and paintings on mysticism, paganism, Christianity, theories of evolution and inspiring pieces on the revival taking shape. It was described as; "...an experiment in practical anarchism" (Branford, quoted in Christian, 1989, p.48). John Duncan produced art influenced by Celtic Christianity and Celtic myths. His work also showed his love of Italian art and he turned to tempera painting adding to the beauty of his images. William Sharp writing under the pseudonym of 'Fiona MacLeod' was linked to Duncan as they both were seen to have the "...same mental states and symbols" (Christian, 1989, p.49). Bradley (1999.p.141) maintains that MacLeod was "...much more interested in fairy runes and pagan myths than old Christian loric and prayers." However, I believe that he produced deeply spiritual poems, plays and stories which reflect the mystical life he clearly inhabited and his love of Celtic spirituality. In 1896, the *Lyra Celtica* was published edited by Sharp's wife, Elizabeth with an introduction by Sharp himself. It was central to the mixing of pagan and Celtic Christian poems and it brought together the leaders of the Celtic revival from all the Celtic countries. In Ireland W. B. Yeats published his *Celtic Twilight* in 1893 and he wrote in 1897, "Celtic

spirituality would redeem the world”. Others were associated with the growing nationalism such as Thomas MacDonagh who contributed his poem, *Litany to Beauty to Lyra Celtica* and who died in the Easter Rising of 1916. According to Bradley in 1897 a “quasi-religious Celtic order was set up” (Bradley, 1999, p.140) with founding members including W.B. Yeats, George (A.E.) Russell and ‘Fiona MacLeod’ (William Sharp) and they looked to the pre-Christian poets and Celtic mystical figures.

Celtic archaeological studies had taken place in Hallstatt in 1845 and in La Tene in 1856 but it was not until 1882 that a Chair of Celtic appeared at Edinburgh University. In 1881 Joseph Anderson wrote, *Scotland in Early Christian Times* and in Ireland O’Neill published, *The Most interesting of the Sculptured high Crosses of Ancient Ireland*, 1857.

## ii) *Carmina Gadelica*

There was an interest in Gaelic folklore culminating in Alexander Carmichael (1855-99) travelling round the north of Scotland collecting prayers, poems and incantations from a dying breed and published them in the *Carmina Gadelica*. Sharp was to write to John Macleay in November 30<sup>th</sup> 1900, “I look forward greatly to see Mr Carmichael again. He is a splendid type of true Highlander...I have the greatest admiration of him in all his ways...what a book *Carmina Gadelica* is! It ought to become as precious to the Scottish Gael as the Greek Anthology to all who love the Hellenic ideal, but with a more poignant, a more personal appeal.” Columba was a popular figure in both poetry and painting and was seen as a “proto-Catholic” (Bradley) but all denominations claimed him as their founder. Paintings appeared like Robert Gibb’s, *Columba in the Sight of Iona*, 1870 or Mactaggart’s, *Columba Arriving in Ireland at Gauldrons Bay*, 1895. Sharp was smitten too and wrote a letter (undated) to M.Le Braz (Breton romance and folklorist) “it gives me sincere pleasure to send to you a copy of the ‘popular’ edition of Adaman’s ‘Life of St Colum.’”



### iii) Iona

Iona was the Mecca of the Celtic Renaissance as it had been to the ancient Celts. Sharp was continually attracted to this island from his childhood and his book *Iona* appeared in 1900. In a letter to M.Le Braz (undated) he writes; “It seems to me that in writing the spiritual history of the Gael, of all our Celtic race. The lovely wonderful little island sometimes appears to me as a wistful mortal, in his eyes pathos of infinite desires...sometimes as a woman, beautiful, wild, sacred, inviolate, clad in rags, but aureoled with the rainbows of the west...Tell the story of Iona and you go back to God and end in God.” A few years earlier in June 1897 Iona celebrated 1,300 Anniversary, typically there were no unity between the faiths and, different services were held with the Catholics having to wait six days for their service (Bradley). Various lives of St Patrick were written again with a denominational input. Todd in his 'Life of St Patrick', 1864 considers Patrick to belong to the established church (Bradley, p.127), but Catholic responses were made.

### iv) Links to Carmelite Spirituality

The Celtic Renaissance looked longingly back to the ancient Celts but what were the mystical elements they sought and how do they mirror those of the Carmelites? The silence and solitude of the Carmelite life as hermits in community has similarities with the religious lifestyle of the early Celtic monks following Columba that the Renaissance sought to recreate and we see in Sharp this pull between society living and the need to go into isolation and stay on Iona, for example, to get in touch with the inner journey. The quest for beauty was shared by all as was the natural mysticism of these solitude places. The strong emotions of soul agony and lament are also found in all in a mysticism that was not afraid to embrace suffering. The lyrical qualities in poetry and the passionate focus on the love exchange with God with direct awareness of God's presence had its attraction for the Renaissance following

on the heels of the Symbolists. The Renaissance sought to reawaken high mystical experiences to gain enlightenment as they searched for the essence of the inner life. The emotionality and vulnerability of Carmel's mystics in their encounter with perfect love and who wrote in 'white heat' had obvious appeal to those of the Renaissance seeking sensations of the soul and who brushed with psychic phenomena. The movement's links to the sacred feminine and focus on visions of a Mary figure again would have been supported by the rediscovery of the Spanish Carmelite mystics. Sharp's believe that all were one is borne out by recent DNA analyses by Professor Sykes which proves Celts of British Isles were descended from Spanish fishermen and the Celtic presence in Spain gives common, reciprocal influences.

#### v) A Dreamy, Spiritual Pursuit

Like the Symbolists before them, those associated with the Celtic Renaissance shared a, "...Revulsion against rational, factual and material side of life in favour of the intuitive, spiritual, dreaming side." (Christian, 1989, p.53). All were in revolt; some like the Irish were nationalists. All were straining to produce the things of the spirit, the otherworldly reacting against naturalism and materialism. Some were mystics others were experimenting in "sensations of the soul" (Symons, 1899, p.218) and dabbling in mysteries previously untouched. The Celtic Renaissance like Symbolism before it was short-lived movement but far reaching in its impact. Beauty was sought through theory and antiquity and ached for in image and word. I would argue this was primarily a feminine movement with far reaching vision, a peak moment in mystical history. Certainly it produced perfection in expression where, "...the human mind, meditating on infinity can but discover perfection beyond perfection." (Symons, 1899, p.224) and the "old Celtic brain was reborn with vivid

intensity...in heart and brain that old world lived anew” (end fragments, *The Divine Adventure, Iona and Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael*, p.389)

## Chapter 2

### A Living Knowledge: Sharp's Mystical Progression

#### i) Early impressions and Roman Catholicism

I would like to concentrate first on William Sharp, 'The Mystic'. He was well aware of his 'special' character from childhood and discovered "he had an inner life, a curious power of vision unshared by anyone about him" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.3) and of which he learned to be silent. Illness bedraggled him through his life and was integral to his mystical progression of light and dark. At sixteen, for example, he had a severe attack of typhoid fever and consequently spent months recuperating in the Western Highlands where his father often took a house in summer.

His parents were Presbyterians and his early encounters in the Western Highlands and isles with the characters like Seumas, the gentle old Catholic fisherman and his highland nurse, Barabal who introduced him to Gaelic folklore, as well as Fr Ivor, a highland priest were all pivotal in forming his independent spiritual development and introduced him to Celtic lore. Here in the Western Highlands where Celtic Pagan rituals and cults had been absorbed into Catholicism largely untouched by Presbyterianism, Sharp was introduced to a Catholicism which "...did not seem to ravage the Celtic tradition so much as Protestantism. To the Protestant's retort that the two superstitions went hand in hand, 'Fiona Macleod' indignantly replied: "How common the foolish utterance of narrow lives, that all these old ways of thought are superstitions." (Macleod, *Iona*, 1900 & quoted in Alaya, 1970, p.165). These so-called superstitions were for 'Fiona Macleod' the remains, fragmentary but persistent, of the Celt's true sense of union with the other world of which nature, in mystical terms, was but a garment. He writes in *Iona*; "...those who do not understand the character of the Island-Gael, or do not realise that all Scotland is not Presbyterian, it may be as well to add

that many of the Islesmen are of the Catholic faith (broadly the Southern Hebrides are wholly Catholic), and that therefore the brooding investigation of an old islander...might the more readily dwell upon Mary the Mother of the Lamb, Mary the Shepherdess as she is lovingly called”(Macleod, 1900, end notes,p.418). He adds “...in a word, in that day, Iona was the brightest gem in the spiritual crown of Rome.”(Macleod, 1900, Note, p.118) “Sharp’s tolerance of Catholicism was thus a practical as well as a spiritual matter.” (Alaya , 1970, p.166). I would argue that Sharp did not just tolerate Catholicism but that it opened him to a mystical theology essential to his progress as a mystic, for example the worship of the Virgin Mary as a child may have made sense of his early encounter with the ‘Lady of the Woods’ and his life-long search for the ideal feminine spirit. Sharp recalls in his memoir that Seumas Macleod, the Catholic fisherman had when Sharp was seven, “....took me on his knees one sundown on the Isle of Eigg and made me pray to “Her” (letter to Dr Goodchild, E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.97) In his book *Iona* (1900), Sharp recounts his encounters with a Catholic priest, Father Ivor. He tells us he was from the Hebrides but he met him on Iona as a child. Fr Ivor he says; “Took me on his knee and stroked my hair and for a long time was so silent that I thought he was dreaming. He put me gently from him and kneeled at the chair and made this simple prayer which I have never forgotten; “O Dove of the Eternal, grant the little one’s prayer.”(MacLeod *Iona* 1900, p.110) (words of the old priest). Sharp recalls that he went also upon his knees and said; “O Dove of the Eternal, I want to love you and you to love me: and if you live on Iona, I want you to show me, when I go there again, the place where Colum the Holy talked with an angel. And I want to live as long as you, Dove of the Eternal.” He never saw the white dove that Colum loved and says mournfully, “For long I thought it must have left Iona and Barra too, when Fr. Ivor died.” (Macleod, 1900 p.110) In his book *By Sundown Shore* published with *Iona* he has a chapter called, *Barabal-a Memory* about his highland nurse Barabal. He claims in it that “her mind was a storehouse of proverbial lore” H

continues; “ To her, and to the old islander, Seumas MacLeod...I owe more any other influences in my childhood perhaps it is from her that in part I have my great dislike of towns”(Macleod, 1910, p.269). From Barabal he learned many Christian tales and he recalls she would sing an ‘Oran’ about St Bride who would come again to Iona to bind the hair and wash the feet of the ‘Bride of Christ’ (another source of his feminine vision). It must be remembered also that Sharp’s writing as ‘Fiona Macleod’ from 1895 was as a Catholic. Alaya, states that Sharp, “...expressly identified her (‘Fiona MacLeod’) as a Roman Catholic.” (Alaya, 1970, p.165). Consequently he developed a “...deep difference of temperament that divided (him) from his parents. At eighteen he took off to the north and joined a group of gypsies as their ‘sun-brother’ for three months where he learned folklore and to be guided by the stars, “...he was in flight, in flight from the orthodoxies and convictions” (Alaya,1970,p.13). So typical of the romantic spirit he began a life of excessive travel and nomadic existence throughout his life only settling in the Sussex countryside at Phenice Croft for two years as a “Celtic recluse” (Alaya, 1970, p.13) when he began writing as MacLeod.

## ii) Searching for ‘Truth’

He acquainted himself with mystics of East and West. The “result was to turn him from the form of Presbyterian faith in which he had been brought up, to put him in conflict with all orthodox religious teaching towards a belief in the unity of all the great truths underlying all religions, and to his deep satisfaction, gave him a sense of brotherhood with the acknowledged psychics and seers of other lands and other days.”(E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.5). He even records Buddha worship in the Hebrides. He was involved for a time with the Theosophical Society like Yeats and Russell, and embraced the teachings of Madame Blavatsky. Her book, *The Secret Doctrine* of 1888 must have appealed to his secretive spirit

with both he and Russell (A.E.) both using pseudonyms for their mystical writings. The Society embraced everything from monotheism to pantheism and had a holistic approach which introduced Sharp to a wide range of influences. It could be argued that it aided his search that began in childhood and which he studied in earnest as a university student and helped develop his futuristic thinking of a New Age well before such things were formalised. Eventually he would commit himself to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn with a strong faith in God. Writing to John Elder in 1879, he states; "God may be beyond the veil of mortal life, but I cannot see that he has given us a definite revelation beyond what pure deism teaches viz that there is a power-certainly beneficent, most probably eternal, possibly...omnipotent who is letting the breath of his being blow through all created things.."(E.A. Sharp, 1970, p.10). Here he advocates an experiential knowledge of God through nature (part of his formation as a mystic) but by February 1881 he writes "...we are all in the hollow of some mighty moulding hand. Every fibre in my body quivers at times with absolute faith and belief... which buoys my soul up in an ocean of love that surrounds it..." (E.A.Sharp, 1910, p.11) (Hinted at in his early poem, *The Redeemer* and so understood by the mystic) here nature mysticism is clearly established in his thinking but he is moving towards a more personal experience of God.

### iii) A Vision and A Quest for Feminine Beauty

Let us look then at some of the key mystical highpoints that shaped his creed and his determination to portray beauty. It has been cited by Elizabeth Sharp that her husband's shift of direction in his writing around 1890 was as the result of meeting a Mrs Edith Wingate Rinder in Rome which became a life-long friendship and may have been his lover (Alaya, Blaimires). A dark, highland beauty, she portrayed the ideal of feminine beauty he craved and seems to have released a previous hidden side of Sharp. Yet, Sharp himself adds it "began

long before I knew her and indeed while I was still a child” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.15). Edith may have made Sharp a mystic but was not necessarily his lover; there was an academic aspect to their relationship. I would argue that the vision he had of ‘The Lady of The Woods’ as a child was more instrumental in forming his goal of finding the ideal woman figure. According to his wife (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.3), he often spoke of the beautiful white lady he had seen and which perhaps was fundamental to his quest for feminine beauty. He wrote of her: “.I knew to be no other than the woman who is in the heart of every woman. I was not more than seven when ...my glancing eyes lit on a tall woman standing among a mist of hyacinths...I stood, looking wide-eyed, unafraid. She did not speak, but she smiled, and because of the love and beauty in her eyes I ran to her. She stooped and lifted blueness out of the flowers...and threw it over me. When I was found lying among the hyacinths dazed, and as was thought ill, I asked eagerly after the lady in white, and with hair all shinny-gold like buttercups, but...found I was laughed at...” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.3.) In his book, *Iona* (1900), Sharp looks longingly to a female saviour that will come to the ‘Mecca of the Gael’ and in *The Gipsy Christ* (1895) he gives us a female Christ figure to dwell on. (Discussed fully in Chapter 5c)

#### iv) Italy and Union

His Roman Catholic leanings are certainly evident on his first visit to Italy where he became overcome with the Catholic devotions he witnessed. In the Duomo of Florence he had a profound mystical experience where he contemplated the “pieta under the great crucifix... (where)...the light fell with startling distinction on the dead and mutilated body of Christ” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.25). In this intense moment he describes the “stain of agony in every tone” of the chant and at the peak of experience he “...felt the agony of the pierced hands and feet” himself and he was overcome and “burst into tears”. He continues, “I think I



would have fainted with the strain and excitement if the agony in the garden had not come to an end..."He wandered away to the Arno, "still shivering with excitement of almost a foretasted death I had experienced and unable to control the tears that came whenever I thought of Christ's dreadful agony" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.25). It was an experience to match any of the great mystics and one that perhaps was pivotal in shaping his mystical life. Here was a moment of mystical union. He knew how to suffer and wrote "Often sorrow is our best ally." Here he could, in this ecstatic moment, unite himself with the suffering Christ.

### v) Mystical Fire

What part Mrs Rinder played is questionable, but Sharp seems to have had a sudden enlightenment while in Rome (1890-91) with her as to how he could express his inner longings. While on the shore of Lake Nemi he says," at ...that moment began my spiritual regeneration. I was a new man, a mystic, where before I had been only a mechanic-in-art. Carried away by my passion, my pen wrote as if dipped in fire, and when I sat down to write prose, a spirit-hand would seize the pen and guide it into inspired verse."(quoted in E.Rhys, 1931) Was he in ecstasy as he wrote or gripped by the spirit? One thinks for example of St Teresa of Avila who was seen to be in ecstasy when she wrote at speed, *The Interior Castle* like so many inspired writers. It is at this point that Sharp settles in seclusion in Phenice Croft in Sussex and stays for two years. Certainly he dedicates his first novel as 'Fiona MacLeod', *Pharais*, 1894 or *Paradise* to Mrs Rinder, but something more profound had happened. Did he perhaps have a conversion experience that is common on the mystic path? His American friend, Mr Janvier writes to Sharp of this new phase of his writing," I feel that some strong new current must have come into your life...for the animating spirit of these new books reflects a radical change in your soul. The pagan element is entirely subordinated to and controlled by the inner passions of the soul. In a word you have lifted your work from the

flesh-level to the soul-level...” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.82) In this new phase he was “testing his new powers, living his new life and delighted in the opportunity for psychic experimentation” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.69). Was he now a mystic and did that mean he had a new experiential knowledge of God? For some time he had found himself caught up body and soul in God with the typical bodily weakness that accompanied his ecstatic feelings. He earlier talked of the “rapt sense of oneness with nature, this cosmic ecstasy and elation.”(E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.70) and continues “my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams, must find expression, yet I cannot, save in this hidden way.” The hidden way, so favoured by the great mystics like Carmelite Saint, St Therese of Lisieux (1873-97) (whose mission was to be love at the heart of the church -a considerable shift of thinking), continued as he reached the mystic heights. He, like her, had found his mission, “he had a definite thing to say”(Alaya,1970, p.81), he believed that “...only a renaissance of belief in the beautiful, being the only sure guide can save modern nations from further spiritual degradation.”(diary,1883, E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.28) His believe, like her, was in the centrality of love. Earlier he proclaimed his “work must be beautiful in itself, Beauty is a Queen and must be served as a Queen” (E.A. Sharp, 1970, p.70) Yet in *Pharias*, (ch 14) he reminds us, “It is loveliness I seek, not lovely things” so reminiscent of St John of the Cross warning to seek the creator not the creation. There is a definite shift in his mentality from nature mysticism to a more personal experience of beauty in a deeply spiritual emotion where suffering has its part to play and where he can proclaim, “The fragrance of all is joy, the beauty of all is sorrow”(1904, E.A. Sharp, 1910 , reprint, p.116).

#### vi) Agony and Ecstasy

He knew well the mystic’s pull of pain-joy, of agony and ecstasy. Early he had ecstatic experiences in nature where he exclaimed, “I drank with mingled pain and rejoicing.

At such times I seem to become part of nature.”(1881, E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.17). He talks too, at this time, of being in a trance of enjoyment “half painful from intensity.”

Suffering and aloneness were part of his short life. His physical and mental health broke down many times as he experience God’s presence and absence. Ill from childhood he had symptoms of a weak heart and nervous collapse and depression. His wife suggests, “the heavy dual work added to by eager experimentation with certain psychic phenomena” and the “continual play of the two sides of his nature intellectual verses the spiritual mind produced a tremendous strain” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.69)

### vii) Near-Death Experience

At times his illness was near fatal for “The fire of his mind for ever consuming his excitable body, his swift and ardent emotions” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.69). During a severe attack of scarlet fever and phlebitis in the spring of 1886, he had a profound near-death experience, he “...passed through psychic and dream experiences that afterwards were woven into the ‘Fiona MacLeod’ writings, and, as he believed, were among the original shaping influences” His wife continues, “on the other side of things...he had no desire to return and rejoiced in his freedom and greater powers but...a hand suddenly restrained him, “Not yet, you must return”. And he believed he had been freshly sensitised and knew he had some special work to do before he could again go free.” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.39). Here again is a critical turning point for Sharp’s mystical development. Like so many who have Near-Death Experiences, he had a mission and a new vigour for life and he threw himself into his work. In 1889 he wrote to Mr Steadman, “Life in all its manifestations is of passionate interest for me, and I cannot rest from incessant study and writing. Yet I feel that I am but on the threshold of my literary life.” In 1891 he writes to a friend Mrs Janvier, “Life is so utterly precious that I cannot but rejoice daily that I am alive and yet I have no fear of or

even regret at the thought of death.” At this time he describes both highs and lows. “This flood of sunshine is like new life...It is new life...It seems to get into the heart and brain and it intoxicates with a strange kind of rapture” but this is followed in the autumn of the same year (1891) by a severe depression.

### viii) Solitude and Iona

As Christ “retired to the wilderness and prayed” (Luke 5:16) so too Sharp found it essential to get out of the stifling London life as much as possible. But it was not till September 1894 that the full force of the Isle of Iona beset him (although he had visited it in his childhood with significant encounters). He writes in his book *Iona*, 1900; “There are moments when the soul takes wings: what it has to remember, it remembers: what it loves, it loves still more; what it longs for, to that it flies.”(MacLeod, 1900, p.1). Again it quenched his thirst for the merging of the Latin and Celtic races and he was smitten with Ithone, the Isle of the Druids as well as Iona, the place where Columba saw an angel. He said; “There is a beauty here that no other place has, so unique is it.”(1894, E.A. Sharp , 1910, reprint, p.73). He even enclosed in his letter a gillyflower from close to Columba’s tomb. He went on to record St Columba’s legends in *Iona*, (1900) and the mixing of Druidic lore with Catholic tradition. He became passionate about preserving the “spiritual heritage of their race (Celts) against the encroaching predominance of materialism”. He sought to represent “Spiritual beauty” in the Celtic Renaissance which he confronted in Scotland. He maintained that “...extreme loneliness...was like balm. Ah those eloquent silences, the deep pain-joy of utter isolation. In that exquisite solitude I felt a deep exaltation grow.”(E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.75) It is surely the cry of every mystic! Now his creative juices could flow and he claims he wrote in “white heat “that “ran like ripples off the brain”. In writing to Mrs Janvier he says that in the solitude that listens, he observed; “A benediction lies upon the world...here I have

lived and I have suffered-here I have touched the heights-here I have done my best” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, reprint, p.92). Perhaps it is time to resurrect William Sharp as a man ahead of his time, mystically alive and expressing with every fibre of his being the eternal truths he found. His contact with Catholicism and the Theosophical Society gave him a broad knowledge of the mystical tradition with his belief in the unity of all mystical experiences. He was a man who had direct experience of God and who knew the troughs and peaks of the mystic way and therefore he was indeed a true mystic. To W.B Yeats in 1899, he writes, “all imaginative work is truly alive only when it has died in the mind and been born again. Resurrection is the test of any spiritual idea”. It is also the test “of the spiritual life itself, of art, and of any final expression of the inward life...” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.94)

#### ix) Pre- Raphaelites

It must be remembered that Sharp incorporated a vast array of influences in his formative years which shaped his mystical thinking. He was a frequent visitor to the Rossetti family and in 1882 he wrote his first biography on Dante Gabriel Rossetti after his death. This was much praised by his sister Christina Rossetti and it gave Sharp the opportunity to show his support for the ideals of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. Although he was aware of the ‘Englishness’ of the movement, Alaya believes it initiated his vision of creative output being attached to nationality. It also introduced him to art that strove for the beautiful and perfection in style with Christian overtones. Sharp remained friends with the Rossettis for many years and had a bond with Christina which reflected in his own poetry (see chapter 5b) and he later wrote a moving tribute to her after her death and often quoted her in his own work. He always respected the principles of the Pre-Raphaelite movement and it must have affected his mystical progression.

## x) Other Contacts

Sharp mixed with a wide range of potential influences in his mystical formation from the natural mystical poets like Wordsworth or Shelly to the Romantic intimacy of the Brownings and he wrote many pieces on them. As he progressed in mystical experience he sought the company of the Symbolists like Maeterlinck which focused his concept of what it was to be a mystic. His Bohemian life in London allowed him to experiment with many ideals and truths. Through Symons and Yeats he was touched again by a Catholicism that was not afraid to seek new angles of approach and even to experiment with wilder psychic forms like Theosophy. (Just as in childhood the Catholicism he knew was mixed with Celtic Pagan myth). He had read Coventry Patmore's books (Alaya, 1970, p.97) and through Patmore (convert to Roman Catholicism) he may have found further depth in the accounts of the Spanish Carmelite mystics, (discussed further in chapter 3) which allowed the growth and understanding of his own mystical experience and affected him writing from 1895 as a Roman Catholic, though not a Catholic himself. He did not convert to this faith despite a growing Christ-centeredness in his writing. Perhaps his experience as a mystic was too wide to be contained within any one faith as he searched for the meaning of his mystical life yet his Catholic comprehension is clearly evident. In his collection of poetry is *The Mystic's Prayer*- his own impassioned prayer.

Lay me to sleep in sheltering flame,  
O Master of the Hidden Fire  
Wash pure my heart, and cleanse for me  
My soul's desire.

In flame of sunrise bathe my mind  
O Master of the Hidden Fire  
That, when I awake, clear-eyed may be  
My soul's desires

(Poems and Dramas by 'Fiona MacLeod', p.291)

## Chapter 3

### The Arthur Symons Connection

In this chapter I try to establish the central influence of Arthur Symons (1865-1945) through his connection to Sharp and Yeats and his and Sharp's important friendship with Coventry Patmore. This I do in evaluating their common links to the Spanish Carmelite mystics and in their contact and connection to the Symbolists. The sources of influence are uncovered and investigated and the influence of Symons' Spanish trips are assessed in relation to the renewed interest in Spanish Carmelite mystical writing. His friendship with Patmore is discussed a source of introducing the work of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila to the Celtic Renaissance. Patmore contact with Sharp is also examined as another source of influence. Through this I hope to argue that Symons and Patmore were key figures in propagating the move towards the integration and influence of Carmelite Spirituality that became a central feature of Sharp's mysticism that avowed the progression of a purification of a movement towards a mystical peak in writing embracing a hope of a new feminine age. His relationship with Symons and Yeats is explored to establish the interconnectedness of thought and expression looking to the same sources of influence. St Teresa's *Interior Castle* and *Meditations on the Song of Songs* are discussed to argue that imagery and themes were being used by many figures of the Celtic renaissance notably Yeats, Macdonald and Russell as well as Sharp giving expression to the theory that this Carmelite mystic and her writing were a strong and abiding source of influence.

## a) Symons and the Spanish Carmelites

### i) Symons and the Spanish Carmelites

On the 10th of June 2006 in the Minster church of St Denys, Warminster there was the first performance of Paul Carr's, *Requiem for an Angel*. Contained within this was a chorale piece for baritone and choir entitled *Let Mine Eyes See Thee*, a setting of the poem by St Teresa of Avila, translated by Arthur Symons. In 1947 Lennox Berkley had also successfully set four of her poems to song again using the translation by Arthur Symons. Symons' translations had come out of his admiration for the poetry of Spanish Carmelite mystics, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross and they appeared in his book of 1899, *Images of Good and Evil*. He also produced a critical essay on the work of these saints where he praised their "naked simplicity" and "personal passion", comparing St Teresa's poetry to popular song

In this section I will be uncovering the probable source of the Carmelite influence on Sharp's writing by looking to his relationship with Arthur Symons and also W.B Yeats. I hope to demonstrate just how close in spirit these three were and discuss their shared thinking. Arthur Symons' trips to Spain are highlighted to argue that simultaneously he was writing from Spain in 1899 his acclaimed book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and his book, *Images of Good and Evil* with its chapter on St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. His relationship with Coventry Patmore is examined in relation to Carmelite influences.

Arthur Symons, poet and critic, was a disciple of Water Pater from whom he learned to examine texts carefully using "personal impressions" and "exquisite style" (Sklare, 1952, p.318). From the 1880's he was publishing articles, some on the French Symbolists and he



made trips to Paris to meet Verlaine, Mallarme and others. This was to culminate in his book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 1899. Through the Rhymer's Club from the 1890's he was to introduce Yeats and others to the poetry of Symbolists like Mallarme. Importantly his book demonstrated "Symons' passionate belief in lyricism" and that "A successful Symbolist was first of all a successful mystic" (Sklare, 1951, p.320). To him the three main ingredients of the modern poetic spirit were "Mysticism, lyricism and great poetic passion" (Sclera). This criteria made him look to the Symbolists, the Carmelite Spanish mystics and especially to the work of W.B. Yeats.

Symons first trip to Spain was in spring, 1891. He writes to Katherine Willard on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1891. In the letter he apologises for having "...not answered your letter from Spain" and further on he says; "I am attracted by everything that is, unusual, Bohemian, eccentric...And I like contrast, variety. It used to amuse me to go to see Mme Blavatsky, and it would satisfy my sense of the piquant to call next day on Cardinal Manning, and then leaving the arch-Episcopal palace with a volume of sermons, drop the book, with the portrait of an actress..."<sup>4</sup> In the same letter he continues; "You may imagine I have not come home from Provence and Spain without some impressions in verse...And how new and wonderful Spain was to me. We saw much, and I think we have gained much." (Beckson & Munro, 1989, p.79-80). He has another trip to France and Spain (1898-99). Symons writes to W.B. Yeats on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1898 from the Grande Hotel de Rome in Seville; "... I am very much interested in the Moorish music-songs which one hears in Seville...a kind of wail, always ending abruptly. The songs are often obscene, generally of only a few lines, but there is always this queer kind of religious, almost Gregorian, quality, and this strange anguish of the voice." (Beckson & Munro, 1989, p.128). By the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, 1899 he writes to Yeats "...I will be going to Granada almost anytime. I have finished my long article on Seville, and am offering it to the

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<sup>4</sup> Cardinal Manning (1805-1892) was originally Anglican but, like Cardinal Newman, he converted to Roman Catholicism in 1851. He was Cardinal from 1875

Fortnightly.... I should like to talk over many things. Do be in London in the latter half of May. I have done the whole of my *Symbolist Movement* except the introduction, which is difficult, and very important. I don't intend to do that till I get back, and should like to talk it over with you." (Beckson & Munro, 1989, p.129). This letter reveals his dual preoccupations with writing about Spain, its traditions and its mystics, as well as writing on the Symbolists. Both had an attraction for him but why?

Symons, then, had already spent three months in Spain when his essay appeared in the *Contemporary Review* of 1899 (later to be included in his book-*Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*, 1918). In it he writes, "The natural human voice, speaking straight out of the heart, pure lyric poetry...cannot be found in Spanish literature outside the mystics...limited to Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz". At the same time and from Spain, Symons was to write his famous study, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. So what were the common mystical and stylistic influences he was responding to in both the poetry of the Carmelite saints and the French Symbolists? Could his friendship and influence on Sharp and Yeats have shaped their work in this respect? What was Symons relationship with them and did they have a shared vision and a common psychic bond?

## ii) Symons and Patmore- A Carmelite Source

Previously I have tried to establish the influence of Spanish Carmelite mysticism on Sharp's writing and the relationship Sharp had to Symons and Yeats (and ultimately Symons' link with Coventry Patmore) may hold the clue to the source of this influence on his work. It seems that Coventry Patmore (1823-96) was the source of introducing Symons to the work of the Spanish mystics. Patmore was a poet and critic best known for his poem, *Angel in the House* (1854) and he was read by Sharp (Alaya, 1970, p.97). He converted to Roman Catholicism in 1862 after the death of his first wife, Emily. In an essay on Patmore by

Symons in 1906 from *Figures of the Century*, Symons writes; “It was he, (Patmore), who first talked to me of St John of the Cross, and when eight years later, at Seville, I came upon a copy of the first edition of the ‘Obras Espirituales’ in a stall of old books in Sierpes and began to read, and to try to render in English that extraordinary verse which remains, with that of St Teresa, the finest lyrical verse which Spain has produced. I understood how much the mystic of prose and poetry of *The Unknown Eros*, 1877 (by Patmore and which he had given to Symons, inscribed, ‘Arthur Symons, from Coventry Patmore, July 23, 1890’), owed to the ‘Noche Escura’ and the ‘Llama de amour Viva’. He spoke of the Catholic mystics like an explorer who had returned from the perils of far countries, with a remembering delight which he can share with few.” (Symons, 1906) He also mentions that he had been asked to write an obituary on Cardinal Newman but had unsuccessfully asked Patmore to do it instead. It is evident then that Patmore encouraged Symons to value the Spanish mystics which he in turn was to experience firsthand in his trip to Spain in 1898-99. From 1891 when Patmore first introduced St John of the Cross to Symons, he may have been discussing the Spanish Carmelite mystics with Yeats and Sharp. Back in 1887, Symons is already aware of Sharp. On 7<sup>th</sup> August he writes to Churchill Osborne; “...what do you think of the Sharps now you have had them with you/ I shall like to have your impressions...Could you sometimes lend me Sharp’s Marston memoir?...” He is obviously very interested in Sharp and his writing. By 15 June, 1899 Symons writes to James, Dykes Campbell; “About 10 or 11 we all turned up at Wm Sharp’s and there, to my delight, I met Mrs Meynell” (She was a poet/critic interested in work of Francis Thompson). It is highly likely that their conversation would circle round Symons’ recent publications of that year both on the Symbolists and on Spain and the Spanish mystics giving a possible original source for Sharp to be introduced to St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila (much respected by Symons).

### iii) Patmore and Sharp

Prior to Symons contact with Patmore in 1891, Sharp was in close talks with Patmore in 1890. According to his wife, Sharp had moved to Hastings in January 1890 to focus on completing his *Life of Browning* and his neighbour was Patmore. Sharp records in his diary for 21<sup>st</sup> of January that he only completed four pages “because he lunched with Coventry Patmore who was the residing in Hastings.” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.51). She continues; “His stay in Hastings was rendered pleasant by the neighbourliness of Coventry Patmore with whom he had many talks” (p.51). From Hastings he writes to Hall Caine on 23<sup>rd</sup> of January “ P.S. Just going off to dine with Coventry Patmore.” So Sharp may well have been discussing the Spanish Carmelites so admired by Patmore during their long talks and perhaps Patmore was influential in fuelling Sharp’s interest in Roman Catholicism. Certainly he may have affected Sharp’s decision to go to Rome later that year and Sharp’s writing focuses on Rome with his *Sospiri di Roma*, 1892 and in his articles on Joseph Severn (British Consul at Rome) he shows a fascination with the papacy of Pope Pius XI and Cardinal Antonelli. His contact with Patmore prior to Symons suggests that Sharp may well have been first to discuss the Spanish Carmelites with Patmore and we know he was reading Patmore at that time.

### iv) Erotic Mysticism

Symons was particularly drawn to the poetry of Spanish Carmelite saints, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, which he translated in his commentary in his, *Images of Good and Evil*, 1899. Symons was notoriously known in literary circles for his poems of illicit sexual encounters such as *London Nights* and it is no surprise then that his translation of Teresa and John reflect his interpretation of their work as erotic mysticism. He praised the two Carmelites for both the lyrical and passionate quality of their work. According to Joy Dixon (2013, pp 652-667), Symons was to proclaim that the poetry of St John of the Cross was

“...not simply love poetry, but explicitly erotic love poetry”. Comparable to earthly marriage, referring to the soul and Christ, translated as “love with love in marriage of delight!” Symons states; “At once the door is opened in the seventh heaven of metaphysics for all the flowers in which the earth decks itself for lovers; and his monk can give lessons to lovers”, (Symons, 1899, p.71)). This exclamation appeared in his article on “The Poetry of Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz “for the *Contemporary Review* of 1899 and reappeared in his book *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* of 1918. In his translation of *En una Noche Oscura (Upon an Obscure Night)* of St John of the Cross, Michael Smith has stated that Symons interprets the poem as a description “evocative of sexual ecstasy”. He particularly points out phrases like, “Fevered with love in love’s anxiety” and he believes that the souls’ union with God is “presented in patent sexual imagery” The translation reads; “When the first air/Blew from the tower and waved his locks aside/His hand, with gentle care/Did wound me in the side/And in my body all my senses died.”. Smith also cites the phrase “leaving my cares and shame” in the last stanza as adding to the “richly suggestive” language. Symons describes St John’s writing as having “metaphysical fire, a sort of white heat” (Symons, 1918, p.73) which must have appealed to those seeking and experiencing psychic and mystic phenomena. Symons talks of the “supreme emotion” of St John’s words which represent the “subtlety of spiritual sensation.” (Symons, 1918, p.66) In *O Flame of Living Love* by St John of the Cross, Symons translates a phrase as “How delicately touch teaches love to me” and makes comparisons with the Song of Solomon where “he is...the supreme love, to be apprehended humanly” as a wife to her husband. Symons adds that in a purely human love “they would be almost perverse, so learned are they in sensation.” (Symons, 1918, p.71). He maintains that St John’s poetry goes beyond love poetry of all ages and exceeds with the “abandonment to all the sensations of love”. He finds this poetry rich and strangely beautiful that “aches with desire” (Symons, 1918, p.71). These to Symons are wild, emotional poems of the “highest order” (Symons,

reproduced, 1918, p.70). Symons also writes of the divine silence and wisdom found beyond the summit of the Mount in the heights.

## **b. Symons, Sharp and Yeats and the Symbolists**

### **i) Symons, Sharp, Yeats and the Symbolists**

In discussing the influence of Symbolism, according to Ellaman (in Beckson, 1990, pp.125-133), it was Yeats who, “was instrumental in luring his friend away from the perversity of Decadence to the mystical vision of the French Symbolists” where “the imagination’s recovery of its lost authority over the body and the material world” was demonstrated. Ellaman (in Beckson, 1990, pp.125-133) claims that it was “Yeats that called the movement Symbolist” (Beckson, 1990, p.125), and that Yeats encouraged Symons to produce his pivotal book on the Symbolism. Certainly in a letter to Yeats from Spain dated 9<sup>th</sup> January 1899, Symons writes;”I have done the whole of my Symbolist Movement except the introduction... (I) should like to talk it over with you” (Beckson, 1990, p.133). Yeats was influencing Symons in other ways too. He introduced Symons to the theosophist, Madame Blavatsky and while in Paris together, Symons wrote a poem entitled *Haschisch* which recorded the effects of their drug experimentation. According to Beckson (1990, p.128), Yeats quotes from two poems by Symons: *La Melinite: Moulin Rouge* and *Rosa Mundi* (Mystical Rose) as evidence that he was “...now enraptured by the mysteries of the spiritual world”. In the introduction to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Symons states;” I speak often in this book of mysticism, and that I , of all people should venture to speak, not quite as an outsider, will be a surprise to many.”

In his critique of *The Wind among the Reeds* by Yeats, Symons finds common elements to praise with the work of Verlaine such as ,the “natural chant”, “ a passionate

quietude, the elemental desire of humanity, the desire of love, the desire of wisdom, the desire of beauty”(Beckson, 1990, p.131). Things that resonate also with the Spanish Carmelite poetry. Symons praises Yeats for gradually becoming “quite human” (Beckson, 1990, p.131) in contrast to the “obscure verse” of the Symbolists and their “inaccessible mode of expression” (Beckson, 1990, p.131) in seeking perfection. By 1900 Symons praises Yeats for “more elaborately simple, more condensed” poetry and his understanding “that verse must be simple and straight forward as prose, but that every line must be packed with poetic substance” (Symons, 29th Dec, 1900, in Beckson, 1990, p.132). Interestingly Beckson ends with a quote from Yeats in a letter to William Sharp in which he urges Sharp to “...seek the delights of style in utter simplicity, in a self-effacing rhythm and language” (Beckson, 1990, p.132).

## ii) Sharp’s Book on the Symbolists

Sharp had come into contact himself with the Symbolists well before the publication of Symons’ pivotal works in 1899. Back in 1892 Sharp made a trip to Paris and in a letter to Thomas Janvier (April 23<sup>rd</sup>), he states that he saw Paul Verlaine and met Symbolists, Jean Moreas and Renard (a writer for the Symbolist review-*Mercure de France*). Sharp adds, “Tonight I ought to go to the weekly gathering of a large number of Les Jeunes at the cafe du Soleil D’Or, that favourite meeting place now of les decadents, les symbolists and les everything else...” Later on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1897, Sharp writes to Bliss Carmen of putting together a proposal to write an “anthology of the rarest and finest poems and lyric by modern French poets to be called say *Le Petit Parnasse Contemporaine* or if preferred *A Little Treasury of Contemporary French Poetry* with an introduction note on the Symbolists and the evolution of Symbolism”. Did he discuss his idea with Yeats who then encouraged Symons to write on the movement?

### iii) Mrs Rinder: Lover, Friend and Academic Support

Sharp was supported in his love of French poetry by his lover or friend Edith Windgate Rinder who had gained success as a translator. In July 19 1899 Sharp writes to Grant Richards that he has asked Mrs Rinder to send him his copy of *Fumeurs d'Opium*

which he sent her, "...with the strong recommendation (that she) translate it...and she has done so". He continues, "I hope you will find your way to commissioning Mrs Rinder to translate it for you (her recent *The Dark Way of Love*, a translation of Charles le Goffic's *Le Crucifie de Keralies*, was a success in both senses" (Published in 1898). *Fumeurs d'Opium* was a book of 1896 by Jules Bossiere, a disciple of Mallarme and the Symbolists. Edith Rinder also translated the *Massacre of the Innocents* in 1895 by Maeterlinck and in 1897 Sharp writes that he has read Maeterlinck's two essays, *The Deeper Life* and *The Inner Beauty*. Rinder was also contributing Breton tales to Geddes's *Evergreen* which Sharp (and 'Fiona MacLeod') had pieces in too. Rinder's *Shadow of Arvor* was published by Geddes in 1896. Rinder's work demonstrates that Rinder's friendship with Sharp was academic as well as personal and she may have encouraged and aided Sharp in his study of the French Symbolists.

### iv) A Psychic Bond

Yeats and Sharp moved in the same literary circles from the 1880's and corresponded frequently encouraging and commenting on each others' work. In January 1897, Sharp makes a special stop in Paris to meet Yeats and stays ten days there. They also met in Dublin when Sharp visited Ireland in 1897 meeting many Irish poets and revolutionaries of the Celtic Revival. Through Yeats, Sharp was introduced to Arthur Symons. In a letter of late September 1896, Sharp writes to Yeats; "I must thank you for introducing my work to Arthur Symons. He wrote to me a pleasant letter and asked me to contribute to the Savoy which I



have done”. Sharp sent two stories as ‘Fiona MacLeod’ -*The Archer* and *Morag of the Glen*-surprisingly Symons chose the latter and it appeared in the November 1896 issue. In December 1897 Sharp was to chair the London meeting of the Irish literary Society but he was asked to withdraw by Yeats and Sharp only agreed when Lady Gregory stepped in and arranged a “little fiesta” where Symons and Sharp met and Yeats also attended (December 1897).

Sharp had long cultivated the friendship of Yeats whom he admired. However Yeats was more impressed with ‘Fiona MacLeod’s’ work and he encouraged “her” to write plays using Celtic myths and also join the Celtic Revival. Yeats invited both William Sharp and ‘Fiona Macleod’ (still seen as two separate people) to join with him and others in creating, through vision, the rites of a Celtic Mystical Order he hoped to form. They also shared an interest in the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn which Sharp and Yeats established a branch of in Paris in 1897 and collaborated in psychic experiments. In 1896 Symons and Yeats stayed at Tillyra castle at the invitation of Edward Marytn (Celtic Revivalist and activist). It was here that both had a common mystical vision of ‘The Archer’. ‘Fiona MacLeod’ (Sharp) was later to claim he shared the psychic vision with them in a hope to confirm to them of his psychic prowess. Yeats writes to Sharp of a vision he had on 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 1896 after evoking the spirits of the moon for eight or nine days. In the vision he saw a beautiful woman firing an arrow among the stars. He writes; “That night she appeared to Symons who is staying here and so impressed him that he wrote a poem to her...calling her the fountain of all song or some such phrase.”(*Yeats Annual*, vol 13, p.78-79). Yeats adds in his autobiography that ; “When he got back to London he found awaiting him a story by Fiona MacLeod and called, I think, ‘The Archer’. Someone in the story had a vision of a woman shooting an arrow into the sky and later an arrow shot at a fawn.” (Quoted in Blamires, 2013, p.154-155). They all believed something significant was happening that

would be a catalyst for a new spiritual re-birth. Dr Wescott (Founder of Golden Dawn) later showed Yeats an image of a woman shooting arrows at stars which appears in higher magic grades of that order. Again Yeats was encouraged by consulting a psychic who said “There were three that saw” confirming to him their psychic bond. However Blamires has pointed out that Sharp was deceitful and had already penned the story of the archer in an unpublished story, *The Last Phantasy of James Achaman* that re-emerges in 1897 after he gets Yeats account of his vision. He possibly did this to try to establish his psychic ability and impress Yeats and Symons. Later he was to revise the story back to its original form without the archer element.

#### v) Simplicity, Great Passion and Lyricism

It is very possible and I would argue that Symons and Yeats would have introduced Sharp to the poetry of Spanish Mystics, St Teresa and St John of the Cross, socially and through correspondences. Symons particularly through Coventry Patmore had been first introduced to them back in 1891 and this was cemented through his trips to Spain especially in 1899 where he records witnessing their manuscripts first hand. The Carmelites may also have provided the exemplar of sacrificial passions that emerged in Ireland, with, for example, Joseph Plunkett’s reverence for the works of St John of the Cross (as recorded by his sister). Symons saw in their poetry a mysticism that embraced simplicity, great poetic passion and lyrical qualities he deemed essential to a new art form in literature and his interpretations of their work emphasises the human love experience softening the extremes of the Symbolists while embracing their musical expressions of mysticism. It is no coincidence I believe that Symons chose Spain to write in 1899 both his pivotal books on the Symbolist movement as well as his ground breaking critique of the Spanish Carmelites and both would have been assimilated by his fellow writers. The connection between Yeats, Symons and Sharp was

indeed a meeting of minds and each interacted with the Symbolists and looked to the Spanish mystics to shape a new vision and a path towards a re-birth of mystical enlightenment.

### **c. The Influence of St Teresa of Avila**

#### **i) The influence of St Teresa of Avila**

Symons begins his article on the Spanish Carmelites (*Contemporary Review*, 1899) by describing his encounter with a facsimile of the original MS of the “Castillo Interior” (Interior castle) of St Teresa of Avila, which he viewed in Spain. He describes her “bold, not very legible handwriting with its feminine blots here and there.” (Symons, 1899, reproduced, 1918, p.73) He praises St Teresa’s poems for their “naked simplicity” and describes her poem as joyous little songs full of improvisations. He quotes St Teresa as saying, “This divine union of love with him I love makes God my captive”. (Symons, 1918, p.79) He records her exclamations “O true lover!”, “...with what softness, with what delight, with what tenderness and with what great manifestations of love thou arrest the wounds that with arrows of the same love thou hast made!” Symons translates one of her poems as “If Lord thy love for me be strong/As this which bind me unto thee...” and “Love’s whole possession I entreat” he later quotes the totality of Teresa’s love, “My body, my life and soul, my bowels and my love, sweet spouse and redemption since I offer myself to be thine.” (Symons, reproduced, 1918, p.81) It is reminiscent of Sharp’s poem, *Lord of my Life*. Symons praises her “joyous simplicity” and “Impassioned devotion to which every height or depth of sacrifice was an easy thing.” (Symons, 1899, reproduced, 1918, p.81) The theme of sacrifice may have encouraged the revolutionary element in the Irish Celtic Revival with figures like poet Joseph Mary Plunkett (Friend of Edward Martyn of Tillyra Castle and who died in the Easter Rising, 1916). Plunkett is said to have carried the work of St John of the Cross and St Teresa with him and to have been influenced by them. Perhaps Symons highlighted the sacrificial quality

of Carmelite poetry to those of the Celtic Revival which struck a chord with them. The Spanish mystics may also have provided a route for their quest for beauty which could be gained through contemplation and studying the methods of these saints.

TR Henn in his book on Yeats' poetry, *The Lonely Tower*, (1950) states that Yeats had read St Teresa's *Interior Castle* and that it may have influenced his tower symbol. (Discussed in chapter 4c) Henn also quotes from Yeats' poem *Vacillation* (1933) a poem to Von Hugel (lay catholic spiritual director, to for example Evelyn Underhill-interestingly Underhill frequented the Carmelite church in Kensington). In the poem Yeats refers to the incorruptible body of St Teresa of Avila and the sweet smell of holiness ensuing from her body. He writes; "Must we part Von Hugel, though much alike, for we/Accept the miracles of /Saints and honour sanctity? / The body of Teresa lies undecayed in tomb/Bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours from it come..." (Henn, 1950, p.169) It is clear then that Yeats was impressed with St Teresa of Avila and her writing and his fascination for the tower symbol only confirms his understanding of its reference to the Song of Songs so cherished by her. (Discussed further in this Chapter)

## ii) St Teresa of Avila, and the Celtic Renaissance.

In this section I hope to demonstrate further that the Carmelite mystic, St Teresa of Avila (1551-1582) has inspired several writers and mystics of the Celtic Renaissance including George Russell (A.E) (1867-1935), W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) and George MacDonald (1824-1905). I would like to argue that their mystical output in poetry and stories were influenced by the Symbolism and poetic expression of the Spanish Carmelites and St Teresa in particular. In examining her visionary imagery for example in the *Interior Castle* of 1577 and her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*, 1567, themes and images reappear in the literary work of these Celtic Renaissance writers. I will be looking at poems by George (A.E)

Russell-*The Fountain of Shadowy Beauty and Sacrifice* ( published in his *Collected Poems*, 1913) as well as taking extracts from his autobiography, *Candle of Vision* (1918). Of George Macdonald I shall discuss his short-story, *The Castle* (1864) and his Fantasy, *The Princess and the Curdie* (1883). From Yeats I shall discuss his poem, *Vacillation* as well as make reference to Sharp's prose-poem, *The Reed Player* from *The Silence of Amour*, 1910. Certainly John Matthews in his book *From The Isles of Dream* (1993) makes an initial connection between *The Castle* by George MacDonald and St Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and in the introduction to the short-story *The Castle* he writes that, "For the symbolism of *The Castle* Macdonald seems to draw extensively on that of the Spanish mystic St Teresa of Avila, whose own work *The Interior Castle* is imbued with a visionary outlook which seems to derive ultimately from the Celtic traditions-perhaps through Celtic-Iberian roots."(Matthews, 1993, p.199) <sup>5</sup> Can, then, clear influences be established through studying these texts?

### iii) Interior Castle

In looking first at the *Interior Castle* 1577, we witness Macdonald and Russell demonstrating an understanding of St Teresa's masterpiece. Teresa was observed to be in ecstasy when she wrote her inspired work but Burrow's points out that she had to use "Hackneyed, technical, ugly words for the most profound thing that can happen to a creature." (Burrows, 1981, p.4) After a vision she found her description of a "soul in grace" as a crystal castle. (Burrows, 1981, p.10) However her castle image used to describe a soul and its progress towards union with God was well received and it re-emerges in George MacDonald's parable *The Castle*. Why did this image hold such appeal? Perhaps they respected the authenticity which emerges from Teresa as a well-versed mystic. Or perhaps their own mystical experiences echoed those

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<sup>5</sup> This has been supported by the study of DNA by Professor Bryan Sykes which proves British Celts are descended from Spanish fishermen

of St Teresa in image and form. Of Russell, for example, the *Times* obituary, (18 July, 1935) writes of, "...his intense spiritual ambition with beliefs which irradiated his whole being" emphasising his authenticity as a mystic.

St Teresa states; "the soul as resembling a castle formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal contains many rooms just as in heaven there are many mansions." The soul is seen to progress spiritually through seven mansions or dwelling places. Each step moves it closer to the king who resides in "the innermost chamber where God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse". In Russell's book *The Candle of Vision* , 1918, (which recounts many mystical experiences he had), he discusses "What powers or dignitaries meet in the inner chamber of the soul" A direct reference to St Teresa's image. (Russell, 1918, p.90). Others used the image of the innermost room of the king "where secret things pass between God and the soul. *The Kings Chamber* comes in chapter 19 of *Fantasies* by George Macdonald in it he writes it is a "dreadful thing to be alone in the king's chamber at the dead of night" which perhaps could possibly have symbolic meaning in regard to a Dark Night encounter with Christ found in the literature of Carmelite St John of the Cross . Yeats, too, uses the *The King's Abode* as the title to his play first performed in Dublin in 1903 and published in 1904. MacDonald's story writes of the many rooms in the castle similar to St Teresa's mansions he writes, "Those who dwell in it often discover rooms they had never entered before." (Matthews, 1993, p.201) It is noteworthy too to speak of the significance of numbers. Teresa describes seven mansions in the castle in the Bible the number seven represents perfection; it is a sign of God and completeness. The number seven is used 562 times in the bible. Burrows, however, indicates that many mansions are implied as in John14:2 ("There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you"). This is certainly true of Russell and Macdonald. Russell maintains that, "When our lamp is lit, we find the house of our being has many chambers and creatures live there who

come and go and we must ask whether they have the right to be in our house; there are corridors there leading to the heart of others and windows which open into eternity” (Russell, 1918, p.53) He also adds:” Not to be lost in vision we must learn the geography of the spirit and the many mansions in the being of the Father.”(Russell, 1918, p.53) Youthful spirits he says can be,”...moulded by the Magician of the Beautiful and enter the House of Many Mansions.”(Russell, 1918, p.53) In his poem, *The Fountain of Shadowy Beauty*, (Russell, *Collected Poems*, 1913 Russell describes a heavenly dream where there appears a “crystal boat” and he adds “Our Father’s house hath many fanes,” Macdonald, too, writes in his parable, ‘The Castle’ that “all around the castle brooded the dark night unheeded” (Matthews, 1993, p.206) and those journeying through the rooms are said they “often at sunrise, might be heard their hymn of praise to their unseen father, whom they felt to be near though they saw him not.” (Matthews, 1993, p.213)

Teresa tells us that the gate of entry to the castle is prayer and meditation and that progress will be halted by the vipers and reptiles (the three lusts-flesh, eyes and pride of life or worldliness). These reside in the moat around the castle and they “...disturb their peace and prevent them seeing the beauty of the building” (1577, ch1 p.45). This concept for the spiritual journey is repeated in Macdonald’s short-story, *The Castle*. In it he writes of “the labyrinth of vaults and passages and endless successions of down-going stairs...They had a dim consciousness too of the presence in those awful regions of beings whom they could not comprehend.”(Matthews, 1993, pp.201-214)

Paul Trafford highlights Teresa’s image of the “...castle as a fortification” (2009) being influenced by the geography of Castile which is a walled town. Teresa also describes the body as the outer walls of the castle which is the soul. This interior castle then has particular features. Firstly it is exquisitely beautiful and yet extremely robust confirming Russell’s statement, “there is no true beauty or wisdom which is not allied with strength”

(Russell, 1918, p.137). Secondly Teresa limits the mansions to seven, with the first four being a preparation, through control of the will and prayer, to receive the supernatural communications of God in the three remaining mansions till the spiritual marriage is reached.

#### iv) Crystal Imagery

It is significant that Teresa describes the soul as a 'crystal' castle. The form of crystal appears in the poetry of Russell too. He uses a spiritual crystal boat in a heavenly dream in his poem *The Fountain of Shadowy Beauty*. In Russell's poem, *The Sacrifice* (from *Lyra Celtica* 1896 / *Collected Works*, 1917), he again uses the imagery of crystal: "the offering arise:/Hazes of rainbow light,/Pure crystal, blue and gold.....In gleams of crystal light/reveals what pure pathways/Led to the soul's desire/The silence of the height." Crystal imagery was thoughtful or inspired imagery as crystal or crystalline is a solid, pure material whose molecules and atoms are arranged in an ordered pattern extending in all three spatial dimensions. A snowflake is a single crystal made of only pure molecules and a perfect crystal is a diamond. So the Creator Himself has formed the soul in the perfection of crystal and may be the direct source of this form used by His mystics. What better substance could have been used for in essence it is a piece of the beauty of God in creation. Crystallization is also a purification process with selection of only pure molecules similar to the soul's purification through the mansions. Dr Masari Emoto also has discovered that "crystals formed in frozen water reveal changes when specific, concentrated thoughts are directed towards them." He found that water from a clear spring and water that has been exposed to loving words shows "brilliant, complex and colourful snowflake patterns."<sup>6</sup> The opposite is true of polluted water.

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<sup>6</sup> website



In Revelations 4:5-6, we are given a heavenly description by John where “Between the throne and myself was a sea that seemed to be made of glass like crystal.” Here too, crystal is used to describe something of immense beauty and purity. Russell, in discussing his imaginings writes; “I remember how pure, holy and beautiful these imaginations seemed, how they came like crystal water sweeping aside the muddy current of my life.”(Russell, 1918, p.75) He also points to the significance of the atom of matter like crystal and proclaims: “He who attributes least mystery to matter is furthest from the truth, and he highest who conjectures the Absolute to be present in the fullness of being in the atom.”(Russell, 1918, p.93) Of matter he says:”Is it not pregnant every atom of it with the infinite?”(Russell, p.93) Teresa describes the sun shining through the crystal at the centre of the castle where the King of Glory resides and Russell similarly writes of a vision where”...intensity of light...like the flashing of sunlight through a crystal” and “ Such a beauty begins to glow in us as we journey towards Deity..”(Russell, 1918, p.34) Russell is clearly familiar with St Teresa’s imagery but perhaps they also come from his own visionary experiences.

#### v) Royal Road

Another image used by St Teresa is in naming the mystical journey the ‘Royal Road’ (Russell, p.138) and indeed the royal abode of the King of Glory is the main feature of Teresa’s writing. George Russell (A.E) also writes of treading the royal road. He writes in his chapter called ‘Power’;”...through struggle and sacrifice, we may grow into power again; and this must continue until we tread the royal road, and cultivate power in our being as we cultivate beauty or intellect.” (Russell, 1918, p.138). The Spanish mystics may also have provided a route for their quest for beauty which could be gained through contemplation and studying the methods of these saints.

## vi) Tower Symbol

TR Henn in his book on Yeats' poetry, *The Lonely Tower* (1950) states that Yeats had read St Teresa's *Interior Castle* and that it may have influenced his tower symbol. In restoring the Tower at Thoor Ballylee near Lady Gregory's place at Coole there remained unfinished an empty room at the top and Henn compares it to the "the ultimate room in St Teresa's Interior Castle, which Yeats had read" (Henn, 1950, p.13). Henn also links it to the seventh room in alchemy and the last house of Phases of the Moon. It is the room where spiritual revelation is given. Yeats, too, in his poem *Vacillation*<sup>7</sup> shows his appreciation for St Teresa of Avila paying her homage in verse eight, "The body of Saint Teresa lies undecayed in tomb/bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours from it come." The tower symbol also reflects the imagery in the Song of Songs; the woman's brothers say; "If she is a wall, /we will build her a silver tower. /But is she is a gate, /we will protect her with panels of cedar. / The woman replies; "I am a wall and by breasts are its towers. My lover knows that with him/I find contentment and peace." (Song of Songs, 8:9-10) Again the walled or enclosure of the woman reminds us of the enclosed life St Teresa was trying to ensure in her reforms of the Carmelite nuns. Also she compares the body to the outer walls of the castle which holds the soul and we hear the woman in the Song of Songs refer to her fortified body, "I am a wall and my breasts are its towers"(Song of Songs, 8:9). The tower symbol is also associated with Mary Magdalene, the word tower being a translation of Magdalene and is a deeply significant symbol of the sacred feminine. (Nahmad and Bailey, introd notes)<sup>8</sup> (Discussed further in Chapter 5 c).

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<sup>7</sup> From *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, 2011 edition

<sup>8</sup> *Secret Teachings of Mary Magdalene*

## vii) Song of Songs

St Teresa's appreciation for the courtly love of in the Song of Songs led her to write meditations on them 1567. It had been discussed first in the nuptial theology of Origen of Alexander (discussing the divine bridegrooms perfect marriage song) and later by Gregory of Nyssa in 389AD (both use idea of the marriage between Christ and the church) and Bernard of Clairvaux in *his Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 1137. It has, however, particular appeal to Carmelite Spirituality, a feminine expression of a love exchange between Christ and his spiritual brides (nuns), which is the main focus but also gives rise to passionate poetry by its many mystics including St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila. William Sharp makes reference to the *Song of Songs* in his book *The Silence of Amour*, 1910. From it we have the prose passage called *The Reed Player*. Sharp as 'Fiona Macleod' writes; "The Song of Songs is what he played...and the beating of hearts was heard, and I heard sighs and a voice like a distant bird-song rose and fell...Play me a song of death I said. Then he who had the hollow read at his lips smiled and he played again the Song of Songs" (p.27). In this reference from *The Reed Player* the passionate love exchange is fulfilled with his words "the beating of hearts was heard" and he also makes a significant observation when he writes; "play me a song of death ...and he played me again the Song of Songs". This theme is re-iterated in 'Fiona MacLeod's short-story *The Ammir-Choille* from *The Washer of the Ford*. In it he writes; "When he ceased, a voice came out of the hollow oak, "Play me a death-song, Murta MacMurta Mac Neisa, Murta smiled and he played again the song of love." This insight into the sacrificial danger in the passions of love so unites with the Carmelite mystic's agony of love and echoes too with the expressions of courtly love of the Middle Ages. Russell also wrote a poem called *The Silence of Love*. He writes; "I could praise you once with beautiful words ere you came/ and entered my life with love in a wind of flame. / I could lure with a song from afar my bird to its nest, / But with pinions drooping together silence is beast. / In

the land of beautiful silence the winds are laid...Fear not the stillness; for doubt and despair shall cease/with gentle voices guiding us into peace.” (George Russell, 1917).The theme of the sacramental union of a man and a woman in a love relationship of marriage or the mutual love between Christ and the Church is associated with the Song of Songs. The Lord had given St Teresa great delight when she heard or read some words from this biblical text. She referred to these words as “the things that pass between the soul and our Lord”. These are the most beautiful songs and very erotic “Your lips cover me with kisses. Your love is better than wine...drink deep and lose yourselves in love...Come then, my love, my darling, come with me...my lover is mine and I am his” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, 1980, pp. 216-260). St Teresa was told to burn her *Meditations on the Song of Songs* by her Dominican confessor but copies remained in circulation and they were printed by Fr Jerome Gratian, her supporter, in 1611 primarily for her Carmelite sisters to read. She took her manuscript straight from the Lord himself and says; “...I shall be able to say only what the Lord teaches me.” (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, 1980, Ch 8) She was not afraid to discuss the kiss of Jesus in her third chapter saying; “And my Lord, if the kiss signifies peace and friendship why shouldn’t souls ask you for this kiss?”(reproduced in Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, 1980, ch 2), alluding gently (so as not to be censored) again to the Song of Songs, (1:2).

It seems, then, that there is evidence that writings of St Teresa of Avila were inspiring the creative writing and poetry of the Celtic Renaissance particularly, Macdonald, Russell, Sharp and Yeats and provided a focus for their own mystical quest. It contained a truth they were searching for and experiencing themselves and in essence was a central influence on the purification of their spiritual journey.

## Chapter 4

### Soul Searching-Sharp's Critical Writing

In this chapter I examine Sharp's extensive critical writing and focus on what were the key and common attributes he looked for when choosing friends in the literary and artistic world and his recorded impressions in his biographical writings. Sharp was a profound seeker from childhood both in his interior life and through his writing. This extended to having keen observational qualities and having the inner knowledge to seek the soul essence in the biographical sketches he wrote.

#### i) Knowing the Heart of a Man

“To know the man is to know the art of the man; though the knowledge must be of the inward life and spirit shaping, and not that of arbitrary and accidental part.” (Sharp on Burne-Jones, 1898, p.181). Sharp's mystical journey brought him to seek in others those qualities of the soul he admired. His writing was to help shape his vision of what makes an artist or writer a mystic. Sharp was art critic for the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Art Journal* during the 1880's as well as producing many sketches of the great and good of the literary and art world of his time. He made it his business to record his impressions of those who were intimate friends of his. His wife, Elizabeth collected these *Papers Critical and Reminiscent* in a book of 1912. It spanned eighteen years from 1884-1902 and interestingly she comments “The volume is largely autobiographical inasmuch as it records the impressions and memories concerning writers of that date with whom William Sharp was in touch”(E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.373) (She apologises that he had only met Matthew Arnold three times). What were Sharp's motives? Did he want to mix with the rich and famous clinging to their success or was there a deeper drive to understand what makes for genius and what qualities they possessed? What, then,

were the key features of both the people he observed and the souls he admired in his circle of literary and artistic friends? How do these represent the quests of Sharp's own spirit that was manifested in his writing and what influenced his style?

## ii) His Circle of Friends

In his essay on Burne-Jones of 1898, Sharp quotes from scripture that, "in art is there anything more obvious than that many are called but few chosen." (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.148). He desired to be one of the elect and, "to belonging to a significant literary and artistic movement and indulge in his craving for uniqueness." (Alaya, 1970, p.30) It was through Sir Noel Paton that Sharp was to be introduced in 1879 to painter/poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti and through him he met many important figures including Swinburne, Morris, Pater, Meredith, Browning, Marston as well as artists like William Bell Scott, Ford Maddox Brown and Holman Hunt. Through Rossetti he was also to encounter his sister, Christina Rossetti (who was so influential in his acceptance of Christianity see chapter 5b). In a letter to Adelaide Elder in 1899, Sharp acknowledged the part Rossetti had played in his development as a writer and a seeker. In 1879 she had sent him a copy of Rossetti's poems and he pronounces that, "without it the whole course of my life might have been very different" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p11). Following a visit in September 1881 to Rossetti, a friendship proceeded which, "helped him in the development of his art by sound, careful criticism and kindly encouragement" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.11)<sup>9</sup>. This began his literary life and from 1881 he moved in "the literary world and in every phase of it from the most Bohemian to the most isolated" (E.A. Sharp, 1910). He constantly oscillates between mixing in high society and the mystic quest for solitude gaining fuel with his contacts yet wishing to absorb the implications for this own inner ambitions. Yet as Hopkins and Rockel have pointed out, his work as

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<sup>9</sup> 2012 reprint

William Sharp has “largely fallen into limbo” (1977, p.4) compared to his output as ‘Fiona Macleod’. This is surprising when his critical work absorbed so much of his time and provided him with regular income, prolific as he was. It gave him, too, the recognition as a unique and trustworthy commentator on the main players in the artistic and literary world of the period.

### iii) Finding the Essence

Sharp was to state that the great poets “stand revealed to us in their own writing” and so it is true of Sharp also whose critical papers give us insight to the pursuits of his own mind and soul. In his article on ‘*Rossetti in Prose and Verse*’ of 1887 he praised Rossetti as “a visionary yet no mere dreamer, a man born out of due time” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.38). A reflection perhaps of himself. This aloofness of spirit is reflected in Sharp’s own experience so that by the 1890’s Alaya believes that, “Sharp had so systemised his loneliness that he could not absorb ...the kind of inspiration provided by mutuality of artistic life.”(Alaya, p.48, 1970) (I would argue that it was a catalyst for him to define a spiritual character and develop one himself). Previously he had recorded uneasiness with London City life and there remained a constant pull away, throughout his life, from the Bohemian circles of London to the more isolated heartlands of the world. By 1895 he wrote to a friend, “London I do not like...I suffer here.” (Blamires, 2013, p.123) This “deep resentments towards urban life” (Alaya, 1970, p.48) is reflected in his essay in 1894 on Walter Pater. Of Pater he intimates, “for a time, London gave him a fresh and pleasant stimulus; but later it began to weary, to perturb, and at last to allure him into even deeper despondencies than his wont” (Alaya, 1970, p.48). For Philip Marston too Sharp writes of his distaste for “the noise and bustle of the city” (Alaya, 1970, p.52) and this is echoed in his *Life of Heine* of 1888, where he identifies with Heine’s description of Hamburg as “a town of automata, machinery, and grim facts, with

nothing that makes life beautiful” (quoted in Alaya, 1970, p.57). In his article on Browning of 1889, Sharp describes the city as “tragic” and feels the “misery and crowding of the city” had “damaged human nature” (Alaya, 1970,p.59).

#### iv) A Man of Conscience

Yet London at night was a different story and included in the *Critical Papers* (1912) is a piece called, “*Hotel of the Beautiful Star*” originally written for *Harpers Magazine*. His wife, Elizabeth records that it “is reminiscent of the author himself and shows a side of his nature that...She...had scarcely touched upon in ...her... memoir of him.”(E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.375). It certainly shows he had a conscience. Describing the homeless folk of London and their bed under the stars, he embellished the piece with majestic descriptions of the night scene of deserted London, writing, “under the influence of moonlight...(London)... can take on a beauty or a mysterious strangeness which once realised, is irresistible”( E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.353) and he describes “nocturnal mid-winter Thames” as “wonderful” ( E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.356) and records the “ serenity, quietude, silence, space, beauty-a beauty as of the remote country, a spaciousness as if the desert, a silence as if an ocean in calm” of “nocturnal London”( E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.368). He was later to write, “I love best the music that leads one into the moonlit coverts of dreams and old silence and unawakening peace.” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.116/7) Certainly he is attracted by the “solitary centre of Hyde Park and the solitary stillness round the Bank of England in the heart of the world”. (a peaceful night view), (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.372). His fragile wonder of the night scene is tinged with melancholy when he reveals his compassionate heart in taking a homeless person, whom he calls “my friend ”,to his home to sleep on his ”relatively comfortable sofa”. (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.372)



## v) Poignancy and Beauty

The haunting picture he paints has echoes in his critical work. For example he praises Matthew Arnold's poetry as having, "serenity, a quiet music, an occasional poignant cry" (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.14). Poignancy and beauty are qualities he admires in those he chooses to write about. In his piece on Christina Rossetti he calls her, "one of the saintliest of women" and perhaps it takes one to know one. He particularly esteems her, "lines of extraordinary poignancy and beauty, straight from the lyric emotion wrought straight from the ecstasy in heart and brain" (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.95). Through his personal knowledge of her, he maintains, "Christina became poignantly melancholic whenever alone." (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.73). He quotes from her poem, "Joy is but sorrow...Pain is but pleasure" and he beautifully describes the sorrow of life as a garment she wore, "no garment chosen for its loveliness, but because of its refreshment for others."(E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.101) It shows insight and understanding from a man with a mystic's heart. In the article he also recalls her quotation from Bacon, "The souls of the living are the Beauty of the world."

Both poignant sorrow and beauty are two themes that repeatedly emerge as qualities Sharp sought for in his fellow artists/writers. He discusses Meredith's poetry as having "an austere beauty, a grave ecstasy" (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.280). Again in writing on Burne-Jones he says, "joyousness can be a grave ecstasy. And a grave ecstasy is the ideal of the highest art."(E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.169). This insightful comment reveals the depth of Sharp's mystical understanding of the power of a soul's agony in a dark moment. Meredith's work, he believes, contains, "as vision of beauty, or rather the faculty of seeing and saying in beauty what revelation or sudden glimpse of all beauty has perceived" (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.274). Yet to Sharp, to know the man is the source of appraising his output and this is the "concentrated knowledge and spiritual vision of a long and noble life" (E.A. Sharp, 1912,

p.280). Of Thomas Hardy, he pinpoints his “inspired words” and “sense of profound sadness” in his writing which, “touches the deepest chords of spiritual life” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.244).

## vi) Seeking Nobleness

To be noble is fundamental to Sharp’s vision of a successful literary and artistic figure. He calls Hardy’s contribution, “English prose of the noblest kind” and he praises the “noble spirit” in Matthew Arnold’s work ,as well as, talking of “the nobility of the man” when discussing Burne-Jones, who kept an “unwavering outlook of a rare and noble imagination” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.182). To be noble, then is an essential characteristic of the great and good and must reflect elements of his own personality. Of Burne-Jones, too, Sharp again makes the connection between poignancy and beauty when he writes of the “deep and poignant sense of the tragic piteousness of life, of the imperative need to interpret through beauty its spiritual correspondence.” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.185) Of Rossetti, he looks to him as being, “haunted by the vision of beauty, the love of Beauty became a passion, this passion became his very being.” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.40). Again Sharp looks to the transformation of the man not just his output. Sharp examines, for example, the “haunting melancholy” of Rossetti’s *Autumn Song* and believes that “sorrow has been a motive influence of incalculable value”. (E.A. Sharp, p.62) His “serious sorrow” is given weight by its hiddenness and for Sharp, “melancholy is in the invariable shadow of high genius” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.49). In his article on Burne-Jones, he proclaims, “All great art, like all great beauty, however revealed, is in a sense melancholy. How could it be otherwise?”(E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.167). This quality of melancholy could be seen to be of its time at the end of the nineteenth century but in chapter 5b I will discuss more fully its use by Sharp and others that links it to the work of St John of the Cross and to the output of the Celtic Renaissance.

## vii) The Mirror of the Soul

Not only is melancholy praised in high art but “strangeness” too is revered. In his observations of Burne-Jones he details his “strange and luminous eyes” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.152) and he extracts from them his interior life “whose spiritual reflection revealed itself in the visionary eyes”. Eyes long believed to be the mirrors of the soul have a fascination for Sharp. He describes Walter Pater’s eyes as “deep-set...and of what a peculiar grey- a variable line, but wherein the inner light was always vivid and sometimes strangely keen and penetrating” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.189). As Alaya has stated: “Pater the man and not merely the appreciator who left his most profound mark on him (Sharp).” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.43)

## viii) Renaissance of the Beautiful

In his article on Burne-Jones of 1898, Sharp again gives quite a detailed account of the soul of the man (near death), on their last meeting where, “the revelation of a man in the strange auroral light which pertains to the first hours of death” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.144-145). So keen is his observation and so sensitive his description, that Sharp reveals his own mystic temperament. Burne-Jones shares his quest, the “quest which is the highest quest of man-the quest of beauty” (E.A. Sharp, 1912, p.146). On 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 1883, Sharp wrote, “Only a Renaissance of belief in the beautiful being the only sure guide can save modern nations from further spiritual degradation.”, ( E.A. Sharp, 1910). He passionately believed “Beauty is a Queen and should be served as a Queen” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.70) and he loved to “drink it in” (1891 letter to Strasse). As reflected in his critical appraisals, he sought “infinite sweet melancholy” and found, “extreme loneliness...was like balm...the deep pain-joy of utter isolation...” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.75). He maintained that “sorrow is our best ally” (to E.A Sharp, 1898) and in his own work he referred to “an emotion akin to the mysterious sorrow of Eternity in love and tears, of which Blake speaks in Vala.” (E.A. Sharp, 1910,

p.116) And again he states “The fragrance of all is joy. The beauty of all is sorrow” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.116). For Sharp the spiritual man was what he sought in a creative genius for he did “not speak of the spiritual life as another life; there is no other life” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.102), he acclaimed. With his keen eye he was able to extract the essential characteristics of those he studied and “knowing intimately of what is supremely worth remembering”. For Sharp believed that “in truth...all creative art is remembrance” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.117).

### ix) Style

In examining Sharp’s critical writing its clear he has a natural style of writing with direct simplicity. He gives us an impression of the artist/writer through careful observation with sensitive insights. He has a “directness of utterance” (Halloran, 1972, p.62) which he did not learn from Rossetti and clear perceptive judgements. Through his critical writing he reflects both body and soul of the person reaching far into the depth of their artistic quests. He was not afraid to express himself (as in his criticisms of Rossetti). In a letter to Mr Black of 1902, he explains that he seeks “verisimilitude”. He adds, see “...your utterance is always your own utterance...write as simply and naturally as possible. Sincerity, which is the last triumph of art is also its foster-mother” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.111). In writing on Burne-Jones, Sharp describes his stripped down simplicity. He states: “I relinquish biographical details and all personal reminiscences.” He adds, see “your utterance (has) interpretive bearing.” His wish was to interpret, “what is essential and inevitable”. (E.A. Sharp, 1912)

Walter Pater wrote on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1885 to Sharp saying that his criticism is “so independent and so sympathetic”, criticism “not merely pleasant but judicious”. He continues; “you have said precisely what I should have wished...Thank you”, a polite complement to Sharp. His wife Elizabeth gives us more insight. She writes; “For his critical work, he studied and prepared himself deliberately. He believed that the one method of

attaining to a balance estimate of our literature is by comparative study of foreign contemporary writing” and he was convinced of the “narrowness of English criticism” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.33). He also maintained that he “tried to estimate the literature under consideration from an absolute impersonal and impartial point of view” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.33). Yet elements emerged that resonated with his own artistic spirit. In the memoirs, his wife emphasises that he always sought to understand the underlying motive of any phase of literature and that he aimed to unite,” the marriage of science that knows, and of the spirit that discerns”(E.A. Sharp, 1910 , p.34/35).

He received much praise for his critical work. For example R. Garnett writing to Sharp on November 1888 discusses his work on Heine and he believed it to be an “excellent piece of biographical work”. He adds that, “you are throughout perfectly clear and highly interesting and what is more difficult with your subject, accurate and impartial.”

Sharp’s critical writing on those he admired from his wide circle of friends, then, reflects his own spiritual journey and his quest for beauty and wonder seen through sorrow. He captivates the essence of those he discusses and simply extracts the qualities he deems are essential in the spirit of an artistic and literary genius. Most he knew intimately and could draw on close observation of his subject. Often the qualities he praises reflect his own criteria for perfection in art and in his own and their inner development. He looks always to the inner man and seeks to interpret the journey of a soul. He had honed his art as critic over many successful years but throughout he believed that, “The basis of criticism is imagination; its spiritual quality is sympathy; its intellectual distinction is balance.”(E.A. Sharp, 1910, p. 34/35) This he achieves through careful observation and insightful writing. Gradually he was narrowing down what he himself felt were essential qualities in a mystic soul which must have propelled his own mystical path and given him joy as he found soul-mates.

## x) Sensitive Portrayals

Sharp demonstrates, then, a keen sensitivity to things of the spirit. He is continually throughout his life encountering new mystical experiences and interacting with those at the foreground of developments in the spiritual realm. He was aware of the importance of soul and looked carefully for what made for an enlivened inner being in those who were his friends that he admired. Certainly he had a choice selection to draw on as he mixed in the artistic and literary world but they ultimately did not satisfy his inner hunger and he always sought to step back and go into seclusion to grapple with his interior world so as to transform many.

## Chapter 5

### Sharp's Later Writing as 'Fiona MacLeod'

In this chapter I look for evidence as to why Sharp chose to write as a woman and as a Roman Catholic from 1895. I examine his growing Christological standpoint and highlight from his texts examples of Christian theology revealed and more specifically the Carmelite spirituality that he seems to grasp and portray in his stories and poems. I argue that the feminine aspect was part of his v

isionary world dating back to his childhood exposure to Catholicism and his visions of the 'Lady of the Woods' which propelled his search for the ideal woman and a feminine redeemer in a renewal to come who he refers to as "the Virgin Mother of Catholicism" or "the daughter of God" to name some of her titles (letter to Dr Goodchild, March 4, 1899). His ideal description of Iona as a woman praises her as "...sacred, inviolate..."(undated letter) an interesting choice of words so associated with the Virgin Mary and repeatedly in his texts he chooses phrases and concepts common to Catholic theology. His vision however I believe was of a "...fair vision of humanity to come: man and woman side by side."(Macleod, 1900, p.399) and not resulting from sexual conflicts. His understanding of the "many Mary's" (Macleod, 1900, p.398) is examined in his use of a Christian Magdalene Washer of the Ford and I look to the Spanish roots of the story. Themes associated with the Dark Night spirituality of St John of the Cross are exposed in his stories and poetry and his concept of Jesus is compared to similar descriptions in Irish literature. His friendship with Christina Rossetti is detailed to form a source of Christian influence on his writing and poetry.

## a. Finding a Christian Expression: The Later Christian Tales

“And when I stood upon the world again it was like a glory. And I saw the stone lying at my feet.

And one said: Do you know me brother?

And I said:”Speak Lord”

And Christ stooped and kissed me upon the brow”

(MacLeod (Sharp) in ‘A Dream’ from ‘Sundown Shores’ 1900, p.411)

In this section I look to the increasing Christological framework in Sharp’s later short stories written as ‘Fiona MacLeod’. I will examine firstly *The Washer of the Ford*, a titular story from a book of Legendary Moralities which deals with purification rituals for the afterlife and discusses the Mary Magdalene figure who washes sins away thereby adapting a folktale into a Christian format. The second section focuses on visionary stories about Jesus or Iosa (to give him his Gaelic name) and discusses *The Last Supper* and *The Fisher of Men* both of 1897 and draws similarities with a story by Irishman, Padraic Pearse called *Ioasgan*. Lastly *The Divine Adventure* (1900) is examined. It is a spiritual/symbolic work that uncovers Sharp’s deeply held Christian beliefs on, for example, eternity, resurrection of the body, or the real presence of Christ. There is a distinctively Catholic theology which emerges crystallising his own mystical progression, yet it must be remembered that although he wrote as a Catholic as ‘Fiona Macleod’ from 1895, he himself did not convert to Catholicism. He did however, continue to produce Christian stories. By 1908 he published, ‘Three legends of the Christ Child’ adapting earlier pieces into a collection of magical, succinct little imaginary stories of the Child Jesus. The first is *The Children of the Wind and the Clan of Peace* which first appears in *Where the Forrest Murmurs* contained in his book *The Silence of Amour*, 1910. It tells the story of the child Jesus talking to the birds and how he established the black crows and the white doves as representing good and evil. In the second piece, *The Lord of*



*Wisdom* is a dialogue between Mary and her son at nine years old where Jesus is privy to secret wisdom from the wild bees. Sharp begins by saying that it is a story he recalls from childhood perhaps learnt from Seamus, the old Catholic fisherman or the northern priests he knew as a child. The third story *How Deep Knowledge came to the Child Jesus* is an expansion of the story told in the Prologue to *The Washer of the Ford*. It tells the story of a desert king who is blind but has ancestral wisdom. He visits the nativity scene (here Jesus is called again the Gaelic, 'Iosa mac Dhe' and even "clapped his hands with joy") and asks the 'King of the Elements', Jesus, to heal him. As he does so the desert king gives him secret knowledge in the form of nine runes. The story ends by projecting to Jesus' death saying; "And when Christ was nailed upon the cross, deep knowledge went back into the green world, and passed into the grass and the sap in trees, and the flowing wind, and the dust that swirls and is gone." (Macleod, 1910, p.40). It ends by saying that we are "no more than a perpetual phorescence" of the cosmic life.

The Christ-centeredness of these stories is discussed in relation to influences of Symbolism at its mystical peak and for links to Carmelite spirituality. Assuming he was exposed to the writing of Carmelite mystics, particularly St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila (discussed in chapter 4), Sharp could find a ready source of Christ-centred mystical expression in their writing. John Sullivan OCD has focused on St Teresa's "christo-centric virtues" in his writing and he maintains she was inspired primarily by the words and person of Christ. He writes; "Fundamentally the Christo-centric attitude is the key to interpreting all her books and doctrines. She calls him master, spouse, Lord, friend, model, life, and dwelling. Christocriticism distinguishes the progressive way of Christian life in all its facets. It is encounter, conversion, discipleship, revelation, life in Christ, service to Christ" (Sullivan, 1987). Certainly Sharp's life contained many of these elements and his later writing bares testament to his growing Christological standpoint. With exquisite language and beautiful

imagery he allows us to indulge in imaginary stories about Christ which reveal Christian truths and enliven the reader's faith. In this he was serving his master while weaving mysteries and revelations into the stories. His books must have inspired many Christians looking for more than the re-telling of Bible stories and they uncover Sharp's rediscovery of his Christian roots. Perhaps it was not his Presbyterian faith he knew as a child but a Christianity that had matured through study and experience to embrace a catholic sensibility and mystical realities.

### 1) *The Washer of the Ford* by 'Fiona MacLeod' (William Sharp)

#### Spanish and Other Influences

In this section I look to the origins of the tale of the *Washer of the Ford* to uncover the links between Sharp's rendering of the story and the legend from early Celtic and Spanish sources. I look also to the Christian rendering of Sharp's story and its origins.

Singer-songwriter Emily Holbert Kellan's current repertoire includes a song called, *Washer of the Ford*. In it she revives the tale of the bean sith - fairy women, woman of peace or washer-woman. According to legend they bring a message of death from the otherworld and wash the blood from the grave clothes of those about to die. The song goes; "I took that torn and bloodstained garment,/Plunged it in the river cold./Yet as I washed the linen fine/I recognised the stitches mine/Upon the very shirt I'd sewn/For my true love, brave and bold!". Kellan's image reflects one example of the Gaelic tale but similar stories exist in a number of countries including Spain, so what were the influences on Sharp version and how does it differ from traditional rendering of the myth? Why did he choose to give a Christian base for his version of the story yet believe "They are all one"? (Prologue to *Washer of the Ford*)

## i) Pagan and Christian

The *Washer of the Ford* is the titular piece from a collection of *Legendary Morality Tales* published along with *Barbaric Tales* and *Tragic Romances* by Patrick Geddes in 1895 and dedicated to Mrs Catherine Janvier his American friend (one of the few who knew the identity of Fiona MacLeod). Geddes was to write on *The Washer of the Ford* in *The Interpreter* (and quoted by Sharp at the beginning of his book); “here we are told the stories of the pictures of the imagination, of magic and romance...These things are not ancient or dead, but are modern and increasing. For wherever a man learns power over nature, there is magic; whenever he carries out an ideal into life there is romance.” In the prologue to this keynote piece, he writes; “I doubt if any now living, either in the Hebrides or in Ireland, has heard even a fragmentary legend of the *Washer of the Ford*. The name survives with its atmosphere of a remote past, its dim ancestral memory of a shadowy figure and of awe haunting a shadowy stream in a shadowy land.” (Prologue, *Washer of the Ford*). The wide definition both pagan and Christian of the Washer of the Ford is borne out by Sharp who in the prologue adds further; “The washer of the ford might well have appeared to a single generation, now as a terrible and sombre pagan goddess of death, now as a symbolic figure in a new faith, foreshadowing spiritual salvation and the mystery of the resurrection. The latter referring to the switch from the bean sith to a Magdalene figure in his account of the story.” What, then, were the sources for his story?

## ii) Spanish Influences

Professor Georgiana Goddard King, writing in 1918 advocates the influence of the folktales and romances of north-western Spain. This was counter-argued the following year (1919) by an article by Gertrude Schoepperle who reasserted the Gaelic content adding that Sharp,

“...must be judged as an artist, not as an antiquarian.”(Schoepperle, 1919, p.60). Yet both sources may come from the close ancestral connection between Celtic Britain and Spain and perhaps behind Sharp’s comment “They are all one”. This theory also is in line with Sharp’s belief in unity and that all religions are one. King maintains that, “In the folklore of Galicia and the Asturias you meet the Sin-Eater, the Washer of the Ford, the Dark Star” (King, 1918, p.352). She believes the Sin-Eater to be a Gallegan figure who appears in the work of Bazan whom he had read. King looks to the *Asturian Romances* and the *Bibliotheca de las Tradiciones Espanolas* (8 Volumes) for influences, particularly two articles; *Essay of the Rose* by Branca and *Folklore de Pronza* by Giner Arivan. In p.229 of Giner there is the description of a stream, “with washers who waylay the traveller and ask for his kerchief”. This sits well with Sharp’s account. Further to this Giner also refers to the Magdalene figures as being “in something the same romantic aspect, barring the erotic note.” (King, 1918, p.354) and also appearing in the *Romances of Asturia* of Menendez Pidal (Madrid, 1885) where souls are lost if they are not ‘shriven’. The main difference to Sharp’s account is that her kerchiefs are substituted for shrouds. King believes Sharp to have had access to Giner’s article, *Essay on the Rose* from the same volume which emerged in his *Rosa Mystica* prose in his book, *Where the Forest Murmur* (1910).

### iii) St Teresa and Mary Magdalene

These folktales and romances could probably have been read by the Spanish Carmelite mystics, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. St Teresa’s records that her mother loved to read Spanish Romances and we know that St John of the Cross chose to write Romances albeit from his mystical standpoint and must have been aware of this tradition. The Magdalene figure used by Sharp and in Spain is interesting in that it links to St Teresa of Avila’s ‘Vida’ or ‘Life’, 1567, where she wrote of her, “great devotion to the

glorious Magdalen”( Haskins, 1993, p.254) of whose conversion she was often reminded, particularly when she took communion. It was to Mary Magdalen that she turned as her intercessor so that she might gain pardon for her sins. In her yearning after union with God, Teresa compared her love to that of St Paul and of Mary Magdalen in “whom this fire of the love of God burned so vehemently and their sufferings must have been ‘one long martyrdom’.” (Haskins, 1993, p.254) Certainly as we will see later the washer woman in Sharp’s story is identified as Mary Magdalene when she states to Torcall, the blind harper; “It’s Mary Magdalene my name is, and I loved Christ.../And this river is the river of death.” (Macleod, 1895, p.161)

#### iv) Celtic Roots

King describes the washer-women as a pagan,” Xanas or white women who lived enchanted in fountains and on St John’s Eve, before dawn, wash their clothes and spread them in the dew.”(King, 1918, p.354). The descriptions of the washer-women vary and cross the boundaries between pagan and Christian. Professor Alaya rejects King’s argument and instead looks to Heine as a source for Sharp. She states; “...the figure of the ‘Washer of the Ford’, a woman who washes linen for shrouds in a running stream is identical with a figure occurring in poem in Heine’s ‘Traumbilder series, *Ein Traum, gar setsam schauerlich* (Heine,1961, p.233). Another critic of King is Gertrude Schoepperle, who reasserts the Gaelic tradition, for the legend but maintains that it appeared in a tenth century story, *Destruction of Da Chocha’s Hostel* and also in, *Tales of Cormac Conlingas* (which Sharp would have known) where the army are crossing a ford of Athlone, on the way to battle, saw, “...a red woman on the edge of the ford, washing her chariot and its cushions and its harness. When she lowered her hand, the bed of the river became red with gore and blood...” She says, “ I wash the harness of the king who will perish ;”( Schoepprele, 1919, p.61). Here we see the

common feature of prophecy among the washers of the ford or 'Badh' (a Celtic war goddess) as she is called here whose office is typically to forewarn of imminent death. Schoepprele also recalls the woman washing the gear of warrior, Cuchulainn, on his way to battle in the 'Great Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne'. In this tale the woman is described a "...slender and white of her body, yellow of hair" (Schoepprele, 1919, p.62) but in another story of 1350, *Cathreim Thoirdhealbhaigh, Triumphs of Torlough* by Seean MacCraith, the woman is seen as "a lone ancient hag" (p.62). In the traditional stories of the death of Ossian's son, Oscar, the woman is a 'Badh' he meets on his way to battle. She is questioned," O Badbh, that washes the garments/ make us a prophecy in truth/shall a man of them fall by us, / or shall all of us come to naught?"(Schoepperle 1919, p.63) Badh's prophecy is correct. Oscar and nine hundred warriors are killed.

Common themes, then, appear as a woman figure associated with battle and the clothes she washes are of the doomed. She is prophetic and usually speaks to the one who is about to die. Schoepperle locates an oral tradition for the story coming from County Clare but from Scotland (Lewis/Uist) she describes the "'bean highhedain', a tiny washerwoman with red webbed feet, frequents the fords after dark and in the early morning, washes clothes of battle."(Schoepperle, 1919, p.63/64). The caoineag (weeping woman) and the banshee also are figures who predicted death (Schoepperle, 1919, p.64) (linking with weeping Magdalene figure) or mnathan nighe who were the spirits of women who died giving birth and who do this work till their allotted deaths.

Yet if we turn to Sharp's account of the story we meet with a unique interpretation. Schoepperle comments, "The writer has handled the legend with great freedom, but the lineaments of the Gaelic tradition are discernible."(p.65) So too are the Spanish Christian themes. The fundamental difference is that Sharp was not writing "legendary mysteries but

legendary moralities... (and)..There is no mystery in them, or anywhere except the eternal mystery of beauty.”(Prologue, *Washer of the Ford*) Essentially Sharp tries to reveal eternal truths through his story. Characteristically he creates a “...strange complexity of paganism and Christianity, or rather an apparent complexity arising from the grafting of Christianity upon paganism.” (Prologue) His wife Elizabeth wrote that, “ ...the story may be read as a journey through physical life and death into renewed life in the psychic plane. Water and blood, music and poetry, vision and blindness, peace and sword, the fruit of knowledge, the child that leads, the river of death, these are all symbols at the heart of all mythology” (Sutherland,1986, p.151).

#### v) Sharp’s Version

In 1897 the story appeared in the *Spiritual Tales* a three volume collection with *Barbaric Tales* and *Tragic Romances*. Sharp considered the *Legendary Moralities* as his most imaginative work which he said “...still haunts me.” (Sutherland, 1986, p.151) It recounts the journey of Tocall, a blind harper from the north who lost his sight after the ‘Field of spears’ battle and opens with him mourning the loss of Aodah-of-the-Songs who saved his life in that battle. He is described as a ‘seer’ who”...played what the wind sang” (Sutherland, 1896, p.152) and who goes east to “Where the light comes” (p.152). But Torcall is a sinner, he laughs when his fellow boatmen fight and kill one another even though he fears death himself. Although blind he has a vision of the washer of the ford trampling the remains of the bodies till they are “...white as powder” while he steers the galley of the dead men. He has further visions of a child, a shepherd who leads him and calls him father and of the woman who bore his son. Then,“...at the ford he saw a woman stooping and washing shroud after shroud of woven moonbeams... (she was)... young and with long black hair.”(Sutherland, 1986, p.160) he sees the woman of the shrouds. She sings; “ Glory to God on high, and to

Mary, Mother of Jesus/Here am I washing away the sins of the shriven,/ O Torcall of Lochlin, throw off the red sins that ye cherish/ And I will be given you the washed shroud that they wear in Heaven.”(p.161) She identifies herself as Mary Magdalene saying; “It is Mary Magdalene my name is, and I loved Christ..../And this river is the river of death...” (Sutherland, 1986, p.161). Sharp comments that “there is a spiritual truth in the vision of the Blind Harper who saw the Washer of the Ford” but despite the Christian message, this story and that of the *Fisher of Men* and *The Last Supper* ( discussed in the next section) he adds that they give “ faint utterance to the heart knowledge we all have, (but) I would not have you or any think that the pagan way is therefore to one as the way of darkness....we are woven in one loom.” He sees the Celtic Christian saints like Columba as “merely transformed pagans”(prologue).So Sharp does not distinguish the pagan element from the Christian one seeing all people as united, yet there is an obvious shift of emphasis in his stories to a Christ-centeredness.

#### vi) A Christian Symbol

The Magdalene figure (a strong Christian symbol) recalls the Spanish tales of Giner and Pidal (which must have been sources of influence on Sharp) and is a pertinent Christianising of the story. Mary Magdalene is seen as ‘The Weeper’ the symbol of supreme repentance and the emphasis on sin and redemption is not common in the old folktales of this story. She is a penitent figure who mixes beauty, sexuality and sin. It also is significant that Mary Magdalene was at the crucifixion and was the first to see Christ rise and the shroud abandoned. She, “...stood crying outside the tomb. While still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb....” (John 20:11-12) and Jesus asked her “Woman, why are you crying?”(John 20:14) Francis de sales writes in his “Treatise, *Of the Love of God*, 1616; “remember the sorrowing Magdalene: “They have taken away my Lord and I know not where



they have laid Him; but when she had found Him amid her tears she held Him fast in love. Imperfect love longs for Him; penitent love seeks and finds Him; perfect love clasps him tight..." (therefore in Magdalene we have is a symbol of penitence and mystical love. The association of mourning tears, with death and resurrection are evident in Sharp's story where the Mary Magdalene "...stooped and took up the tears" of Torcall who was crying for the "...lonely heart of the white one" (Jesus) as portrayed as a little child crying in the night. Her face is said to be "the face of sorrow" (Sutherland, 1986, p.162) and she calls Torcall's tears, "Bells of joy" (p.162).

Often Mary Magdalene is portrayed holding a skull a symbol of death and here she is associated with death. She asks him if he will cross the ford to be redeemed then washed clean. His prayer she takes and creates a song of peace and asks him "What is best? The sword or peace?" (Sutherland, 1986, p.162) Submissive unto death and purified of sin he answers "peace". His shroud is white and he moves into the flood and on to eternity.

Sharp's version has a strong moral framework and replacing the 'hag' or 'bean sith' figure with Mary Magdalene ennobles the tale. It demonstrates Sharp's progression to giving his tales a Christian perspective. Gaelic influences are traceable as are Spanish folktales and romances. Perhaps this indicates a common link between Celtic myths of Scotland and Ireland and those of north-western Spain with its Celtic presence. The Magdalene figure used by Sharp connects, too, with St Teresa's who held her in such high esteem. I would argue, then, that Spanish Christian influences are strongly evident in Sharp's rendering of the story not only from Giner and Pidal's Magdalene version but with connection to St Teresa herself who must have been aware of the romances and folktales of Spain. Sharp, himself acknowledged the wide influences on his work. He proclaimed;" Truly we are all one. It is a

common tongue we speak, though the wave has its own whisper and its own sigh, and the lip of men its word and the heart of woman is silence.”(Prologue, *Washer of the Ford*).

## 2) Iosa

### Visionary tales of Jesus in the work of Fiona MacLeod (William Sharp) and Padraic Pearse with Carmelite influences.

In this section I look to demonstrate Sharp’s growing Christological stance in his later writing borne out here with his stories focusing on Iosa or Jesus and the Christian message they portray. Sharp creates a very sensitive characterisation of Jesus with beautiful descriptions which demonstrate his close relationship and experience of Christ. I also seek to uncover the interconnectedness of these tales between Scotland and Ireland by comparing Sharp’s story to one by Padraic Pearse.

Today in Derry and Belfast you will find the Iosa Community. Founded in 2006, its members meet regularly to pray, share and undertake parish missions. Iosa is the Gaelic name for Jesus and is shared by both Scottish and Irish language. Iosa appears in stories such as William Sharp’s (Fiona MacLeod) *Spiritual Tales* (1897) telling the stories of *The Last Supper* and *The Fisher of Men* and in the prologue to *The Washer of the Ford* (and later reproduced in his *Three legends of the Christ Child*, 1910) where the child Jesus is called Iosa mac Dhe. The name also is used in Padraic Pearse’s (1879-1916) short story, *Iosagan* (the loving diminutive of Iosa and associated with the Christ-child). The Gaelic dictionary lists ‘Iosa Criosd’ as Jesus Christ in English and ‘Iosal’ as meaning low and humble which represents well the figure of Jesus we see in these stories. Iosa is also linked with St Ita (Born

480), a Celtic saint from Killeedy whose legend has it that the infant Christ appeared to her whereby she wrote a lullaby to Him. Jesus is referred to as 'Jesukin' or 'Iosagan'. It begins; 'Tsucan/ alar lium im disiurtan;' translated as, 'Jesukin/ Lives in my little cell within'. She is seen as having the gift of nursing the Child Jesus and is seen as the foster mother of the saints of Erin. This links her to the Scottish Legend of St Bride, the foster mother of Jesus. An English version of St Ita's lullaby was set to music for voice and piano by American, Samuel Barber (1952). What, then, are the common visionary images created of Iosa in the Scottish and Irish stories? How do these stories centred on Christ reflect the inner life of the writer and his movement later towards Christianity. Writing as a Catholic in them is there traces of Carmelite Spirituality?

In 1892, Sharp in his poem entitled, *The Redeemer* was able to say ; "I know that my Redeemer liveth....he hath not called to me yet..." But belief calls to him, and like Job he says; "And sometimes I look and gaze out upon uttermost darkness, / And hear the wail of desolate winds moaning around the world-/Till the darkness shivers to light.../I hear...marvellous thunderous songs/ Shout" Thy Redeemer liveth, O human soul, and crieth for thee!" The strain of yearning for God is felt in his lines- he longs for a vision of Christ, to see Him face to face and believe. This yearning is met in the three '*Spiritual Moralities*', *The Last Supper*, *The Fisher of Men* and *The Wayfarer* originally called, *Where God is, There is Light*. He writes these stories as 'Wilfron' (the third person, "...that linked the dual nature (Fiona Macleod and William Sharp)...and...the psychic quality of seer ship", which cost his mental and physical health so much. Sharp writes in his diary (1897, E.A, Sharp, 1910, p88.), " Herewith my typed copy of your Wilfron's last writing. Called *The Wayfarer*, though possibly, afterwards, *Where God is, there is Light*, it is one of the three *Spiritual Moralities* of which you know two already, *The Fisher of Men* and *The Last Supper*. In another way, the same profound truth is emphasised as in the other two, that love is the basic law of the

spiritual life. The Redeemer liveth' in these three: Compassion, Beauty, Love, the three chords on which these harmonies of Fiona's inner life have been born..." *The Wayfarer* was included later in his book, *The Winged Destiny* (1910). This emphasis on love as the key to all spirituality is comparable to the theology embraced by the Carmelites at the end of the nineteenth century with St Therese establishing a love based theology.

Interestingly Sharp was reading Maeterlinck's two essays, *The Deeper life* and *The Inner Beauty* at this time and there seems to be a shift in Sharp's writing towards a Christian Mystical tradition. In *The Inner Beauty* Sharp would have read; "Nothing in the whole world is so athirst for beauty as the soul, nor is there anything to which beauty clings so readily. There is nothing in the world capable of such spontaneous uplifting, such speedy ennoblement...I have caused suffering because I have loved, and also have I caused suffering because I did not love...To love thus is but to free one's soul, and to become as beautiful as the soul this freed." These words must have propelled him towards meditating on the soul and towards a Christian understanding of the soul and suffering. T.A Janvier, recognises the change in Sharp's outlook. In his letter to Sharp of June 22, 1896, he points out to Sharp that he, "...feels that some strong new current must have come into your life; for the animating spirit of these new books reflects a radical change in your soul. The pagan element is entirely subordinate to and controlled by the inner passions of the soul. In a word you have lifted your work from the flesh-level to the soul-level..." (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.82). Sharp himself acknowledged that his "finest work was *The Moon-Child*, *The Fisher of Men* and *The Last Supper*, which" in a sense... (His)...inner life of the spirit is concentrated".(E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.81)

T.A. Janvier writes of, *The Last Supper* that it has his "strongest affection" and is "most purely beautiful and profoundest" (letter, 21 Feb, 1896) work. Of *The Last Supper* Sharp comments, "I shall never do anything better." In the same letter of 21 Feb, 1896 to his

wife he adds “this intense inner flame that has been burning within me so strangely and deeply of late,” and she maintains that *The Last Supper* was “...the work of Wilfron’s psychic visionary power and was ‘the result of direct vision’” (Sutherland, 1986, p.143). Steve Blamires points out that the handwritten manuscript for this short story “...has very few changes or corrections” unlike most of his other pieces. He believes, “It clearly came to him readymade and needed little revision or change.” (Blamires, 2013, p.172) In 1902 Sharp writes to a Mr Black, “...no work of the imagination has any value if it be not shaped and coloured from within...” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.111). The piece was described as “a beautiful story” by W.B. Yeats (letter to Fiona Macleod, 1901) who wished to adapt it to a play for his new Irish Theatre. He met leading figures of the Irish Nationalist Movement in 1897 and was introduced to figures such as, Dr Hyde and Edmund Martyr. These were associated with Patrick Pearse, described as “a Cultural Nationalist” (University College, Cork) who wrote a short story called, *Iosagan* in the same period. Sharp, then, was perfecting his own soul to acknowledge a more complete understanding of the Christian message and the figure of Christ as he returned with hindsight to Christianity that had begun in his childhood now invigorated with mystical knowledge. Did he see Jesus as a figure with a pertinent uniting force of all religions or was he reflecting the Catholic faith of his pseudonym?

### i) Iosagan

Writing in *Books Ireland*, Anne O’Connor’s review of Sutherland’s book, states, “*The Last Supper...* (is)...Reminiscent of Pearse’s ‘Iosagan’ (May, 1987, p.84). It tells the tale of old Matthias, who has lapsed in his duties but who engages with the children coming from mass. One day he spots a “ little brown boy with a white coat on him...(whose)...face...was as bright as the sun...(with)...rays of light coming from his head.” Another child tells Matthias that he is called ‘Iosagan’, of royal stock, who only appears to children. Sometime later he

sees again the Holy Child and his heart "...gave a leap in the middle." He calls to Iosagan and allows him to sit on his knee. Iosagan tells Matthias to ask forgiveness and, "I and my mother will make intercession for you." Matthias repents and admits he was too proud to go into Iosagan's house. He asks to kiss the border of Iosagan's coat (reminiscent of the healing by Jesus of the woman with the haemorrhage) and disappears but says he will return that night. Iosagan appears to a priest and tells him Matthias is dying. He goes and listens to Matthias's story and thinks a messenger was sent to him from Matthias. He is described as "A gentle little boy with a white coat". While calling again for Iosagan, Matthias dies.

## ii) *The Last Supper*

In Sharp's work, *The Last Supper* Iosa appears again as the adult Jesus and where the roles are reversed. The child of Mary Gilchrist (whose story is told in *The Fisher of Men*), called Art has a vision of Christ and the twelve weavers representing the twelve apostles. We are told that the meeting takes place in the 'Shadowy Glen' and that the encounter with Iosa gives him a "...moonlit mind"-light in the" dark sea of his mind...of all the days of his life." He is as 'one illuminated' and as an adult he was true and good and,"...to know him was to catch a breath of the infinite ocean of wonder and mystery and beauty of which he was the quiet oracle." Sharp tells us that lost in the dark he encounters,"...a man tall and thin and worn, with long hair hanging down his face. Pale as a moonlit cot in dark moor and his voice was low and sweet." Art is unafraid of him because he had the "mother-look" in his eyes and called him by his name. The wood call with its sweet air (feadan or whistling sound in a dream) and he is lifted by the man who says, "Will you come with me this night of the nights, little Art?" Agreeing he falls asleep and wakes in a huntsman's booth deep in the glen. He sees a table with bowls of porridge, oat cakes and a loaf of rye bread. Art recognises Iosa's royal status and Iosa confirms that "The Prince of Peace I am". He whispers that it is the Last

Supper and that, “I die daily and ever ere I die the twelve break bread with me” referring to the daily Roman Catholic Eucharistic celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. He says he is ‘Iosa Mac Dhe’ or Jesus, son of God and he kisses the boy so he will never be blind again, speaking of course of spiritual sight. Iosa comforts the boy and holds him in his arms. This warm, sensitive rendering of Christ perhaps reflects the Jesus Sharp was encountering intimately and mystical himself.

Each apostle holds three shuttles, Beauty, Wonder and Mystery, and Iosa tells Art that, “They weave for my father, whose web I am”. He adds; “I am the Web of Life”. Each apostle, “wove an immortal shape and went forth into the green world, singing a rapturous sweet song” (The Green Life signifies the psychic world). His “heart leaped” at the sight of the weaver of love and he wishes to look at no other. Later the Weaver of Passion says, “It is strength I give.” And kisses Art. He is taken upon the knee of Iosa and comments that they all have their eyes lit in white fire that is in the heart of Iosa. Judas is represented with black shuttles of mystery, despair and the grave and as a “shadow-eyed man”. Iosa takes Art and leads him my hand out of the room whereby Art awakens in the arms of his mother who cries as she prays.

Art, like St John of the Cross, can say “mine are the heavens and mine is the earth...because Christ is mine, and all for me.”(John of the Cross, Sayings of Light and love, 26, 27) This is reminiscent too of Sharp’s poem, *Lord of My Life*, where he proclaims; “His heart to mine, his lips to mine/O he was mine all mine, all mine.” Art has all of Jesus intimately to himself and has joy in all the divine knowledge he is given. Art has looked upon Iosa and “with this image of his son alone, he clothed them in beauty by imparting to them supernatural being.”(Commentary on Spiritual Canticle) “To see him face to face and thoroughly understand the profound and eternal mysteries of his incarnation... (and)...deep secrets.”(Spiritual Canticle, 37, 1) which Iosa awakens by kissing his eyes and giving him

vision. Regis Jordan OCD imagines that St John of the Cross is “trembling with wonderment and joy, as the implications of these mysteries flowed over him” (Payne, 2012, p.120).

Similarly Art tells us, “I trembled with joy” as he is awakened to the eternal mysteries. So revelation fills both with joy. Jesus is called ‘Iosa the Life’ or ‘The Web of Life’ and in the gospels we are reminded that Christ is ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’ who gives, “food that endures to eternal life” (John, 6:27) and also, “I am the bread of life...everyone who sees the son and believes in him should have eternal life...” (John, 6:35ff). Christ is the word made flesh and St John of the Cross tells us, “...fix your eyes only on him and you will discern hidden in him the most secret mysteries a” wisdom and wonder of God...” (St John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel, 2, 22, 6). He possesses the truth so all is revealed to him.

Iosa supports Art and we can compare this to St Teresa of Avila’s experience of Christ’s presence beside her. Her visions were mainly of Christ (Ch 27, 28, 29 of *The Life* seen with the ‘eyes of the soul’. (Discussed in chapter 4c) The same eyes Art uses to see Iosa. She records a vision of Christ’s hands of the “most marvellous beauty, and later she sees “The divine countenance as well and the whole experience left... (her)...completely absorbed” (beginning of Chapter 28, *Life*, quoted in O’Donoghue, 1989, p.37). This atmosphere of reverence is captured well by Sharp with the sweet voices of the weavers and the quiet whispers and touches of Iosa, recalling St John of the Cross’s words, “How gently and lovingly you awaken in my heart” (Living Flame of Love, 4:4). In the spiritual cantic he says;”...let us enter further into the thicket” (SC, V36), just as Art and Iosa enter deep into the shadowy glen. St John of the Cross also discusses the effect of seeing Christ’s face which”...left them clothed in beauty” (SC, V5) and he gives graces through the encounter. It is a journey through darkness to light. For in the “night of nights”, Art travels in darkness into the wood to discover the light of Christ, “Light within darkness” (O’Donoghue, 1989, p.68). Sharp then demonstrates his deep theological understanding of the ways and effects of loving



Christ. His insight and attention to detail in the setting and in the characterisation of Jesus can only have come from one mystically alive as Sharp was and I would argue that they are evidence of Sharp's rediscovery of the Christian message.

### iii) *The Wayfarer*

In, *The Wayfarer*, Art's mother, Mary Gilchrist features. In it Sharp warns of the failures of Calvinism when its Minister, James Campbell condemns Mary who lives alone with the child she bore, little Art. Mary asks the minister if he preaches the love of God to which he answers, "I preach the love and hate of God, woman!" But Mary pronounces that "God is Love". Despite this she is "Accursed" by the minister, a "Blind shepherd". A Wayfarer appears with a voice "low and sweet" and he talks with Campbell. He reiterates Mary's words that 'God is Love' and is merciful. Through the minister's sermon all are darkened and lose hope as he considers Mary "Impure". The wayfarer is described as having a "worn face, with large sorrowful eyes, his long fair hair. His white hands...a poor man" but with "eyes of deep love and tenderness". He tells the congregation of the story of Mary Magdalene "with loving words" and tears fell in all. And so the redemption of Mary Gilchrist is seen as she sobs by the wayfarer's side, "It is love that is the following thought of God". Mary with Art in her arms goes to the glen of willows and a hand touches her shoulder. As her name is called, she sinks to her knees crying; "Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God". Here we have a parallel story to that of Mary Magdalene who recognises Jesus after the Resurrection when he calls her name. Again as in the Washer of the Ford, Sharp returns to the image of the repentant Magdalene and her intense love of Christ to create a story filled with a Christianity centred on love that resonated with his own vision for a renewed faith.

#### iv) *The Fisher of Men*

In *The Fisher of Men* we again see links to the other spiritual tales in the characters present and in the description of Jesus. The story centres round Alasdair Og (he who died the night Art saw Iosa) and his dying mother Sheen MacLeod. Sheen sees a man by the stream who was “tall, but spare and weary and the clothes upon him were poor...his face was pale...with white hands that a woman has...his voice too was a voice like that: in the softness and the sweet, quiet sorrow...” He tell her he is a fisher and calls himself ‘Mac-an-t’ Saoir’ or Son of the Carpenter and she says his name is Iosa. He visits Alasdair in their house as his mother has just died and he relates that he “met the white soul of Sheen, as it went down the Shadowy Glen...” At that consolation Alasdair falls to his knees. A fisher, Iosa is and “night and day” he tells Alasdair, “I fish in the waters of the world”, the waters of sorrow, grief and despair (allotted to Judas in *The Last Supper*). Here Sharp again focuses on a Christ who wants to have a personal relationship with his follows which he portrays in a naturalistic manner without any hierarchical images. Christ is seen by Sharp as healer and restorer.

#### v) A Christian Message in a Spiritual Rebirth

These tales then, hold a beauty in word and form but Sharp, “Always...had made ...(his) command over beauty serve the needs of the exquisite spiritual consciousness” (Gilman, p.676), where “The accent of the mystic has persisted”. These tales mark the culmination of Sharp’s own spiritual awakening and his increasing acceptance of Christianity. He uses his stories to criticise Calvinism and re-capture the mystical traditions evident in, for example, St John of the Cross, where Christ is the central focus whose effects are witnessed in the transformations of those he comes into contact with. These spiritual tales, too, show the growing links between Scotland and Ireland as the Celtic Renaissance took shape. Pearse was friends with Thomas MacDonagh (who contributed to the *Lyra Celtica*) and also knew

Joseph Plunkett who were both involved in the Easter Rising of 1916. Plunkett is often said to have been influenced by St John of the Cross. Certainly all were active in creating an Irish Literary Group and an Irish theatre and they may have met Sharp on his visit to Ireland in 1897, the year *The Spiritual Tales* were published and perhaps shared stories. Whatever the influences, Sharp's stories attest, "...a strange stirring, a kind of spiritual rebirth" (Diary, January 1903) which was centred on Iosa, the mild, gentle image of Christ. Evident, then, is Sharp's recovery of the treasures of the faith of his childhood but he also looks ahead to a universal Jesus who lovingly embraces all people.

### 3) *The Divine Adventure* by 'Fiona Macleod' (William Sharp):

#### The Influences of Symbolism and Dark Night Spirituality

1899 saw the publication of an unusual short -story, in the *Fortnightly Review*. It was called *The Divine Adventure*. Interestingly Arthur Symons was to publish his *Spiritual Adventures* in 1905). The following year, 1900 *The Divine Adventure* was published in book form along with his *Iona* and *By Sundown Shores*, all spiritual and critical studies of the Gael and were "in a sense more 'mystical' " (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.96) than his previous works, coming after his spiritual enlightenment. In this section I will be analysing it to uncover the influence of Symbolism and to discuss Sharp's contact with the Symbolists. I also will be analysing the story for elements that demonstrate a deep mystical knowledge and particularly show an understanding of Dark Night spirituality, associated with Carmelite Mystic, St John of the Cross. I will evaluate this to ascertain Sharp's growing Christological standpoint in his writing.

## i) Story of a Soul

Sharp states that *The Divine Adventure* was “part of my inward life” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.96) which he gave expression to by creating, “...shapes and embodiments for strictly imaginative concepts” (Alaya, 1970, p.184). Alaya describes *The Divine Adventure* as, “a traditional, almost Elizabethan allegory” (Alaya, 1970, p.7), but surely it is more. It demonstrates a new form, embracing the principles of the Symbolist movement while portraying the vision of an experienced mystic firmly rooted in Christianity. Sharp himself writes in the end notes; “In this symbolical presentment, I ignore the allegorical method-and those who, accustomed to the artificial method of allegory, would rather see this “story of a soul” told in that method, without actuality, or as an ordinary essay stripped of narrative.”(End notes to *The Divine Adventure*, p.413)

In contrast to Alaya’s interpretation, Sharp appears to see it as a symbolic piece. He embraced Symbolism with enthusiasm and in 1902 he writes to a Mr Black that, “...a book I look forward to with singular interest is Mr Arthur Symons’ announcement, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, (1899). In it Symons claims “...without Symbolism there can but be no literature; indeed not even language.” He continues, “Symbolism in literature really is: a form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary until it has obtained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness.”(Symons, 1899, p.2) Certainly Sharp had written articles on Symbolists like Maeterlinck, Yeats, Puvis de Chavannes and others. Was, then, Sharp a Symbolist or was he “supremely a realist” (of the spirit) who “abhors the vague” (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, postscript). What influence did Symbolism play in his writing and can we call *The Divine Adventure* a work of the Symbolist movement? Was it an expression of mystical theology and what part did the embodiment of spiritual beauty and religious experience play? In writing on W.B. Yeats in

1902, Sharp warns, "...the obvious peril (of the symbolist) is a confusion of the spiritual beauty behind the symbol with the arbitrary expression of that spiritual beauty through that particular symbol." He was ultimately searching then for the source of beauty not just its symbolic representation. That source being God.

Sharp compares his story to "The Story of a Soul" (Macleod, 1900, postscript, p.17) Significantly he uses quote marks here and he may have been referring to the autobiography of Carmelite saint, St Therese of Lisieux which had been launched in 1897 with much coverage and wide circulation and before Sharp's story appears in November/December 1899). Her new theological direction with love as a central theme (she wanted to be love at the heart of the church was a considerable shift in thinking) and must have appealed to Sharp. It provides another possible connection between Sharp and Carmelite Spirituality. Sharp obviously wanted to see this story as in essence as a Christian tale that would allow the reader to encounter deep mysteries of the faith such as purification, resurrection of the body and suffering which are some of the many that are explored throughout the story.

## ii) A Journey of Body, Soul and Will

The story follows the progress of a soul through the experiences and dialogue between three faculties, Body, Soul and Will seen as three good friends who go in search of 'Truth' and who meet various people on the way, like the old fisherman and the stonebreaker, as well as heavenly creatures who enlighten them spiritually. They reflect as they walk together but alone and embrace the exquisite landscapes they encounter. It is not dissimilar to the journey of the Dark Night of the Soul as described by Carmelite, St John of the Cross, where "into the darkness of the night" on St John's Eve the three faculties go to journey towards union with God, where the appetites must come under control and where purification takes place. They go, "as pilgrims of old who had the Holy City for their goal, but knew that

midway were perilous lands.”(Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.2) <sup>10</sup>So this is perhaps a mystical tale to reflect the theological journey in the Dark Night, 'the Night of Love'. Often reference is made to the 'companions of the night' or "It was night" or as the body says, "I was alone in a waste place, my feet were entangled among the briars and thorns", similar to the impasse felt in the Dark Night. Often, too, they are "rapt in silence" as the progress in this "secret ladder" where, "hidden things of the spirit are the only realities" (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.1). Yet his story is grounded in reality. He states; "In the kingdom of the imagination the ideal must ever be faithful to the general laws of nature" (*Macleod, Divine Adventure*, 1900, end notes, p.415). He appeals to his readers; "...is it so great an effort of the imagination to conceive of the Mind and Soul actual as the Body is actual?" (The Mind being the Will). A tension exists in the story between the actual and the symbolic in the search for truth.

### iii) A Catholic Theology

At the beginning we are told that although they were young, they had known "the two great ends of life-to love and to suffer."(Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.1). They can be seen then as proficient in the basics of the spiritual life. Sharp states; " In deep love there is always a dark flame. I think it is the obscure suffering upon which the Dancer (Love) lives."(Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, p.1) We can recall here the words of St John of the Cross; "O living flame of love! How tenderly you wound me in the deepest centre of my soul" (St John of the Cross, Living Flame, VI). We see the three friends or faculties withdrawing often to contemplate in silence at various points on the path, and then wandering on through exquisitely described landscapes. At times they rest by streams and pools or stop to discuss spiritual truths like resurrection of the body or eternity. All they discuss is theologically based

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<sup>10</sup> 1912 edition

on Christianity and more specifically Catholicism. St John writes “I went out unobserved” in the first verse of ‘The Dark Night’ (1577-8) and in Sharp’s story both the Will and the Soul are invisible with only the Body being seen by others. When questioned, the old fisherman, relays that he sees a tired old man and a fine lad (to whom “fear of God has gripped his heart”) with the Body, but these are only reflections of himself.

In *The Science of the Cross*, 1939 Carmelite Martyr, Edith Stein (1891-1942), discusses St John’s writing and the purification process. The Will, she maintains is purified for the sake of Love, the Intellect to base it in Faith and the Memory for the sake of Hope. She adds; “The strength of the soul comprises; the faculties; passions and appetites all of which are ruled by the Will. When the Will directs faculties, passions and appetites to God and turns them away from all that is not God, then the Will preserves the strength of the soul for God, and she can love God with all her strength” (Stein, 1939, reprint, 2002, p.89) And so the Will is purged of its desires and becomes divine and one with the will of God so union can be achieved through love. In *The Divine Adventure* we see this process and the Soul is able to kiss the Will saying “I am the Following Love or breath of God” and at the end the Soul kisses the Body in death and all things are purified through immortal love. In the story, the three faculties meet a stonebreaker who asks for money and who says his occupation is a better thing than death. His passions and appetites are not focused on God and he therefore tempts the Body to leave the others and go with him to a wedding party where he can meet an old flame. The stonebreaker wishes to get drunk and this disturbs the Will and the Soul. The Soul is said to have “beheld the shadow of the Cross” and had “redeeming love in his eyes” The Soul sees in the man suffering who needs divine love to heal. Distressed, the Soul goes to the Body (who want also to get drunk) and calls to him whereby he stops drinking. To the stonebreaker the Soul awakens his conscience with memories of this good mother. But Morag Cameron (betrothed to another) is seen as the temptress to the Body and has succumbed to

temptation in the union of both. Purification is needed so the Soul lifts a violin and holds it up to the night-wind. “When it was purified, and the vibrant wood was as a nerve in that fragrant darkness, he laid it on his shoulder and played it softly.” (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.7) (The use of the phases “fragrant darkness” is reminiscent of the language of the Song of Songs and St John of the Cross). He played the “Song of Dreams, song of peace, song of mystery” (Macleod, 1900, p.7) and the evil ebbs away with the stonebreakers sobs. He played to Morag and to the Body of immortal love and the Soul prayed to “Beauty of all beauty” (p.7) therefore focusing the faculties on God. Or as St John of the Cross writes;”Remember the Creator, /Forget the creation/Study life within, /and reach love’s summation.”Verse XXII , Jones, p.125) or again he writes; ”for when the human will has felt/The sure touch of Divinity,/It does not seek to find reward/save in Divine affinity./Only through faith can one attain/Beauty of this rare kind”(verse, XX from Jones, 1993, p.119).

By contrast with Morag the temptress, we later see them encountering a woman about to give birth in a cottage. She is a Mary figure and is protected from the evil outside by seven beautiful spirits who await an immortal’s birth. Their journey continues on till the grave. The Will states he has “but one dream, one hope and that is to believe.” (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.13) and he listens as the Soul talks of Divine Love, “Suddenly he fell upon his knees and prayed. We saw tears falling from his eyes” and is told that he is in the Garden of Gethsemane. Suffering and the Cross are anticipated now. As St John states Christ is to be imitated, we are to “suffer and rest with him” and “The troubles and sufferings one bears for love of God are like precious peals”, “ His majesty gives endless and eternal goods in heaven: Himself, his beauty and glory” (Edith Stein, 1939, reprint, 2002, p.281/2). In *The Divine Adventure*, the Body sings, “Hand-in- hand go Joy and Sorrow” where by the Soul acclaim “ Is it not Love that gives the clearest sight: For out of bitter tears, and tears unshed, Riseth the Rainbow of Sorrow overhead, And neath the Rainbow is the clearest



light”(Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, p.10). Christ’s presence grows ever closer when they come to a forest chapel amid great oak trees (reminiscent of the place where the druid’s had their ceremonies). The burning red flame of the sanctuary lamp indicates the real presence in this innermost chamber. (This overtly Catholic reference is also filled with visionary beauty, a testament to the forming of his understanding of mystical theology and his focus on the presence of Christ.) The Soul is gone now but later the Will reunites with the Body who lies dying at the Cross Ways Inn. In tears he kneels before the Body who repents now that it was Morag’s soul he loved thereby purifying his love. The Soul then reappears and comes to claim both the Will and the Soul with a kiss to the Body. Now the three are one and Sharp ends with a quote he used for his own epitaph- “Love is more great than we can conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions.”

#### iv) Symbolism at its Mystical Heights

The story then resonates with elements of the theology of St John of the Cross which perhaps have been borrowed from his mystical texts but is it a Symbolic work? Sharp writes; “The Symbolist, unlike the allegorist does not disregard the actual. The Symbolist or the mystic (properly they are one) abhors the vague, what is called the ‘mystical: ‘he is supremely a realist but his realism is of the spirit and the imagination and not of externals” (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, postscript, p.17), “actuality (is) his base.” This was an important point that counteracted the dismissal of mysticism earlier in the nineteenth century as vague. Sharp continues; “...a spiritual image illuminates a reality that the material fact narrows or obscures.”(p.17). Sharp saw *The Divine Adventure*, then, as a spiritual narrative giving light to the “profoundest human problem” (p.17) - it is by looking inward that we shall find the way outward. It is primarily then giving “form of the unseen by the visible” (Symons, 1899, p.2). For as Carlyle says “ In a symbol...there is concealment and yet

revelation” (Symons, 1899). Here too the “infinite is made to blend itself with the finite, to stand visible” (Comte Goblet d’ Alviella, in Symons, 1899, p.2). Sharp does give visible expression to an inward Christian journey and certainly maintains the view expressed by Symons of “The one pathway leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty” (Symons, 1899, p.7). In *The Divine Adventure*, Sharp talks of “Beauty of all Beauty...let none perish without thee.” (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.7). Symons argues that the turning towards the soul is as a direct reaction to growing materialism and that Symbolic art is “itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.”(Symons, 1899, p.9).

However, how much was this output shaped by religious experience? Sharp (as Macleod) writing to a Mr Black in 1902 states;” No work of the imagination has any value if it be not shaped and coloured from within”. Alaya points out, however, that Macleod claimed “to be incapable of disregarding the actual reality as it seems” (Alaya, 1970, p.185). She continues; “These were strange claims indeed to make a tale where the only verisimilitude lay in the truth of the existence of an inner life”. Yet Alaya acknowledges that Sharp applied the term ‘realist’ and ‘realism’ repetitively when discussing them. She concludes; “Perhaps Sharp considered the spirit ‘realist’ in its technique because it stored up experience for symbolic re-use.”(Alaya, 1970, p.185). Sharp praised Yeats in 1902 as the “Priest of the symbolic who, “within him the imagination is a truth the second-sight of the mind.”(Alaya, 1970, p.185). So spiritual experience itself could be the starting point that is transferred by “...new synthesis of commonplace ‘fact’, thereby making that ‘fact’ symbolic” (Alaya). I would agree with Alaya that facts are at the core of Sharp’s story but now they are theologically correct and he uses his story to reveal Christian truths.

Irish poet/artist George W Russell, a correspondent of Sharp’s and a fellow enthusiast for the Celtic Renaissance delivered a lecture on Symbolist painter George F. Watts in which he

sates: "Spirituality is the power certain minds have of apprehending formless spiritual essences, of seeing the eternal in the transitory, of relating the particular to the universal, the type to the archetype"(Russell, *Imaginations and Reveries, 1915*) In discussing his painting of 'Time' and 'Death', Russell writes that the real inspiration is " Not the comprehension of Time, nor the nature of Death but a revelation human form can express of the heroic dignity." Sharp, too, wanted to ennoble the reader and reveal eternal truths through his writing. By the time he completed *The Divine Adventure* (1900), his Christological focus was well formed as he writes as a Catholic from 1895. He is not shy to develop themes in the story that tackle the great theological questions and to give an answer to his reader. It is symbolic in as much as it was mystical but progressing towards a new phase that was firmly rooted in Christianity reflecting back to his childhood encounters with Catholicism. He must have drawn back to both his vision and devotion to Mary and his relationship and encouragement by several priests such as Fr Ivor in the highlands.

#### v) A Living Knowledge

Perhaps also not all were experiencing the profound mystical states that Sharp realised, where "realism of the spirit and the imagination" were keenly alive. These profound experiences shaped his search for eternal truths but that search brought him back to the Christianity of his youth albeit embracing the mystical theologies of the Catholic tradition. There are many beautifully written passages for example such as where the soul tells the body "I know nothing: I believe" whereby the body says;"When I am well I believe in new, full, rich, wonderful life-in life in the spiritual as well as the mortal sphere."( Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, p.19). They then go on to discuss eternity:

" May it not be that you, O Soul, are but a spiritual nerve in the dark, confused, brooding mind of Humanity? May it not be that you and I and the body go down unto one end?

"Not so. There is the Word of God."

"We read it differently."  
"Yet the Word remains."  
"You believe in the immortal life?-You believe in Eternity?"  
"Yes."  
"Then what is Eternity?"  
"Already you have asked me that!"  
"You believe in Eternity. What is Eternity?"  
"Continuity"  
"And what are the things of Eternity?"  
"Immortal desires."

(Macleod, 1900, p.19/20)

This dialogue demonstrates the depth of theological discussion typical throughout the story.

## vi) A Dark Night Theology

In *The Divine Adventure* we see a soul's journey towards God and can trace elements of Dark Night theology of St John of the Cross. This demonstrates his grasp of the mystical path of the soul but expressed with actuality as its base. Interestingly in the Prologue to his book, *The Washer of the Ford*, 1895, Sharp (as 'Fiona MacLeod') makes another reference to the Dark Night where "Jesus said to His mother "take up the tears (of another) and throw them into the dark night." And Mary did so and lo! Upon the wilderness where the light was, on the dark wave where seamen toiled without hope, clusters of shinning stars rayed downwards in a white peace." I think it is likely, then, that Sharp was familiar with dark night spirituality. Sharp quotes a mystic who said "as the lark touches the solid earth before it rises where it can see both earth and heaven and sing a song that partakes of each and belongs to both. In the kingdom of the imagination the ideal must ever be faithful to the general laws of nature." (Macleod, *Divine Adventure*, 1900, postscript, p.17) He then purified further Symbolism and imbued his story with Christian meaning rooting it in mystical theology.

## **b Poetry: The Heart's Cry**

Melancholy and Lament Linking the Poetry of Fiona Macleod (William Sharp)

with Christina Rossetti and St John of the Cross



Deirdre of the Sorrows by John Duncan, 1905

In June 2005, the Abbey Theatre Dublin premiered Vincent Wood's play, *A Cry from Heaven*. It retells the story of the beautiful Deirdre and the Sons of Usna, one of the greatest tragedies of Irish Myth. It is one of five plays written on Deirdre with versions by George William Russell (A.E) in 1902 and W.B. Yeats in 1907. The tale typifies the tragic gloom, the soul's cry so characteristic of the Celtic spirit. It tells the story of Deirdre who, the Druid chief Cathbad predicted, would be very beautiful and kings and lords would shed blood over and go to war for her. Brought up in seclusion she becomes beautiful and elopes to marry Naoise, a young warrior. When he is killed by another suitor, Conchobar, Deirdre is said to throw herself from her chariot or in other versions to die of grief. In Sharp's ('Fiona MacLeod') poem, *A Cry on the Wind* he mentions Deirdre: "O sorrowful face of Deirdre seen on the hill! /Once I have seen you, once beautiful, silent, still:"

*Deirdre of Sorrows* is beautifully illustrated by Scottish Celtic Renaissance/Symbolist artist, John Duncan (1866-1945) for the frontispiece of Alexander Carmichael's (of *Carmina Gadelica*) book *Deirdre*, both of 1905. In the same year J.H. Bacon also drew *Deirdre's Lament*. In Duncan's version we see an exquisite rendering of sorrow in the image of Deirdre. This chalk drawing shows in crisp, side profile the bent silhouette of Deirdre collapsed in grief with her hand supporting her lamenting head borne down with pain. Her long hair stresses the downwards pull as it descends to the bottom edge of the picture. There is a cold poignancy in the grey tones and the hard edges of the drawing which is executed with great precision. She is embellished with intricate Celtic ornament in her jewellery and in the backdrop. We are drawn so effectively into the sorrow and beauty of Deirdre to touch the emotion of a broken heart. Her shawl is wrapped high around her, sheltering her as she enters deep into her soul's anguish. Duncan, then, helps us to visualise lament and sorrow but in this section I would like to examine how Sharp's later poetry, writing as 'Fiona MacLeod', reflects the Celtic Renaissance's preoccupation with "soul agonies" (Rosenblum, 1982, p.33) as well as being characteristic of Christina Rossetti's poems and those of Carmelite, St John of the Cross (1549-1591). What part did Sharp's friendship with Christina Rossetti influence his poetry? There are links with the poignant distress and agony portrayed in the Dark Night of the Soul of St John of the Cross.

### i) Lament

Looking at the history of Lament we can date it back to the Iliad and Odyssey and elegies or laments for the dead were popular in Ancient Greece and were often sung by women. In the books of the Old Testament we find examples such as Psalm 129/130, "Out of the depth I cry to you, O Lord, Lord hear my voice". This lament, this emotional expression of suffering is featured in a third of the psalms. *The Book of Lamentations* or *The*

*Lamentations of Jeremiah* are appeals for divine help with, for example, Jeremiah pleading, 'Even when I call out or cry for help he shuts out my prayer' (Lam, 3:8). Again in *Lamentations* he says 'he has barred my way with blocks of stone' (Lam, 3:9), which echoes the impasse of the Dark Night described by St John of the Cross. In the *Book of Job*, too, we hear Job cry, "The hand of God has struck me" (Job, 19:21) and he questions God saying "Why have you made me your target?" (Job, 7; 20)

In the *New Testament* we witness Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where he is sorrowful unto death where "Grief and anguish came over him" (Matthew, 26:37). We can think, too, of Jesus' words to his disciples, "Truly, Truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice: you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy" (John 16:20). On the Way of the Cross we hear of the "women who were mourning and lamenting him" (John 20:20). Why then do the "...groans of the wounded...anguish of the dying...lament of the widow and orphans" (Edith Stein quoted in McIntosh, 1998, p.232), reflections of the crucified, feature so prominently in the output of the Celtic Renaissance and particularly the work of Sharp and what were his sources? Was it representational of the mysticism that was emerging and an expression of religious melancholy?

Laments for the dead or elegies for the distress of the individual often feature in Celtic Poetry of the *Lyra Celtica*, 1896, (edit by Elizabeth Sharp, wife of William). *Credhe's Lament* from the *Book of Lismore* is reproduced with its wild moaning, "A woeful booming, and O a boar of woe, is that which the wave makes upon the northward beach! Beating as it does against the polished rock, lamenting for Cael, now that he is gone...calamity that is fallen upon me having shattered me, for me prosperity exists no more. (E.A. Sharp, 1896, p.5) Sharp's introduction to the *Lyra Celtica* outlines what he extracted as the key features of Celtic lament and melancholy which he sought to re-create in his own poetry. He picks up the "poignant note common to all poetry" (E.A. Sharp, 1896, p.37), but marks Celtic poetry as

having “deep yearning emotion” and “exquisite regret and longing” (p.37). Of Gaelic poetry he points out the “mournful longing, a lament of what cannot be again” (E.A. Sharp, 1896, p.29). He discusses the “strange melancholy” that “characterises the genius of the Celtic Races and believes Ireland has given the “most hauntingly sad lyric cries in all modern literature” (p.xlix). This ‘cry of the weary’ he sees in spiritual terms saying “melancholy of inappeasable regret, of insatiable longing is as obvious as in our own day, when spiritual weariness is as a added crown of thorns. Whence come this sadness, he asks?”(p.xlix). Sharp praises the spontaneity and lyricism of the Celtic poetry where, “its songs of joy end in elegies, nothing equals the delicious sadness of these national melodies” (E.A. Sharp, 1896, p.1). Interestingly he ends the introduction with an insight into his belief in the essential nature of sorrow and darkness on the soul’s journey for, “Even the children of light must go down into darkness”.

## ii) Renan and Arnold

Sharp quotes scholars, Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold in his introduction to *Lyra Celtica*. Renan in his *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (1896) writes of its “sadness” and describes “the songs of the bards of the sixth century they weep more defeats than they sing victories. Its history is itself only one long lament...If at times it seems to be cheerful, a tear is not slow to glisten behind its smile”. Matthew Arnold in his lectures of 1865/66, however, criticises Renan for pushing “the glorification of the Celts too far” (1859 letter to his sister). Arnold does praise the “melancholy” and “style “of Celtic poetry and of it being “singularly beautiful in short passages.” Chris Corr writing in 1998 comments that, “Arnold, with his love of polar opposites, maintains that the Celt’s melancholy was the counterpart to his passionate love of life” (Corr, 1998, p.20). Corr goes on to discuss Yeats who had written *The Celtic Element in Literature* in 1898. Yeats believed it was “this disjunction between essence



and reality that according to Yeats explains the eternal melancholy of the Celt” (Corr, 1998, p.20). Frances Shaw writing in 1934 is deeply critical of Renan and Arnold and their “languishing romantic nature” (Shaw, 1934, p.82). He criticised the “deep unhealthy melancholy” of the Celtic Twilight where he is “ever bent down under a ‘titanic’ melancholy” (Shaw, 1934, p.29) He does, however believe Gaelic poetry to be a “re-clothing of mysticism”. It has to be asked, what were the mystical influences?

### iii) Spiritual Blindness

In looking at Sharp’s poetry written as ‘Fiona Macleod’ we have laments like *The Lament of Ian the Proud* (1901) where typically Sharp uses the symbol of the wind perhaps representing the movement of the spirit. “What is the crying that I bear in the wind? / is it the old sorrow and the old grief? The poem ends, “And wind crying to me who am old and blind!” The exclamation mark is interesting here perhaps spiritual blindness is implied and blindness appears often and has a symbolic quality. We have the image of a desolate individual “weary and blind”, in the darkness of the night of pain and loss. The theme of blindness as a symbol of utter darkness where there is a cloud in front of the eyes appears in his other poems like his *Soul’s Armageddon* (Macleod, 1910, p.72) and are typical examples of the Dark Night of the Soul of St John of the Cross. It is evident, too, in Sharp’s prose for example in *Under the Dark Star* (1895) the introduction explains his use of the name Gloom for the central character, “I should explain that the designation is not a baptismal name at the same time, I have actual warrant for its use; for I knew a Uist man who in the bitterness of his sorrow, after his wife’s death in childbirth, named his son Meelad (i.e. the gloom of sorrow: grief).” (Macleod, 1912, p.290). In *Children of the Dark Star*, 1910 he talks of the “blind bird” and writes, “God also who guides sunrise and moonrise into obscure hearts, to build,

with those winged spirits of light, a nest for the blind soul.” (Macleod, *Dominion of Dreams/ Under the Dark Star*, 1910, p.370)<sup>11</sup>

#### iv) Fire and Ice

Tears and longing feature in the *Death Dirge of Cathal* (Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, 1910, p.141) with its eerie barren starkness. “Out of the wild hills I am hearing a voice, O Cathal!” and with painful intensity he writes, “And I am thinking it is the voice of the bleeding sword. Whose is that sword of the slayer-him that is called Death”? With steely precision he says, “Out of the cold greyness of the sea I am hearing, O Catha, I am hearing a wave-muffled voice, as of one who drowns in the depth...” It ends, “O where is Cathal mac Art that has warmth for the chill that I have?” The use of the words like, “cold greyness”, “chill” against “warmth” emphasises the numbing pain he feels with its icy penetration of his soul. The phrase, “as one who drowns in the depth” portrays the magnitude engulfing him as he hears the muffled sound here a poignant note is struck that echoes the starkness of the soul’s isolation and pain. I would maintain that St John’s poetry and theology seem to be understood by Sharp.

#### v) Dark Night Theology

In Sharp’s poem, *The Soul’s Armageddon* (Macleod, 1910, p.72) we feel the annihilation of soul so typical of St John in the Dark Night of the Soul. Sharp again uses St John’s image of the “clouded ...faculties” (Backbone, 1997, p.64) when he writes, “I am deaf and dumb and blind/with immeasurable fear”. In Arthur Symons translation of *Dark Night* by St John of the Cross he interprets this as, “Nor I see anything/without a light or guide...And in my body all my senses died.” The fear element, too, is essential to the Dark Night experience. At the end of the first stanza, Sharp writes, “And I hear a voice say

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<sup>11</sup> 1912 edition

come/and I hear a voice say, Die!” Again this expression of so much pain that the soul would like to die is reflected in St John’s poetry. In, ‘I live Yet do not Live in Me’, St John writes, “I die because I do not die” and “A thousand deaths my agony” This pain is so severe that the soul endures great suffering and aches to die. This suffering is without comfort. Sharp shows an understanding of the Dark Night, too, in the opening stanza of *The Soul’s Armageddon*—“I know not where I go/ o wind that calls afar:/o wind that calls for war/Where the Death-Moon doth glow/In darkness without star”. To Stein, “The soul must enter the midnight darkness of faith which is the only way to God” (Edith Stein in McIntosh, 1998, p.195). The deepest quarters of the soul are pierced with pain and aloneness, which echoes well the soulful laments of Scottish music, like the Piobaireachd music for the Scottish bagpipes. In his poem, *Flame on the Wind*, Sharp begins, “O wind without that moans and cries, O dark wind in my soul”. The uses of “dark wind” and “moans and cries” again resonate with imagery in St John’s Dark Night but also with his *Living Flame of love*. Sharp writes, “O Flaming Heart, I’d drown you deep where the great icebergs roll:” again there is the contrast of heat and cold. Sharp continues, “O is there peace for hearts of fire in gloom and cold and flight-/Torches of the night”. The phrase “Torches of the night” can be seen symbolically and is an interesting image of light in the spiritual darkness. By comparison St John of the Cross writes, “O lamps of fire that shined/with so intense a light/that those deep caverns where the senses live, / which were obscure and blind,” Again St John uses the idea of blindness echoed in Sharp’s writing to describe the helpless impasse of the Dark Night. In his poem, Sharp describes the “tempest in the lonely night and tempest-whirled desire...o burning soul”. The isolation and passionate desire here are reminiscent of mystical poetry and particularly close to St John’s poetry in the pattern of imagery used of the love stricken and anguished soul who feels abandoned by God and in the shadow of death. It is interesting to note that there is an Irish

poem of the fifteenth and sixteenth century called *The Hidden Love*<sup>12</sup> that describes love in terms of woe and melancholy. Though it describes not the passionate love of God but of a girl it does speak in terms of “no sickness so woeful as secret love...Och my grief! I cannot forget my melancholy love for her”. The use of “my grief” is used often by Sharp to describe the pains of love, such as in his poem *Lord of My Life*, ending, “Lord of my life, my Pride, my Chief/My Grief!” Jackson (1971, p.91) believes the Celts experience of God was as a personal relationship where they speak of God as “my Darling, God of heaven” (ninth century, Irish) or use examples of human love to describe their intimacy with God. This seems to be embraced by the poets of the Celtic Renaissance and Sharp in particular.

#### vi) Melancholy and Christina Rossetti

Turning now to melancholy in Sharp’s poetry, he may have been influenced by his twelve year friendship with Christina Rossetti , the poet of the broken heart. They corresponded and met from 1880 and most of their letters were deemed too personal for publication. Sharp was deeply impressed by Rossetti and he recalled the intimacy he shared with her in his article for the *Atlantic Monthly* of June, 1895. Writing of her at sixteen he says she felt the “poignancy” of the “old world cry, Vanity of Vanities all is vanity”. Sharp writes in his poem, *The Mourners* (Macleod, 1910),”Their hearts were weary still with the sorrow of old/...They want a vain re-birth; /Vanity of Vanities, alas”. Sharp praises Rossetti for her “lines of extraordinary poignancy and beauty, straight from the lyric emotion wrought of the ecstasy of heart and brain”. He discusses, too, her “brooding melancholy”, evident poems like *The Convent Threshold*. In his article, Sharp quotes from her poem, *Joy is but Sorrow* written before 1886. Here “Joy is but Sorrow”, “Pleasure is but Pain” and she describes “transfigured pain” in the Way of the Cross she followed so devotedly. It is an interesting selection by

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<sup>12</sup> In Jackson, 1971

Sharp and he seems to share Rossetti's sentiment in his poem "*The Sorrow of Delight*" or later re-named, "*Mater Consolatrix*" (Macleod, 1910). He writes, "Heart's joy must fade with sorrow/For both are sprung from clay/But the joy that is one with sorrow/treads the immortal way" This mingling of pain-joy is again evident in his poem, "*The Cup*" (Macleod, 1910), "The cup of bitter-sweet I know/That with old wine of love doth glow:/the dew of tears to it doth go/And wisdom is its hidden woe.". In 1886 Sharp included Christina's poem "*Monna Innominata*" in his book *Sonnets of the Century* and Sharp seems to have spent days at a time with the Rossetti family. She records in her diary that Sharp even gave a "cross of primroses" for her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's grave. In a letter of 1882 she writes "I have had a narrow escape of seeing my birthday memorized in the Athenaeum by a sonnet from Mr Sharp" and on July 26, 1882 she records that she lent Sharp "*Main's Sonnet Book*". In 1884 (May 5th), she writes to Sharp "Your friendliness and courtesy invite mine, pray believe in mine whatever I say, as I believe in yours in spite of what you say./Will you not on consideration agree with me that it is out of the question for a Christian really to believe something contrary? On your having passed from a cruder form of negation I do heartily congratulate you." She most probably would have discussed her religious beliefs with Sharp and may have instigated the bitter-sweet theology evident in both their poems. In 16 April, 1886 she writes to Sharp of her "Deep mourning" at the loss of her mother and thanks him "for bearing her affectionate remembrance. She regarded you with true good will".

Christina's poems often reflect the subjects of death and mourning. In "*Death's Chill Between*", we again see the use of cold painful phrases and she writes from a broken heart, "My heart-ache is all too deep, /And sore my throbbing breast". Sharp was impressed by the simple, pious poet but describes her personality as 'strange'. Fredregand Shore in 1931 in his study of Christina looking at her poem "*A Heart Knowth its own Bitterness*", 1857, he compares Rossetti to a young St Teresa of Avila with her "Sweet but fiery ardours" (Shore,

1931, p.77). This is interesting in the light of the links to her counterpart in the Spanish Carmelite reform, St John of the Cross. Arthur Symons describes Christina's poetry as a "cry of the heart and an ecstasy of the soul's grief or joy" (July, 1887). Perhaps, then Christina Rossetti impressed Sharp with her expression of a soul in deep communion with Christ and who embraced the sorrow and melancholy in her writing to further his aim to re-establish through poetry as part of the re-education of the masses in the value of poignant beauty and suffering. While Sharp was still searching Christina was an anchor of deep Christian faith and endurance which he could not ignore.

### vii) A Shared Theology

Melancholy and lament, then feature heavily in the poetry of the Celtic renaissance and in the later work of Sharp, writing as 'Fiona Macleod'. He shows an understanding of the poetry and theology of St John of the Cross particularly the Dark Night of the Soul and gives his own interpretation of the soul's annihilation and painful suffering. Often he seems to borrow phrases and concepts in his poetry not only from St John but from Christina Rossetti also giving strong Christian mystical influence to his poems. Lament and melancholy, common to many cultures finds a unique and piercing expression in the poetry of Sharp, with its mystical contrasts of fire and ice, pain and pleasure with which he hope to purify a nation. It is poetry "so deep, so penetrative that one might die from them, without being able to say whether it was from bitterness or sweetness." (Renan, 1896, p.1)

### **c. The Sacred Feminine and His Female Voice**

In this section I would like to explore the female presence in Sharp's writing and poetry, in both in his recorded visions and understanding of the Virgin Mary , in his early writing and as a woman, Fiona MacLeod from 1895 (showing sympathy for women) as well

as his quest for a new feminine age. I would like to argue that women were central to his progress as a mystic and shaped his thinking from his earliest days. Visions of the Sacred Feminine feature in several writers of the Celtic Renaissance. Sharp was continually haunted by the vision of the 'Lady of the Woods' he saw as a child. The beauty of this encounter was to engage in him a life-long search for the ideal woman of beauty. Not only was the image of the beauty of woman to engulf his mind but also their suffering. His sympathies are seen in his poems particularly those entitled, *From the Heart of Women* written as Fiona Macleod (*Poems and Dramas*, 1910). He also through friendships with women was able to support the feminist cause and seems to have had a deep understanding of the plight of women. His belief in the feminine aspects of spirituality also led him to a faith in a female redeemer who would come to Iona which he discussed in his book *Iona* (1900) and he was not afraid to embrace the image of a female Christ in the story *The Gypsy Christ* (1895). Why, too did he choose to write as a woman, Fiona Macleod, from 1895?

### i) Lady of the Woods

In first looking at his early visions as a child and in particular that of 'The Lady of the Woods' we see an encounter that was pivotal to his mystical development. He is said to have often in later life talked of the "beautiful, gentle white Lady of the Woods" he encountered as a child. As a child he called her "star-eyed". He later does not make an overt Catholic connection to the Virgin Mary but rather names her, "the woman who is in the heart of woman" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.3). Later he was to use this phrase again in his poetry *From the Heart of Woman*. The lady he describes is a tall woman who stood "away in the mist of wild hyacinths under the great sycamores". He says she did not speak, but she smiled and because of the love and beauty in her eyes I ran to her. She stooped and lifted blueness out of the flowers, as one might lift foam out of a pool and I thought she threw it over me". He

describes her hair as “all shinny-gold like buttercups”. He says that he was found lying dazed afterwards among the hyacinths and was laughed at when if asked after her. The impact of this vision cannot be underestimated. The description is not unlike other visions recorded of the Virgin Mary. One particular ‘Lady of the Woods’ vision of Mary is that of Le Pally, France (Sept 9, 1909) where the Virgin appeared to Fr Pere Lamy where she requested a shrine which he established called the Lady of the Woodlands. In Marpingen, Germany, July 3 1879, a ‘white figure’ appeared carrying a child in her arms to three girls who were in the woods picking berries. Common, too, is that Sharp’s vision of the Lady was dressed in white which is often seen in her apparitions. In Sharp’s book *Iona*, his vision of a future woman-redeemer to come is of a female who “shall appear white and radiant, the shepherdess shall call us home.” (Macleod, 1900 p.101), again alluding to a Virgin Mary figure. Also in *The Sin-Eater*, 1895, Sheen Macarthur talks of the hens pegging at her skirt as comparable to “the way I am pulling at the white robe of the Mother o’ God (as)... a healing hand upon my tears-O, och, ochone, the tears, the tears!” (Macleod, 1896, 2012, reprint, p.29) Interestingly Andrew Managravite, (Victorian Web) has pointed out that all Sharp’s nineteen poems in *Sospiri di Roma*, 1892 use the word white or refer to “white heat”.

Peter Eicher writes that the Virgin often “appears only for a moment, but that moment forever alters the lives of the people involved” (Eicher, 1996, p.5). He stresses the “grace” she brings and certainly Sharp was altered and affected by his visitation. Mary Craig emphasises that “any such archetype must be the eternal feminine”<sup>13</sup>. Common too is the natural location of the visitation whether it be in woods, meadows or mountains (Garabandel) and often springs appear where she appears (Loudres) or natural phenomenon like the sun dancing (Medgugorie). In these features, Sharp’s vision fits very well with other visions of the Virgin.

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<sup>13</sup> Source not found



To the Duchess of Sutherland Sharp writes; "...There is that Lady of Silence, the Madonna of Enigma, who lives in the heart of many women. Could you not shape something under *her* eyes...?" (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.124). It shows a respectful utterance on Mary by Sharp. Also he recalls that at seven the old fisherman Seumas MacLeod "took me in his knees one sundown on the Isle of Eigg and made me pray to "Her" (Letter to Mr Frank Rinder, 1900, E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.97). Alaya points out that "The veneration of Mary, which some spokesmen for the rational protestant mind termed Mariolatry and censured as a degradation of man's spiritual instincts, began to appear to Sharp as a means by which man expressed his persistent craving for a maternal spirit in which to submerge himself, a craving that reformed religions were wrong to deny."(Alaya, 1970, p.165) Interesting (Irish Celtic mystic), George (A.E) Russell wrote a poem called *The Virgin Mother* ( *Collected Poems*, 1913), he writes:"Who is that goddess to whom men should pray/ But her whom their hearts have turned away,/Out of whose Virgin being they were born.? Whose mother nature they have named in scorn. /Calling its holy substance common clay..." Russell was to write to Sharp: "You love the mother as I do but you seem forever to expect some revelation of awe from her lips where I would hide my head in her bosom." (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.85) Other members of the Celtic Renaissance also received visions of the Sacred Feminine. Dundee artist John Duncan, for example is recorded in John Kemplay's book as having a vision of which the "Most beautiful of these visions burned with an intensity that left an afterglow in his spirit." (Kemplay, 1994, p.90) The vision was of a young woman who Duncan describes as glowing with "deep fervent life" who looked at Duncan with her "large simple fearless eyes like a goddess." Kemplay continues, "Her poise was perfect, the expression in her eyes Duncan found impossible to describe. The eyes were kind and comprehending though there was no weakness in them"(Kemplay, 1994, p.90) He maintains that the vision "strengthen

him". Were these female visitations heralding the way for the mystical enlightenment that Sharp and others were to pursue centred on the feminine spirit?

## ii) Motherhood

Sharps sympathies with women according to Alaya (1970) stem from his childhood experiences. She cites the fact that he would have been affected by the homebirths of his mother as evidence for his sensitivity to woman's suffering in childbirth. Sharp's poem *Motherhood* (portrays the three types of mothers; the brute, savage and civilised. The poem comes from his book of 1882 called *The Human Inheritance*. In a letter to Lee-Hamilton dated Christmas 1880, he says "It was written from a deep sense of the beauty and sacredness of motherhood in itself, in whatever form and under all circumstances. A tigress as exemplifying the brute creation-an Australian native, as exemplified from the lowest human savage-and a high souled, pure hearted girl as exemplifying the highest level of cultural civilisation." His believe in the sacredness of motherhood is stated in his letter to Lee-Hamilton of Oct 5 1881. "Motherhood was written from a deep connection of the beauty in the state of motherhood itself of the holy strangely similar bond of union it gave to all created things and how it as it were forged the links whereby the chain of life reached unbroken from the poly depth we do not see to the God." He writes also of his believe in the "nobility of motherhood". His sympathies towards women are echoed in his later collection *From the Heart of Women* (Macleod, *Poems and Dramas*, 1910. In it is *The Prayer of Women* which also appeared in the *Lyra Celtica*, 1896, in which writing as 'Fiona Macleod' , he launches a stinging attack on men with the repetition of "Wherewith he mocketh us,/Wherewith he playeth with us,/Wherewith he trampleth upon us/ Us who conceive and bear him:" He allies too with the "darkness and loneliness...that women carry with them with shame, and

weariness and with pain,/only for the laughter of man's heart". He ends "we whose breast is weary with milk/Cry cry to thee, O compassionate".

### iii) Sympathy with Women

In another poem of the collection, *Rune of the Passion of Woman*, (MacLeod, 1910) he describes the "sorrow of lonely women" and mourns the pain of a wife without a husband who had not experienced the "sweet, wonderous, consummate joy/of womanhood fulfilled to all desire". An interesting addition is the phrase, of woman "who never, never, never have grown hot and cold with rapture", a graphic statement of experience. Mystical experience or a praise of the union of both sexes, it asserts the place of the male in woman's life's. This contrasts dramatically with his earlier poem maintaining the cruelty of men towards women. In the *Rune of the Sorrow of Women*, Sharp (MacLeod) writes of women as "having anguish of body, die in the pangs of bearing". He continues "heavy the breast with milk that never shall nourish: heavy the womb that never again shall be weighty". Here his words are a witness to the plight of mothers whose child dies in birth, something common to many in his time. The collection ends with a poem called '*The Shepherd*'. In it the woman says "Why should a woman forfeit her whole heart/at the bidding of a single shepherd's call?" This is an interesting assertion of a woman's right to refuse an offer in matters concerning her future. The many Laments Sharp (MacLeod) wrote also shows an alliance to the pain of woman who so often were the ones who performed them but was it a call of a woman's heart or a suppression by men?

It has been suggested by Meyer that Sharp had transvestite tendencies which I think unlikely. Sharp has strong relationships with women of a noble kind and as his wife Elizabeth says "he was a Viking in build, a Scandinavian in cast of mind, a Celt in heart and spirit". He was a man of principle whose pursuit of the cause of woman was part of his quest for the

uniting of the two aspects of the divine male and female. His sympathies with the feminine did however cause him to say “Don’t despise me when I say that in some sense I am more a woman than a man. His friendship with, for example Olive Schreiner, campaigner and feminist, lay testament to his support for women and Sharp corresponded with her and mixed socially. In a letter to Richard Garnett, he writes “By the way, I had a note on Saturday from Olive Schreiner. Her address is Hotel Mediterraine, Alassio, Italy. She intends to be in London for a few weeks next may and will, I hope, stay with us for a day or two”. Sharp was supportive of the feelings and emotions of women and his friendship with Christina Rossetti demonstrates his sensitivity to the greatness of the female poet. His lifelong search for the ideal feminine beauty led him to a lifelong friendship with Mrs Edith Wingate Rinder whom he met in Rome (1890-91) and who to him encapsulated the ideal highland beauty. This meeting was to inspire him to pursue his quest for beauty and truth in his mystical writing as ‘Fiona Macleod’. He was supported by women particularly his wife, Elizabeth and Edith who as writers contributed academically as well as personally to his mission to purify the mysticism of the Celtic Renaissance. His choice of a female pseudonym gave him the freedom to write from the heart and remain hidden. It allowed him to cultivate the female side of the spirituality he believed essential to the transformation of a culture.

Writing in isolation at Phenice Croft, Sussex, for two years he was able to get in touch with the woman-soul. In 1896 he was to write that the “Soul of woman breath into my brain” and that his writing was a partial expression at least to the articulate voice of a myriad woman who suffer in one way or other of the triple ways of sorrow” (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.82) His writing as ‘Fiona Macleod’ was to portray a visionary language exquisitely beautiful and reflective. His feelings could be aired fully in an emotional expression of mystical experience. It was heart and soul writing idealist and dreamy yet of a spiritual peak. Phrases

run off the tongue in wonderful literary ecstasies and delight us with their purity. Mother earth is proclaimed in all her beauty as is the beauty of the soul.

#### iv) A Compassionate Woman-Saviour

In his book, *Iona*, (1900) Sharp (Macleod) shares his belief in a woman-saviour who would return to Iona. He writes; “there is the divine eternal feminine counterpart to the divine eternal male...Mystery of the dual spirit...the mystery of the two in one” (Macleod, 1900, p.140). In his book *Iona* he writes of “...the advent of Mary into the spiritual world with the possible coming again to earth of Mary, as another redeemer or with the descending of the divine womanhood upon the human heart as a universal spirit descending upon awaiting souls.” (Macleod, 1900, p.101) In *The Gypsy Christ*, 1895 Sharp is confident to write his vision of a woman-Christ figure, a gypsy figure with memories of his free spirit that spent three months with gypsies in the highlands when he was eighteen. This woman-saviour he believed would be “...the compassionate one-with no doctrine to teach, no way to show, but only deep, wonderful, beautiful, unalienable, unquenchable compassion.”(Macleod, *The Beauty of the World*, in *The Divine Adventure* 1900, p.397) This vision he had of the feminine redeemer strikes to the heart of Carmelite spirituality and its influence on his works (discussed previously), may account for his vision. O’Donoghue (1989) was to say that the “Carmelite order is always renewing itself especially in its feminine mode” (O’Donoghue, 1989, p.136) and that the “feminine is at the heart of the life of contemplation”. Queen Beauty of Carmel, Mary, would indeed strike a chord with Sharp’s vision. Carmelites are hermits of our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel and the “celestial feminine is at the very centre of their contemplative vision” (O’Donoghue, 1989, p.141). St Teresa of Avila was a very feminine model for Sharp yet she was open to the masculine. In reflecting on the influence of the Spanish Carmelites on the Celtic Renaissance and Sharp we see the fusion of a feminine

vision of beauty and a purified mysticism. His prophetic vision looked to a time of peace with the advent of the coming of a Mary figure. In *Iona* he states: "The divine spirit shall come again as a woman. Then for the first time the world shall know peace." Sharp was a man of vision, ahead of his time whose first vision of 'The Lady of the Woods' projected him to carry forward a quest for a feminine renewal and peace to come. This hope of a time of peace is reflected in his poem, *When There is Peace*. It was set to music by Herbert Howells and appears in his *Five Songs For Low Voice and Piano*:

There is peace on the sea tonight  
Thought the fish in the white wave :  
There is peace among the stars tonight  
Thought the sleeper in the grave:

There is peace in my heart tonight  
Sighed Love beneath his breath;  
For God dreamed in the silence of His might  
Amid the earthquakes of death.

There is peace tonight  
There is peace tonight

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

“There is a great serenity in the thought of death, when it is known to be the Gate of Life.” (Fiona MacLeod, E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.120)

I have therefore established in this thesis that William Sharp was indeed a mystic and that his mysticism was shaped by his own experience and through his contact with Symbolism and the Spanish Carmelite Mystical tradition. These merged seamlessly with the early Celtic traditions being rediscovered. I have demonstrated that he experienced the highs and lows of the mystical life which he eagerly pursued throughout his short life. This venture was a costly one to his mind and body and he stretched himself to the limit, experiencing ecstasies and union as well as illness and depression. I believe his early contact with Roman Catholicism as a child introduced him to a faith that became a lifelong fascination to him culminating in his writing as a Roman Catholic from 1895. He was continually aesthetically drawn to Roman Catholicism. It opened to him a mystical theology that was essential to his mystical progression and was part of a literary tradition that is evident in his later stories and poems. I have shown that these Roman Catholic leanings emerged throughout his life and while he was still searching and experimenting with different traditions. He encountered a Catholicism that was not afraid to embrace wider influences such as Celtic Pagan lore in the Western Isles and the theosophical interests from East and West of Yeats and others. The mixing of the Catholic tradition with wider mystical influences is characteristic of the faith that appealed to Sharp yet he gradually comes to a Christological conclusion and progresses from natural mystical ecstasies to a more personal experience of Christ. In Italy he experienced the full force of mystical union while attending a Roman Catholic Passion Service and later in Rome (1890-91) he suddenly knew he was truly a mystic with a sudden “spiritual

regeneration”, I would call it a conversion experience. Another crucial highpoint was his near-death experience (1886) which triggered a new fire in his soul and gave him the drive and a mission to save the nation through beauty. This experience he believed contributed to the spiritual content of his works as ‘Fiona Macleod’. I would argue that his later work lays testament to the eternal truths he found which ultimately conclude with the belief common to most mystics that God is love.

I have suggested that Sharp was introduced to the Spanish Carmelite mystics through Arthur Symons who he had contact with from 1896 (when he was introduced by Yeats) but knew of Sharp from 1887. It is also significant that Sharp was in close talks with Patmore in 1890 and he admired Patmore’s writing and may well have discussed the Spanish mystics he was influenced by before discussing them with Symons. I have uncovered that in 1891 Coventry Patmore was introduced to Symons and Symons makes his first trip to Spain in the same year. I have demonstrated that Symons acknowledges Patmore as originally sparking their interest in the Spanish Carmelites in 1891. Symons believes Patmore’s book *The Unknown Eros*, 1877 is indebted to the Carmelite Mystics. Spain was a central influence both in its Carmelite Mystics and in its folktales and romances (evident in Sharp’s morality tale, *Washer of the Ford*) and Symons then returns to Spain in 1899 to write his two pivotal books on *Images of Good and Evil* with chapters on St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila and on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. These I have argued were most probably discussed by Sharp and Yeats who were in close contact at this time with Symons that stretched to a belief in a psychic bond between them and shared Archer Vision. The essential elements that appealed to Symons were the erotic mysticism of the Carmelites, borne out by his translation of their poetry. Its emotionalism and emphasis on the graphic sensations of the soul written in ‘white heat’ struck a chord with Symons and I maintain with Sharp and others too. Its pursuit of beauty, its feminine quality and simplicity of lyrical expression all aided their aim to purify



the movement to a mystical peak. The passion of a heart was felt in the Spanish Carmelite poetry which aches with desire for love, beauty and hidden wisdom. All elements of the mysticism of Celtic Renaissance. I have also illustrated that much imagery and symbolism of St Teresa Avila's writing reappears in the writing of Russell, MacDonald, Yeats and Sharp. Direct references such as the interior castle, crystal imagery, the king's central chamber and the tower symbols all remerge in their writing. So, too, do themes from the Song of Songs and the impassioned love of Mary Magdalene appear in the work of Sharp and others. This links to the Carmelite Mystics expressions of the delights of love with a personal experience of God (evident in Sharp's prose-poem *The Reed Player*) and extending to the height and depth of passionate sacrifice for love which I believe may account for Irish revolutionary, Joseph Mary Plunkett holding fast to the work of the Spanish Carmelites. These saints were also hailed as well-versed mystics who could give Sharp and others a route to the contemplation of beauty they sought and who they could test their mystical progression against.

I have also established that Sharp was actively seeking out and meeting the Symbolists from 1892 and that he had planned to write a book on the French Symbolists in 1897 before Symons's pivotal book in 1899. From 1895 Sharp was able to have their work translated by his friendship with Edith Wingate Rinder who was known for her translations and she may be responsible for encouraging him to read their literature. His works demonstrate the merging of Symbolist ideals at its mystic height with its quest for beauty and the development and integration into the principles of the Celtic Renaissance (Maeterlinck's *Inner Beauty* is one example read by Sharp). I would disagree with Alaya and Blamires who maintain Edith was his lover. I believe that her relationship with Sharp was more intellectual and inspirational than sexual and that this noble man stayed loyal to his wife Elizabeth. His strength of character and integrity I would argue shine forth in his letters and his writing as

does his sensitivity to things of the spirit and shows him as a man of conscience. His was a journey of a soul reflected in all he penned.

I have shown that he was profound seeker from his youth and this is reflected in his ability to extract the soul essence of those he chose as friends and wrote about in his critical work. It is evident that the key attributes he looked for in soul-mates in the artistic and literary world were poignant sorrow and beauty in writing and nobleness and melancholy of spirit. As demonstrated he produced keen observations and these society interactions then gave him the tools to retreat and reflect on his own inner life.

I believe his later Christian tales illustrate a growing focus on a sensitive portrayal of Christ and a proclamation of the Christian message. In the *Washer of the Ford* Sharp notably Christianises the story from its Pagan roots and chooses a Mary Magdalene figure through the influence of Spanish folktales and romances known also to the Spanish Carmelites. Sharp in all this later tales ennoble and uplifts these stories to reflect his belief that “love is the basic law of the spiritual life.” (Sharp’s diary entry, 1897) This is shared in the theology of the Carmelites being discovered. His characterisation of Christ is of a compassionate, loving and gentle saviour who makes a direct approach to his followers. Sharp uses these stories to criticise Calvinism and places redemption as a key personal experience. He demonstrates an understanding of the ways and effects of loving Christ. I would maintain that this came from his own mystical experience of love and the story of *The Last Supper* he maintained came from a direct vision. At other times he describes, for example, his contact with a Christ-figure as on 29 March 1898 he writes to his wife; “The other night I fell asleep on my sofa. I dreamed that a beautiful spirit was standing beside me. He said:”My Brother, I have come to give you the supreme gift that will heal you and save you.” I answered eagerly:” give it me- what is it?” And the fair radiant spirit smiled with beautiful solemn eyes, and blew a breath into the tangled garden of my heart- and when I looked there I saw the tall white Flower of

Sorrow growing in the Sunlight.”(E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.91) He exposes in his stories his own comprehension that mystical love brings knowledge of the eternal mysteries. Christ is portrayed as healer, comforter and restorer. In his story of *The Divine Adventure* (1900) we see evidence of his progression towards a more overtly Roman Catholic theology. He presents a theological journey complex in its conception and symbolism yet intricately weaving and revealing Catholic truths like redeeming love, a reference to the real presence of Christ or resurrection of the body which are all discussed and answers are given to the theological questions posed. Concepts borrowed from St John’s Dark Night theology emerge such as purification and the dark flame of love or the control of the appetites. Even the impasse of the night and the mystical kiss are evident. The three faculties of Body, Soul and Will sit well with St John’s theology. I believe it confirms that Sharp’s inner journey had come full circle and in an enlivened way he was rediscovering the Roman Catholicism of his childhood through the study of the Spanish Carmelite mystics.

He was exploring other aspects that resonated between these mystics and the Celtic Renaissance. Sharp’s poetry as ‘Fiona Macleod’ is steeped in references to St John of the Cross. The deep yearning emotion of regret and longing, the clouding of the faculties, the agony of soul, the blindness in the Night, as well as the suffering without comfort are all evident in Sharp’s poetry for example, *The Souls’ Armageddon*. He is not afraid to mimic phrases and concepts from St John’s writing which he must have felt contained exactly what the Renaissance was seeking to purify their Celtic mysticism. His twelve year friendship with Christina Rossetti has been shown to have also encouraged his Christian leanings as a pertinent example of the Christian life and confirmed his understanding of the centrality of a bitter-sweet theology, influenced by her melancholic, yet at times ecstatic spirit.

I have established that women were essential to his mystical progression and his writings show a sympathy for the plight of woman and for their heroic suffering. He

surrounded himself with strong, educated woman including his wife Elizabeth and latterly with Edith Wingate Rinder as well as successful poets like Christina Rossetti and feminist activist, Olive Shreiner. His writing at times can attack the lowly position of woman or sensitively reflect their sorrows in childbirth or joys of motherhood. Woman and the feminine spirit were essential to his mystical thinking with his believe in female saviour who would return to herald a time of peace. The centrality of Virgin Mary or the feminine spirit begins early with his vision of the 'Lady of the Woods' as a child and is confirmed by the prayerful contacts he makes with Fr Ivor and Seumas, the old Catholic fisherman, who encourage devotion to Mary in his childhood. It began a lifelong search for the ideal feminine beauty. His vision of a Mary-figure is typical in description to other appearances of the Virgin Mary. It was similarly shared by others of the Celtic Renaissance such as Russell and Duncan and encouraged the hope of a feminine guiding hand of the movement towards a mystical re-birth with a female saviour, a virgin figure coming to Iona and an era of peace. This I believe demonstrates his vision as a man ahead of his time, thinking on a time of peace long before such things were formulised. It would have been supported by his contact with theosophy but it also fits well with the Marian theology of the Carmelites who pride themselves on looking for a feminine renewal.

Writing as a woman he believed gave him the freedom to express fully his mystical, visionary side but I have shown that there were other many factors contributing to his choosing a female pseudonym and he could remain hidden while revealing precious truths he found and had to make no apology for returning to Christianity and the Catholicism first encountered as a child. Not the Presbyterian faith of his parents but a faith that embraced a universal Jesus. His mystical journey was complete based now on compassion, beauty and love.

Sharp, I would maintain, was a powerful player in the progression from the mysticism of the Symbolist to the new phase that embraced a Celtic past rich in mystical treasures and ended with the sacrificial expressions of the Irish. His recording of his own mystical experiences confirm his place as a well-versed mystic and whose works show grounding in solid theology. He was instrumental in developing through his writing enjoyable stories and emotive poetry which revealed Christian truths and demonstrate his understanding of the mystic life using exquisite language and insightful characterisations. I would assert that Sharp should be resurrected from his neglected status and should be seen not as a man of his time or a man with inner conflicts but as a key literary contributor whose aim was to ennoble his readers and perfect their spirits. I would assert that he should sit alongside C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald as a man on an inner soul journey and writer of a literary tradition whose stories contain the hidden truths he found. He and his interaction with others like Symons and Yeats and Russell was a central force in the shaping of a mysticism that looked to the Celtic traditions but that embrace a much deeper movement to find the essence of mystical expression with the transition from Symbolist yearnings to Christian perfection. In testament to his importance, a friend, Mrs Mona Caird wrote of his "...soul that had to bear the torment and the revelations of genius...(whose)...friendship was a spiritual possession." (E.A. Sharp, 1910, p.130). His death in 1905 saw the parting of a beautiful spirit whose great depth I maintain is self evident in his prolific writing and literary legacy.

"On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1905 at 3 o'clock he suddenly leaned forward with shining eyes and exclaimed in a tone of joyous recognition," Oh the beautiful 'Green Life' again!" And the next moment sank back into my arms with the contented sigh, "Ah all is well." He was buried two days later in the woodlands of Simeto and his Invocation to Peace was recited by the Duke of Bronte. An Iona cross marked his grave and engraved were the words, "Farewell to the known and exhausted, welcome to the unknown and illimitable" (E.A.Sharp, memoir, 1910, p.128)

### Invocation to Peace

Deep peace I breathe into you,  
O weariness, here:  
O ache, here!  
Deep peace, a soft white dove to you;

Deep peace, a quiet rain to you;  
Deep peace, an ebbing wave to you!  
Deep peace, red wind of the east from you;  
Deep peace, grey wind of the west to you;  
Deep peace, dark wind of the north from you;  
Deep peace, blue wind of the south to you!  
Deep peace, pure red of the flame to you;  
Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you;  
Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you;  
Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you;  
Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you.  
Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you!  
Deep peace of the running wave to you,  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,  
Deep peace of the Yellow Shepherd to you,  
Deep peace of the Wandering Shepherdess to you.  
Deep peace of the Flocks of Stars to you,  
Deep peace from the Son of Peace to you,  
Deep peace from the heart of Mary to you,  
And from Bridget of the Mantle  
Deep peace, deep peace!  
And with the kindness too of the Haughty Father  
Peace!  
In the name of the Three who are One,  
Peace!  
And by the will of the King of the Elements,  
Peace! Peace!

(Dominion of Dreams/Under the Dark Star, p.424, 1912 edition)

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