William Sharp/Fiona Macleod – A Personal Mysticism

By David Miley

Introduction

William Sharp (1855-1905) was a widely published Victorian man of letters. His work included poetry, novels, plays, biographies, editing and criticism but he is best known for work published under the pseudonym Fiona Macleod. Textual evidence and contemporaneous accounts point to Macleod as a feminine component of Sharp's psyche which he struggled to integrate for his entire life. Following that supposition, the life and work of Sharp/Macleod is best understood through a Jungian lens. The poem "The Rose of Flame" (1896)[1] is a prime example of both Sharp's internal split and the utility of a Jungian critical approach.

Sharp – Life leading up to Fiona Macleod

Sharp was born into a well-off family involved in commerce. From his wife (and cousin) Elizabeth's memoir, we know that he was a sickly, dreamy child who communed with invisible friends.[2] One experience directly relevant to the nature of Fiona was the vision at age seven of a White Lady. He reported that he saw a beautiful white woman who turned the flowers around her blue. Elizabeth Sharp reports that Sharp spoke of her often and that over time her titles changed. [3] This indicates an active preoccupation and not a childhood memory trapped in amber. It is also significant that Fiona derives from fionn, meaning pale or white in Scottish Gaelic.

[1] Macleod, Fiona, *From the Hills of Dream: Mountain Songs and Island Runes*, 43.
[2] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 5–6.
[3] Sharp, 9–10.

Sharp was educated at home before going off to Edinburgh for college. He dropped out in 1872 and then spent the next six years halfheartedly pursuing an array of financial opportunities.[4] In 1879 he met Dante Gabriel Rossetti and entered his literary circle.[5] This association would prove crucial. Sharp was not independently wealthy and depended on publications for financial support. Rossetti's circle of connections provided a steady stream of work. After a nine-year engagement, he married his cousin Elizabeth Sharp in in 1884. Two years later he suffered scarlet fever and was near death, hallucinating his own death and afterlife. Elizabeth identifies this period as the source of raw material that would be fleshed out as Fiona Macleod.[6]

In 1890, feeling the oppression of living in London, Sharp moved to Italy to devote more time to creative work.[7] In 1891 he encountered Edith Wingate Rinder. In an 1896 letter to his wife, he states that meeting Rinder caused the "development as 'Fiona Macleod' though, in a sense of course, that began long before I knew her, and indeed while I was still a child." Elizabeth Sharp continues that it "unlocked new doors in his mind and put him " in touch with ancestral memories " of his race.[8] This clearly links Sharp's relationship with Rinder to his visions as a child.

Out of this experience came *Sospiri di Roma* (1891), a collection of poems set in Italy. The poems expressed a newfound sensuousness in Sharp's work, a sensibility about nature and sexuality decidedly at odds with Victorian society.[9] It was not well received. Sharp could only

[4] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 99.
[5] Alaya, 29–30.
[6] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 125–26. .
[7] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 96.
[8] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 222. The exact nature of the relationship between Sharp and Rinder is speculated upon but not proven. According to Halloran they traveled together, and her presence was helpful in calling up the Fiona persona. But if it was an affair, it was an affair with at least tacit support of Elizabeth who wrote about Edith in glowing terms and Edith's husband Frank Rinder who spoke similarly about Sharp after his death.
[9] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 99–102.

follow his new creative vision and maintain a steady income through pseudonyms. A first trial of a new approach was the one-time publication "The Pagan Review" (1892), extolling the virtues of a new, freer sensibility. Sharp wrote all the articles under different pseudonyms[10] for the Review's single issue which established the principle.

Sharp began the novel *Pharais* (1894) intending it to be published under his own name but midway through the process created the Macleod pseudonym. [11] In a letter to Catharine Janvier he describes the creative need for the Macleod pseudonym "... I can write out of my heart in a way I could not do as William Sharp, and indeed I could not do so if I were the woman Fiona Macleod is supposed to be, unless veiled in scrupulous anonymity."[12] Only a small group of people would be let in on the secret, close friends, publishers and most importantly William Butler Yeats.

Yeats and Sharp

William F. Halloran traces Sharp and Yeats early relationship and the eventual revealing of the deception in "WB Yeats, William Sharp and Fiona Macleod A Celtic Drama." [13]Sharp knew Yeats since he knew virtually everyone literary in the United Kingdom, but it was not until 1896 that they became friends.[14] While it is clear that Elizabeth Sharp was convinced of Williams psychic and visionary nature, it is from Yeats that we have a less biased opinion.

It is perhaps now a good time to examine the nature of mysticism and the mystic. Philosophers, theologians and mystics have all had their divergent views. Perhaps the simplest way of looking

[10] Alaya, 103.
[11] Halloran, William F., *Sharp/Macleod Letter, Vol. 1*, Kindle location 9858.
[12] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 227.
[13] Halloran, William F., "A Celtic Drama."
[14] Halloran, William F., 159.

at mysticism is that it involves forces that are hidden, wholly Other, and relatable. Relating to those forces creates a profound change in the mystic often with the addition of new abilities. Hagiographic sources note that mystics of all stripes have produced art, music, dance, and writing derived from relation to that Other. Hagiographies also note a profound spiritual effect on others and newfound psychic abilities. And it is also common that mystics recognize other mystics in a tradition of testing as old as "The Colloquy of the Two Sages."[15]

By this definition Sharp was a mystic. Sharp related to Macleod and what he would call the creative Flame as separate entities. Relating to Macleod and reaching for that creative Flame deeply changed Sharp in a way that is reflected in both Sharp and Macleod's work. As for influence, Sharp and Macleod have over one hundred individual entries in The Liedernet Archive[16] . a list of poetry set to music, the most famous being the opera, The Immortal Hour. On the topic of psychic abilities there is the testimony of William Butler Yeats. Elizabeth quotes a letter from Yeats wherein he states that Sharp was "the most extraordinary psychic he ever encountered."[17] Evidence for Yeats' belief come from Yeats memoirs and his *The Trembling Veil*.[18] And as Halloran notes, Yeats would test Sharp's visionary abilities. [19]

A further nuance in the relationship with Yeats was that even after the deception was unveiled[20], Sharp and Macleod wrote separate letters to Yeats. Elizabeth believed that Yeats construed Fiona a complete and autonomous personality. As for herself, Elizabeth believed while William while in the grasp of Fiona seemed like a different person but was, in the end, an aspect of

[15] A medieval verse tale. A young poet exchanges tests with an old poet both of whom provide cryptic if not mystic answers. At the end, the old poet accepts the younger as the victor and the younger accepts the elder as his teacher.
[16] "William Sharp (1855 - 1905) - Vocal Texts and Translations at the LiederNet Archive."
[17] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 424.
[18] Yeats, William Butler, *W.B Yeats Memoirs: First Draft Autobiography*, 129.
[19] Halloran, William F., "A Celtic Drama," 166.
[20] Halloran, William F., 177.

William. She also notes that over time a third personality, Wilfion, evolved as a merger of both personalities.[21] Records of letters to Elizabeth signed Wilfion give some credence to this view.

Understanding Fiona

This brings up the larger question of how to discuss Fiona. A letter from Macleod to William Butler Yeats (Appendix B), written in 1899, gives a highly nuanced description of the Sharp/Macleod internal structure. Macleod states that she is the match and Sharp the torch and the creative Flame is brought into being by love. Even as the flame burns, Macleod still has a separate identity "sometimes guiding, sometimes inspiring, out of the deep mysterious intimacies of love and passion."[22] From Macleod's testimony, at least, she is a separate being linked by love and involved in the act of fiery creation.

In the Sharp/Macleod conundrum, Halloran sees two possibilities. One is that Edith Rinder was the stimulus for Sharp and that she was not truly a secondary personality.[23] The strongest evidence he provides concerns Sharp's interactions with Yeats after the deception was revealed. He interprets Sharp's continued use of the pseudonym with Yeats as a way of associating Rinder with the Macleod work while preserving her privacy. Counter to that concept Halloran mentions Sharp's earlier confession to Ernest Rhys wherein he clearly describes himself as being entered by a feminine spirit. Halloran is less convinced by this interpretation as it may have been influenced by Yeats and the Celtic Mysteries, Yeats' magical order. Nonetheless, Halloran does suggest that Sharp may have exhibited dual personalities "whatever the origin"[24]

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[21] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 423–24.
[22] Halloran, William F., "The Life and Letters of William Sharp and 'Fiona Macleod', Volume 2 Section XIX Life:July - December 1899," 25–26.
[23] Halloran, William F., "A Celtic Drama," 176–77.
[24] Halloran, William F., 177.

More prosaically, Elizabeth Sharp's memoir depicts Fiona as a natural outgrowth of William's visionary nature.[25] Becoming Fiona was the path for exploring that nature. In her view, Sharp's relationship with Edith Rinder was required for creativity to flourish. Flavia Alaya looks somewhat askance at this, describing the Rinder relationship and Elizabeth's "wifely endurance" as pragmatism.[26] Without the income from Macleod's writing the family's finances were in peril. Rinder seemed necessary to boost Sharp's spirits and, as Halloran suggests, keep him on an even keel when he was away from Elizabeth.[27] As for Sharp himself, Alaya seems to believe that the choice of the Macleod pseudonym was driven more by a desire to protect his inner creative life than as a means of expressing an essential nature.[28]

Other scholars have looked at Sharp through feminist, queer, political, fairy possession and Jungian psychoanalytic lenses. Terry L. Meyers' *"The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona Macleod, Incorporating Two Lost Works, "Ariadne in Naxos" and "Beatrice"* "[29] uses textual analysis of these two works plus other examples from the corpus to build a case that Sharp had repressed homoerotic feelings that were later expressed through his pseudonym. Meyers provides no facts to back up his premise but instead utilizes Sharp's references to male beauty, Fiona's poetry about lost loves, Fiona's feminism and a general homosocial London environment to make his case. While it is hard to argue with anyone asserting repressed feelings of any sort, Sharp's long relationship with Edith Rinder and no known countervailing relationship with a man casts doubt Meyer's conclusion.

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[25] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 227–28.
[26] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 124.
[27] Halloran, William F., *Sharp/Macleod Letter, Vol. 1*, I:522, 524. Halloran states that the two women had agreed that Sharp should not be "left alone" because of his delicate mental state.
[28] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 136.
[29] Meyers, *The Sexual Tensions of William Sharp: A Study of the Birth of Fiona Macleod, Incorporating Two Lost Works,"Ariadne in Naxos" and "Beatrice."*

Virginia Blain provides a queer feminist critique with her article "Queer Empathy: or, Reading/ Writing the Queer in Victorian Poetry."[30] Blain, writing in 2004, notes that the feminist and queer projects may diverge, but that divergence can be bridged through empathy. An empathetic response includes the odd combination of sympathy and detachment that should be applied to reclaim the queerness of Victorian poetry. Blain creates the rather unusual category of transbian, a male who desires to change his sex to female in order to relate sexually to women in the receiving position. Given the Sharp/Macleod/Rinder triad, this is not outside the realm of possibility. Blain states that while Sharp was empathetic from a queer perspective, he was inauthentic from a feminist perspective. In Blain's view, Sharp can always return to being male and did not suffer the conditions his alter ego wrote about so movingly.

On the political front, Michael Shaw's chapter "William Sharp Neo-Paganism: Queer Identity and the National Family"[31] does not attempt to unravel the mysteries of Sharp/Macleod. Instead it looks at the Macleod pseudonym as a method to portray a feminine queer neopaganism for the Scottish national family. The national family is an extension of the family to include all those from a defined homeland. It is queer because the style of discourse exhibits a blending of traditional masculine and feminine approaches to action and argument. It is neopagan because of a romantic attachment to a mythical lost Celtic world. Shaw believes that Sharp chose the Fiona pseudonym as a way of expressing all these ideas in a way that the traditional, masculine Sharp could not.

An unusual lens of analysis is not from a scholar at all. For the most part, Steve Blamires *The Little Book of the Great Enchantment* [32]looks at Fiona as a fae lover largely based on his own

[30] Blain, "Queer Empathy: Or, Reading/Writing the Queer in Victorian Poetry." The online source is unpaginated.
[31] Shaw, "William Sharp's Neo-Paganism: Queer Identity and the National Family."
[32] Blamires, *The Little Book of the Great Enchantment*.

unsupported supposition. However, his "Appendix V Brigid – Celtic Goddess, Celtic Saint and Faery Incarnation"[33] [34] has some material that is reasonably well documented[35] and directly relevant to the poetic analysis of "The Rose of Flame". Blamires notes the many cases in which Macleod wrote on the topic of Brigid and used a number of unique epithets one of which is "Bridget of the Shores", the title of one of her essays.[36] The epithet is interesting in and of itself for its use of liminal water imagery, one of the two major themes in "The Rose of Flame". But it is the essay's fire imagery that is most relevant. Blamires quotes Macleod describing two other Brigid epithets:

> "They refer to one whom the bards and singers revered as mistress of their craft, she whose breath was a flame, and that flame song : she whose secret name was fire and whose inmost soul was radiant air, she therefore who was the divine impersonation of the divine thing she stood for, Poetry."[37]

This corelates completely with the creative state that was the source of the Sharp/Macleod project. Beyond that, identification with a goddess directly supports Emma Jung's understanding of Macleod.

A Jungian approach to Fiona

The approach to Sharp/Macleod that may have the highest correspondence to ground truth is Jungian psychoanalytic theory. Outside of Emma Jung's landmark *Animus and Anima*,[38] almost

[33] Blamires, 301–13.
[34] The spelling of Brigid is various. Instead of standardizing, the attempt here is to use the spelling that the author of a cited piece would use.
[35] Blamires credits the original idea to Ethel Rolt-Wheeler in a 1919 magazine article (Fortnightly Review, 1919). The article in question states the possibility of Fiona as Brighid and talks about Macleod's references but does not actually make a case.
[36] Macleod, Fiona, *Where the Forest Murmurs. Nature Essays*, 76–86. Blamires identifies the original source but did not notice that it had been reprinted in this volume.
[37] Blamires, *The Little Book of the Great Enchantment*, 306.
[38] Jung, *Animus and Anima*, 67, 84–86.

no one has followed this line of reasoning. [39] The Jungian model is one of psychic wholeness developed through understanding and integration of the diverse parts of one's own psyche. Emma Jung argues that Sharp overdid it and conflated the archetypal anima of the collective unconscious with his personal anima or feminine psyche.[40] In her view, the result is an enormously powerful anima that was impossible to integrate. This analysis is further supported by some peculiarities of the archetypal feminine.[41] According to Emma Jung the archetypal feminine aligns with all "Womanhood". Macleod's earliest writings are highly feminist and sympathetic toward the plight of women.[42] In addition, aligning to the archetypal feminine is also an alignment to the "Goddess Nature" which is also represented in Macleod's extensive nature poetry and prose. In Jungian thought, becoming ruled by an archetype is one of the hazards of integrating one's own self. While it seems that one is in the presence of a god-like entity it is essentially an unhealthy impediment on the path to becoming whole.

Another Jungian connection to Sharp and Macleod's work, not mentioned by Emma Jung, is the concept of the divine child created through the union of the personal conscious with the anima.[43] While not using Jungian terminology, Halloran discusses both Yeats' and Sharp's male-female polarity mysticism. Both men believed in the possibility of merging male and female consciousness. For Yeats it was with Maud Gonne. For Sharp it was at one point the spiritual child of his love for Edith Rinder which Halloran believes evolved into Fiona Macleod. [44]

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[39] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 115. Alaya mentions the possibility in passing but does not follow it up.
[40] More recent Jungian theorists have worked on a queer understanding of the psyche. While Sharp/Macleod was certainly queer, the basic Jungian model seems to work descriptively without interpretation.
[41] Jung, *Animus and Anima*, 86.
[42] This effect might also be construed for ibn 'Arabi who had a total change of consciousness concerning women after contact with a Persian beauty in Mecca.
[43] Ostrowski-Sachs, Margaret, *From Conversations with C.G.,Jung.*, 31–32.
[44] Halloran, William F., *Sharp/Macleod Letter, Vol. 1*, I:178–79.

Jungian psychoanalytic theory has been abused when applied to literature as a form of labeling, such as *Joe represents Jane's shadow*. A more useful application of Jungian theory is to look at a literary work as a set of interactions toward wholeness. The question then becomes how the actors within a work are or are not evolving. Macleod's writing is a rich environment for this type of critique since it can be said with little fear of contradiction that Sharp was devoted to integrating the feminine component of his nature.

The Rose of Flame – Poetic Analysis.

"The Rose of Flame", (Appendix A) was first published in 1896. As such it is early in the life of Fiona Macleod. The title is not a common phrase in English and seems to exist only as the title of a poem (and a volume of poems) by Anne Reeves Aldrich.[45] There is reason to believe that Sharp would have encountered Aldrich's work. Both Aldrich's volume *Rose of Flame* (1889) and *American Sonnets*, edited by Sharp, were reviewed in the same issue of Harpers New Monthly Magazine[46] literally a page apart from each other. There are some other overlaps. Aldrich's work was criticized for being overly sensual as had Sharp's *Sospiri di Roma (1891)*. Aldrich and Sharp were both sickly through most of their lives with Aldrich dying very young in 1892 just as the forces that were creating Fiona were at work. And, her "The Rose of Flame" has a similar impossible quest and a sea voyage with a rose of flame as the goal.

A more direct influence may be the mystical rose poems of William Butler Yeats. Macleod seems to have borrowed phrases from Yeats' rose poetry throughout her work[47], including within "The Rose of Flame". For Yeats, the rose may be rooted in the Rosicrucian underpinnings of The Golden Dawn order that both Sharp and Yeats belonged to. Whether Sharp had begun to

[45] Aldrich, Anne Reeve, *The Rose of Flame: And Other Poems of Love*.
[46] Unknown, "Editor's Study," 639–42.
[47] "Eternal Beauty" from "The Rose Upon the Rood of Time" is an example that Macleod mined often.

know and be influenced by Yeats at the time of the Rose's writing is unknown, but from the borrowings, it's clear that Yeats had an influence over Macleod's career and writing.

"The Rose of Flame" has a solid Jungian substrate based on two common themes in Macleod's work. Sharp first broaches the subject a male/female divided soul with "The Twin-Soul"[48] published in 1888.[49] Working broadly from John Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci: A Ballad" Sharp adds his own spin. Elizabeth marks this poem, along with "The Death Child" and "The Isle of Lost Dreams" as precursors to Fiona Macleod.[50] The divided self and the desire for reunion recapitulate the Jungian quest of a man searching for the missing female part of his psyche. The core action of "The Rose of Flame" is a resolution of this theme.

Another major theme involves traversing the sea, or more generally water. In Jungian thought, water is the most common symbol for the unconscious. Crossing or diving into water is crossing and diving into the unconscious, a necessity for psychic integration and healing.[51] As will be shown, "The Rose of Thorn" uses water imagery at multiple levels. In terms of Sharp's mystic consciousness, water imagery is always present. Some examples of sea imagery include The White Lady of the Woods evolving to the White Lady of the Sea and two stories considered tall tales but with a grain of psychological truth. In a note Halloran describes an absurd story wherein Sharp claimed to have rowed out to sea as a teenager with a young woman intending to

[48] Sharp, William, *Romantic Ballads and Poems of Phantasy*.
[49] The poem may also relate to Plato's *Symposium* on the subject of separated male and female souls as stated by Aristophanes.
[50] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 135. For reasons unknown, Elizabeth refers to this poem as "Twin Souls".
[51] Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 9.1:17. In writing about the dream of a theologian, Jung invokes this action in relation to the pool (or well for that matter) of Bethesda, "This dream shows us the natural symbolism. The dreamer descends into his own depths, and the way leads him to the mysterious water. And now there occurs the miracle of the pool of Bethesda: an angel comes down and touches the water, endowing it with healing power."

commit a double suicide.[52] And, five years after a psychic experience he shared with Yeats, he explained a period of absence as the result of following a vision of a woman into the Seine.[53] In life and in art, water is Sharp's path to the feminine side of his nature and to wholeness.

Aside from these two themes, much of Macleod's imagery is idiosyncratic and often impenetrable except by reference to later works. This begins with the title of the poem and its rose and flame imagery. Macleod's author's note to the poem "The Rose of the Night", (written a few years after "The Rose of Flame) states, "There is an old mystical legend that when a soul among the dead woos a soul among the living, so that both may be reborn as one, the sign is a dark rose, or a rose of flame, in the heart of the night." [54] This leads one to believe in an Otherworldly origin for the Rose as well as restating the divine child archetype. Another work, Macleod's essay on a (fictional) dying kinsman "The Book of Opal" identifies the Flame as a creative merging of two separate spirits, "I believe more readily now that a man or woman may be possessed: or that two spirits may inhabit the same body, as fire and air together inhabit a jet of flame."[55] Two letters provide further insight into flame imagery. In an 1886 letter to Elizabeth, Sharp indicates that if he lives long enough he may try philosophy but for now, "-the flame."[56] And as previously mentioned there is the torch, match, flame paradigm (Appendix B) and the association of Bridget as the flaming personification of poetry. Viewed through a

[52] Halloran, William F., "A Celtic Drama," n15 page 201. The story comes from "Reminiscences of W.B. Yeats" by L.A.G. Strong
[53] Halloran, William F., 167.
[54] There seems to be no known mystical legend that relates these three concepts. There is, perhaps, a distant relationship to the ballad Tam Lin where Janet pulls a rose and it invokes a lover who then needs to be rescued from the fae queen. It contains the lines "And last they'll turn me in your arms/Into the burning gleed, / Then throw me into well water, /O throw me in with speed" that invoke both burning and wells signature images in "The Rose of Flame."
[55] Macleod, Fiona, *The Dominion of Dreams: Under the Dark Star*, 181.
[56] Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir Compiled by His Wife, Elizabeth A. Sharp*, 260.

Jungian lens, the flame of the title is the creative Flame (divine child) that is engendered through union of a man and anima.

The rose imagery itself is normatively feminine and considering Macleod's Catholicism probably refers to the Virgin Mary. This is supported by the use in the first line of the term "immaculate" and by one of Macleod's final works, "Rosa Mystica", whose title is an epithet of Mary. Immaculate echoes the immaculate conception and the entering of the (stereotypical) male God into the female body to produce a divine child. Given Sharp's personal metaphysics this may not be a stretch.[57]

Having unpacked the title, we now turn to the body of the poem. Structurally, it is organized on an alternately rhyming pattern, but with no other constraints. The first line of the poem is also the last, "Oh fair immaculate rose of the world, rose of my dream, my Rose!" The phrase "rose of the world" seems borrowed from a Yeats' poem of the same name, a paean to female eternal beauty.[58] The line is interesting in that it reflects the emergence of Sharp's feminine persona from an abstract eternal, to a dream, to a personal and named real Rose.

That reality is further supported by the next line, "Beyond the ultimate gates of dream I have heard thy mystical call:" The gates of dream are a reference to Homer's *The Odyssey*.[59] Penelope had a dream that foreshadows the return of Odysseus. She then speaks of the two gates of dream, the gate of delusional ivory and the true gate of horn. By being beyond the gates of

[57] Yeats, William Butler, *W.B Yeats Memoirs: First Draft Autobiography*, 129. Yeats recounts, second hand, Sharp regaling a Lord Killanin with a story. Fiona Macleod appeared to him in a dream as a male and penetrated him in his similarly female state. For days afterwards, his breasts were swollen. While Yeats also thought of Sharp as a compulsive liar, his tall tales always seem to have an element of internal truth.

[58] There seems some controversy over whether there was an actual collection of poetry called *The Rose* published in 1893. While numerous authors mention it, there seems to be no actual record of whether it was published. However, it can be shown that Macleod's use of the phrase "rose of the world" could have come from an 1895 Victorian anthology that containing a Yeats poem of the same name.

[59] Odyssey, Book 19, lines 560–569

dream, Macleod asserts the reality of "my Rose". The use of this image also supports an archetypal reading. The story of Penelope and Odysseus can be seen as the male personal consciousness undertaking a voyage to achieve reunion with the feminine (along with some side trips). But unlike Penelope, the Rose is an actor in her own right made manifest through the act of calling.

We dive deeply into Macleod personal imagery with the next two lines, with images from to a later work, "The Wells of Peace".[60] The hero of that tale searches for the seventh well of peace that will allow him union with an unattainable feminine. The wells are: Love; Beauty; Dream; Endurance, also called Strength; Compassion; Rest, whose "portals are the grave"; and Love-Fulfilled, where the one you love shall whisper "'There is but one love.'"[61] From this work we know that the rainbow in the third line, "It is where the rainbow of hope suspends and/the river of rapture flows", is the rainbow that suspends over the seventh well. The word "suspends" is used precisely carrying both the meaning of a bridge over a chasm and a break or suspension.

The river of rapture is harder to pinpoint. It is certainly part of Sharp/Macleod water imagery and reflective of the unconscious. Beyond that it is a possible reference to the River Styx aligning it with the penultimate well of peace. The sixth well also works in a Christian sense reflecting the ascent of Christians after the Second Coming in their resurrected (and perhaps psychically unified) bodies.

The fourth line presents as a structural outlier. While there is no overall consistent rhythmic pattern, it is possible to read lines one through three with eight beats per line and a pause between the fourth and fifth beat. When done so, it has a rollicking rhythm. But the fourth line

[60] Macleod, Fiona, *The Dominion of Dreams: Under the Dark Star*, 148–59.
[61] Macleod, Fiona, 156–58.

is impossible to fit into that scheme so we can assume that Macleod meant it to throw the reader off balance and to give it importance. The line itself directly connect to the later work, "And the cool sweet dews from the wells of peace forever fall." Objectively this is a suspension of the laws of gravity, but not the laws of the unconscious. Looking into archetypal connections, wells are the liminal spaces of Celtic myth that function as portals to the Otherworld.[62] In such a suspension of normal spatial relationships, dew falling from a well is entirely possible. Another possible interpretation is that dew collected in hollows may be considered a holy well.[63] This has the advantage of making direct sense of the falling image and reinforces the Otherworldly character of the well as a portal. This cool and sweet state contrasts sharply with the image of creative flame of the next line.

The Rose's call laid out a path through the river of rapture and the wells of peace. The response to that call is a heart in flame, "And all my heart is aflame because of the rapture and peace," the creative union of Sharp and Macleod. This idealized state is immediately undercut by the next line "And I dream, in my waking dreams and deep in the dreams of sleep,". While this state of creativity is powerful, it is not beyond the gates of dream and not yet fully realized. The four lines then with their linking "Ands" encompass a call from the unconscious that will be reached ultimately through all seven portals involving. Knowing about and experiencing some of those portals provides a taste of union known in dreams, whether waking or sleeping. That death, the sixth well, is the only door to this state of union expresses the archetypal nature of an anima too powerful to be integrated in real life.

[62] Wells, lakes, shorelines (Bridget of the Shores), and twilight all fall into this category. Boann's challenge of the Well of Segais is perhaps the most famous example of a well as a gateway and a barrier.
[63] Ray, "The Sacred and the Body Politic at Ireland's Holy Wells," 271.

The next line brings us back to the Rose as actor, “Till the high sweet wonderful call that shall be the call of release”. That the call is high and sweet tends to reiterate that the Rose is normatively feminine. That it certainly refers to death brings back Odysseus, but this time with a siren call instead of Penelope. That it is a passive surrender instead of an active quest reiterates the power imbalance between the seeker and an archetypal anima. There are at least two ways of understanding this passive surrender. One is an actual death and with Sharp’s tenuous health this is an ever-present possibility. Another possible interpretation is a dive into the unconscious which Carl Jung looked at as a form of death before rebirth. Either approach works with the next line, “Shall ring in my ears as I sink from gulf to gulf and from deep to deep.” “Gulf,” like the word suspends, has two different senses in English. The first sense is a body of saltwater connected to an ocean in which “gulf to gulf” would indicate distance traveled before entering the (presumably deeper) ocean. The other sense is of separation as in *There is a gulf between us*. Both interpretations work to give the sense of duration and distance before even approaching the goal. Finally, the call “Shall ring in my ears” reinforces the siren-like nature of the Rose’s call. As with Odysseus, the seeker opens to this fatal attraction, but unlike Odysseus, this seeker is not tied to the mast.

The depth of the process is heightened by repetition of the verb “sink” in the next line, “Sink deep, sink deep beyond the ultimate dreams of all desire – “As the process continues the seeker exits the state of constant dreaming. All delusion is stripped away as is all desire, “Beyond the uttermost limit of all that the craving spirit knows:”. The seeker has reached a sense of clarity beyond dream where it is possible to know and accept the anima in all her power. Instead of fleeting encounters, the seeker is unified at last with the archetypal feminine and swallowed up within her “Then, then, oh then I shall be as the inner flame of thy fire,”. Following Emma Jung,

this is still not a union of equals but more of a merging into divinity, not a psychologically healthy condition but one recorded by mystics from multiple traditions. The poem ends as it begins with "O fair, immaculate rose of the world, Rose of my dream, my Rose!". Returning to the start identifies the undifferentiated state of the seeker. The barriers to union have not been resolved, but that end state is still yearned for.

Evolution of the Rose

As can be seen, Sharp/Macleod's life has a strong correlation to Jungian theory. The creative flame for men may come through understanding and integration of the feminine. In Sharp's case that archetype was initially so powerful that it was not integratable. This would evolve over time to a more manageable relationship with a personal anima. The 1899 letter from Macleod to Yeats (Appendix B) describes a more balanced relationship between Sharp, Fiona and the Flame that is very different than the florid sensibility of "The Rose of Flame." This more nuanced understanding is mirrored in Elizabeth Sharp's belief in Sharp and Macleod evolving into the third personality Wilfion. As this merger developed, Macleod work changed, becoming more involved in prose essays than passionate creative writing.[64] But near the end of their lives Macleod took one more try at the Rose. The final words of "Rosa Mystica" poetically summarize the seeker's lifelong quest:

> "Surely, here, an image of that Rosa Mundi which has been set upon the forehead of the world since time was, that Rose of Beauty, that Rose of Time, that Rose of the world which the passion of the soul has created as a prayer to the Inscrutable: the Rose of the Soul, of you, of me, of all that have been, of all that

[64] Alaya, *William Sharp--" Fiona Macleod," 1855-1905*, 182–84.

> are, of all unborn, that we lay upon our places of prayer, and offer to the Secret Fires, and commit to desolation, and sorrow, and the salt and avid hunger of Death? What came of that mystical wedding, of the world we know and the world we do not know, by that rose of the spirit, committed thus in so great a hope, so great a faith? The Druid is not here to tell. Faith after Faith has withered like a leaf. But still we stand by ancestral altars, still offer the Rose of our Desire to the veiled Mystery, still commit this our symbol to the fathomless, the everlasting, the unanswering Deep."[65]

All the elements of "The Rose of Flame" are present in this piece yet the tone is calm and clear eyed. The Rose has moved inward, now being offered to the Mystery instead of being the Mystery itself. In a Jungian sense, Sharp's personal anima has been claimed and differentiated from the archetype. But like all mystics, there is still more to know and achieve. For Jung it would involve integrating more components of the psyche, also an endless quest. For Sharp/Macleod, it may be becoming a little closer to the goddess of poetry.

[65] Macleod, Fiona, *Where the Forest Murmurs. Nature Essays*, 348.

Appendix A "The Rose of Flame"

The Rose of Flame

Oh, fair immaculate rose of the world,
rose of my dream, my Rose!
Beyond the ultimate gates of dream
I have heard thy mystical call:
It is where the rainbow of hope suspends and
the river of rapture flows
And the cool sweet dews from the wells of
peace forever fall.
And all my heart is aflame because of the rap-
ture and peace.
And I dream, in my waking dreams and deep
in the dreams of sleep,
Till the high sweet wonderful call that shall
be the call of release
Shall ring in my ears as I sink from gulf to
gulf and from deep to deep
Sink deep, sink deep beyond the ultimate
dreams of all desire —
Beyond the uttermost limit of all that the crav-
ing spirit knows:
Then, then, oh then I shall be as the inner
flame of thy fire,
O fair immaculate rose of the world, Rose of
my dream, my Rose!

Appendix B Letter from Fiona Macleod to William Butler Yeats, September 1899

When Macleod says “my friend’s” or “his” she is referring to Sharp.

“Again, I must tell you that all the formative and expressional as well as nearly all the visionary power is my friend’s. In a sense only his is the passive part; but it is the allegory of the match, the wind, and the torch. Everything is in the torch in readiness, and, as you know, there is nothing in itself in the match. But there is the mysterious latency of fire between them: in that latent fire of love — the little touch of silent igneous potency at the end of the match. Well, the match comes to the torch, or the torch to the match — and, in what these symbolize, one adds spiritual affinity as a factor — and all at once flame is born. The torch says all is due to the match. The match knows that the flame is not hers, but lies in that mystery of thitherto unawakened love, suddenly brought into being by contact. But beyond both is the wind, the spiritual air. Out of the unseen world it fans the flame. In that mysterious air, both the match and the torch hear strange voices. But the match is now part of the torch, lost in him, lost in that flame. Her small still voice speaks in the mind and spirit of the torch, sometimes guiding, sometimes inspiring, out of the deep mysterious intimacies of love and passion. That which is born of both, the flame, is subject to neither — but is the property of the torch. The air which came at the union of both is sometimes called Memory, sometimes Art, sometimes Genius, sometimes Imagination, sometimes Life, sometimes the Spirit. It is all. But, before that flame, people wonder and admire. Most wonder only at the torch. A few look for the match beyond the torch, and, finding her, are apt to attribute to her that which is not her’s save as a spiritual dynamic agent. Now and then that match may also have *in petto* the qualities of the torch — particularly memory and vision: and so can stimulate and amplify the imaginative life of the torch. But the torch is at once the passive, the formative, the mnemonic and the artistically and

imaginatively creative force. He knows that in one sense he would be flameless — or at least without that ideal blend of the white flame and the red — without the match: and he knows that the flame is the offspring of both, and that the wind has many airs in it, and that one of the most potent of these under-airs is that which blows from the life and mind and soul of the ‘match’ — but in his heart he knows that, to all others, he and he alone is the flame, his alone both the visionary, the formative, and the expressional. Do you understand? Read — copy what you will, as apart from me — and destroy this. Of late the ‘match’ is more than ever simply a hidden flame in the mind of the ‘torch’.

When I add that the match never saw or heard a line of “Honey of the Wild Bees” (which you admire so much) till after written, you will understand better.”

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