The representation of the Highlands by the “twilight Celtic": ideology and cultural synecdoche in William Sharp / Fiona Macleod

Philippe Laplace

The representation of the Highlands by the “Celtic twilight”: ideology and cultural synecdoche in William Sharp / Fiona Macleod

Miss Fiona Macleod is the name most intimately connected with this movement, with this Celtic revival, as the newspapers say. (…) This book [Fiona Macleod, *The Laughter of Peterkin,* Edinburgh, 1897] cannot fail to help the union of feelings that we wish to create between the Irish and Scottish Celts, by reminding them both of their origins similar and these treasures of heroic legends. A community of feelings, not only between these two peoples, but also with the Welsh Celts, will perhaps be one of the decisive results of the "Celtic Movement", and many social, political, as well as literary events can derive [1]

The romanticism exercised by the Highlands and their Celtic roots was evident from Macpherson and his "pseudo translations" of Ossian. The search for an identity able to unite the country passed through these regions and the discovery, or the creation, of a mythical past: the Highlands and the Islands had been promoted as the cultural synecdoche of Scotland [2] **. That is to say that their particularities and their symbolism were used to represent Scotland and thus give the nation Scottish culture an autonomous and different character from their neighbors to the south. But behind the Scottish “Celtic Twilight” and its most notorious representative, William Sharp – aka Fiona Macleod, hides other aspirations that go beyond those sketched out by Macpherson in his introductions to Ossian's poems. We will therefore consider the main Scottish representative of this movement and we will see how radically his writings differ from those of his predecessors as to the ideology of the representation of the Highlands and the Islands. But let's talk first of the origins of the movement and place it in the cultural context of the end of the 19 ninth century before considering Macleod, its contradictions and its purposes literary and cultural.**

Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold played a fundamental role in the revival of interest for Celtic literature. They attributed to him, in fact, the pledge of respectability which lacked thanks to a critical article (published in 1854) and a series of lectures at the university of Oxford in 1867 [3] **. Arnold thus justified his research in the prolegomena of his communication: “What the French call the *science of origins* (…) is very incomplete without a thorough critical account of the Celts, and their genius, language,**

---

1 **William Butler Yeats, “The Celtic movement: Fiona Macleod”, in, *Free Ireland,* Organ of the Irish colony in Paris, April 1898,** 2nd **year, n° 4, p. 1**

2 **Philippe Laplace, “The institution of the Gaelic imaginary corpus in Scottish literature: from Macpherson to Scott”, in, *Scottish Studies,* 6, winter 1999-2000, pp. 129-45**

and literature »[4]. Arnold, whose influence was felt on a whole generation of intellectuals in Great Britain, continued Renan's theories concerning the Celtic temper brought to grief and inclined to lament the passing of an age Golden. Characteristics that the writers of the "Celtic Twilight", Macleod in first, were not left out to exploit:

> **Ah, that saying! *[Tha mi Dubhachas! –I have the gloom]* How often I have heard it in the remote Isles! "The Gloom". It is not grievance, nor any common sorrow, nor that deep despondency of weariness that comes of accomplished things too soon, too literally fulfilled. But it is akin to each of these, and involves each. It is, rather, the unconscious knowledge of the lamentation of a race, the unknowing surety of an inheritance of woe .[5]**

This nostalgic touch and the Celtic imaginary corpus were then detected, or rather imagined, in other fields of artistic activity. Taking up Arnold's premises, a Canadian-born critic was ecstatic over the Celtic character of the paintings of Burne-Jones and Pre-Raphaelite artists. Although born in Birmingham, the surname of the painter indicated a Welsh origin and this did not fail to appear in his paintings. The Celtic touch detected by Arnold in the literary works was therefore also discernible in Pre-Raphaelite works:

> **Burne-Jones, deriving his impulse in large part from Rossetti, yet shows us Celticism in its essential British -that is to say Cymric- development. (...) An Arthurian uncertainty envelops the scene. The touch of a wizard has made all things suffer a strange but beautiful change. Costumes and architecture are of no period in particular, save 'once upon a time'; of no country one can specify, save of Celtic fa[6]**

According to the critic, who moreover assiduously frequented the Rossetti group in London in which Yeats and, more briefly, Sharp evolved, the movements British aesthetics enjoyed a sentimental aura unknown to the cold and methodical "Teuton art". The Pre-Raphaelites were not content only with describe and represent a scene: their Celtic touch allowed them to add mystery and mysticism in order to immerse the spectators in a past now disappeared from the chronicles. The Celts, despite all the contempt which Samuel Johnson had brought to their descriptions, thus became "frequentable" people: they participated in Anglo-Saxon characteristics, differentiating them from the cold and meticulous peoples

---

3 **Ernest Renan, "The poetry of the Celtic races", in, —** ***Œuvres Complètes,*** **vol 2, Paris, 1948, pp. 252-301; Matthew Arnold, "On the Study of Celtic Literature" in, —** ***The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold,*** **vol. 3, Ann Arbor, 1962, p. 291-395**

4 **Matthew Arnold, "On the Study of Celtic Literature" in, — ,** ***The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, op. cit.,*** **p. 299**

5 **Fiona Macleod, "From Iona", in, — ,** ***The Sin-Eater; the Washer of the Ford and other legendary moralities,*** **the Works of 'Fiona Macleod', vol. 2, London, 1927, p. 5**

6 **Grant Allen, "The Celt in English Art,"** ***The Fortnightly Review,*** **vol. 55, 1/2/1891, p. 274-5**

"Teutons", thus reinforcing the feelings of difference and condescension that distinguished the Victorian period in Britain.

The enthusiasm aroused in academic and artistic circles by Arnold and the pre-Raphaelites was essential to the beginning of the "Celtic Twilight" in literature. The nostalgic evocation of a past that has now disappeared and the memory or the creation of myths became the keystone of the writers of this movement. Just like the pre-Raphaelites, they took advantage of all the Celtic mythopoetics in order to recover this " Golden age ". In Ireland, it was Yeats who with "The Wanderings of Oisin" (1889) then "The Rose" (1893) [7], had been presented as the spokesperson for a current disdainfully dubbed "cultic twalette" by Joyce [8]. Note also that Yeats, imitated in this by Macleod, disavowed the use of the term "movement", "school", "current" or "Renaissance". This vocabulary in no way reflected the individual aspirations of the artists who worked on the same theme and therefore had to be used with caution. Macleod thus justified his work and the objective purely literary which he wished to achieve: "I resent too close identification with the so-called Celtic revival. If my work is to depend solely on its Gaelic connection, then let it go, as go it must. My work must be beautiful in itself" [9]. This therefore allows us to see from the outset that she did not wish to situate herself in the frame which for a very long time has been attributed to it by critics and this also obliges us to redefining Scottish “Celtic Twilight” and the symbolism that Macleod bestows in the Highlands and the Islands.

It was William Black (1841-98) who can be considered one of the initiators of the movement in Scotland. His novels take place in the tortured and grandiose landscape of Highlands. But Macleod's vision and depth lack this novelist popular: his novels are beautiful tourist brochures, with fairly simple ones whose main theme is exile and the sentimental memories kept by Highlands those who left them. He was very successful in the United States and is undoubtedly, of all the writers of the Scottish "Celtic Twilight", the one who can

---

7 William Butler Yeats, “The Wanderings of Oisin”; “The Rose” in, — 1990, , *The Poems*, London, pp. 1-32; *ibid.,* pp. 52-72

8 JA Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory,* London, 1992, p. 127

9 Letter to Mrs January, 1894. Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir,* vol. 2, London, 1912, p. 12

more easily be related to the novelists of the Kailyard because of the tone, style and international success he enjoys.

If the Scottish "Celtic Twilight" never reached the same extent as in Ireland, this is, in addition to the socio-political situation, due to the genius and prestige of Yeats. Macleod, the most notorious Scottish cantor, does not possess the same talent as his counterpart Irish. Macleod is the pseudonym of a Scottish writer and art critic born William Sharp in Paisley in 1855 and who, according to a friend of his, spoke only a few words of Gaelic [10]. The choice of a female pseudonym evokes a literary hoax in the purest Scottish tradition, one thinks here of Macpherson or the Sobieski brothers or again to the “Great unknown”. We can only speculate on the reasons which pushed Sharp to literary transsexualism or what this same friend had described as a "romantic camouflage" [11] : maybe it was to recover this soul feminine that Renan and Arnold had glorified in their respective writings and had presented as fundamental to the Celtic temperament. Maybe it was a reaction towards Yeats whose first heralds were male mythical figures (Fionn, Cuchulain). Perhaps this was the height of heteronymy for a writer fond of this kind of process: his wife later confessed that he had signed within seven different names all the compositions of the first and only number of *The Pagan Review* he edited [12] .

But Sharp nevertheless confided that he felt torn between two personalities from his most young age, a female and a male, and the appropriation of a female pseudonym allowed him to realize at his level the ambition of Dr. Jekyll, that is to say to manage to separate his personality into two distinct parts. More seriously, leads indicate that it is to the translator Edith Wingate Rinder that we must turn. The first novel by Macleod, *Pharais* (1894), is dedicated to him and his influence is essential for the conception of Sharp's literary ambitions [13]. Met in Rome in the years 1890, she introduced Sharp to Maeterlinck and the Belgian Renaissance movement of 1880s. Sharp wrote several articles on Belgian literature and lived there without anyone doubt a source of inspiration, both at the poetic level – just like Yeats for whom the Symbolists were an obvious literary and ideological influence: a small country

---

10 Ernest Rhys, *Everyman Remembers,* London & Toronto, 1931, p. 80

11 *ibid.,* p. 80

12 This is what Elizabeth Sharp indicates in a dedication: National Library of Scotland, Ms 8786

shared between several languages and with neighbors politically and economically much more powerful. Sharp's stays in Italy also inspired him: he confessed great admiration for Gabriele D'Annunzio, an author who declared himself an esthete and whose the ambition was to work for the rediscovery of a Latin aestheticism that society modern had perverted, a nostalgia and a purpose that can be compared to those of the "Celtic Twilight". Rich in his influences, he now only had to place them in a Scottish context.

Ireland obviously offered an important cultural and literary model for Scottish writers. Sharp knew Yeats because they had evolved in the same intellectual circles in London and the two men shared many interests and points in common, even if their first meeting did not leave a very good memory at Yeats [14]. **But he however reports being impressed by the powers of Sharp's medium: the two men shared a passion for the occult and, although sure, mythology. Yeats, on the other hand, was unaware of Macleod's true identity as in testifies to the letters he addressed to her for several years in which he congratulated on his style. Likewise the reviews he granted him which, even if they take an annoyed turn at the end, remain no less complimentary.**

It was Patrick Geddes who, with his review *The Evergreen,* gave the "Twilight Celtic" Scottish and Macleod the influence they needed to develop. *The Evergreen* is in keeping with the spirit of "fin de siècle" and Geddes magazines defines in these terms the literary and artistic objectives of the writers and artists who participated in the dissemination of what he called the "Celtic renaissance":

> **Among the Local and National Traditions which are interesting many Scotsmen to-day, the present issue of the *Evergreen* is particularly concerned with two. These are the Celtic Renascence, now incipient alike in Literature and Art, and the revival and development of the old Continental sympathies of Scotland –the development of the newer but increasing sympathies of England** [15]

The objective was therefore clearly international and cosmopolitan. This is a point essential ideology which distinguishes the Scottish movement and which, in a way, breaks and betrays the ideological ambitions that Macpherson builds in his introductions to Ossian's poems: rather than looking only to the

---

13 **Elizabeth Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir,* vol. 2, *op. cit.,* p. 5**

14 **Letter to Katherine Tynan, 1/7/1887. Allan Wade, (ed), *The Letters of WB Yeats,* London, 1954, pp. 42-3**

15 **"Prefatory Note," *The Evergreen ,* Fall 1895, p. 8**

Highlands and Islands in order to promote a certain image of Scotland and to resume thus the cultural synecdoche that he had defined, Geddes and his collaborators wish turn to the Highlands and the Islands for another, more aesthetic purpose whether ideological or political. Tensions between England and the Celtic countries must also be forgotten, and Macleod's position on the non-politicization of the Celtic movement were the source of much tension and dissension. Those these were exacerbated by the publication of an article entitled "Celtic" in 1900 in *The Contemporary Review* 16. Attacked from all sides, Macleod republished this article in his work *The Winged Destiny* (1904) preceded this time by a long prologue which makes it possible to justify his sometimes violently critical positions with regard to certain opinions within the "Celtic Renaissance" and to redefine its attitude anti-partisan. This article caused a stir when it came out because, according to Macleod, it was not necessary not only abandon the 'Celtic' argument in political discourse, but it was necessary also, and this was certainly unacceptable to many readers, abandoning the qualifier "Celtic" to distinguish the stylistic particularity of a literary work; he were only elements, only a vision of the world influenced by an education and traditions that belonged to a very specific locality. The supremacy of Celtic literature, from the Mabinogion to the Book of Kells, was also severely attacked by Macleod who advocated a commitment that many never forgave him:

> **When I hear that "only a Celt" could have written this or that passage of emotion or description, I am become impatient of these parrot-cries, for I remember that if all Celtic literature were to disappear, the world would not be so impoverished as by the loss of English literature, or French literature, or that of Rome or of Greece. But above all else it is time that a prevalent pseudo-nationalism should be dissuaded. I am proud to be a Highlander, but I would not side with those who would "set the heather on fire". If I were Irish, I would be proud, but I would not lower my pride by marrying it to a ceaseless ill-will, an irreconcilable hate, for there can be a nobler pride in unvanquished acquiescence than in futile revolt. I would be proud if I were Welsh, but I would not refuse to learn English, or to mix with English as equals. And proud as I might be to be Highland, or Scottish, or Irish, or Welsh, or English, I would be more proud to be British –for there at last, we have a bond to unite us all, and to give us space for every ideal, whether communal or individual, whether national or spiritual. As for literature, there is, for us all, only English literature. All else is provincial or dialetic** 17

We will see later the contradictions concerning the Highlands and the Celts in the Macleod/Sharp speech, but one thing is certain: Macleod and Geddes share the same ambitions: to create a movement which is not only regional but national while standing out from the nationalist temptation in the political sense of term. They want to move towards cosmopolitanism and promote the particularities of

---

16 **Fiona Macleod, "Celtic", *The Contemporary Review* , flight. 77, no. 413, May 1900, pp. 669-76**
17 **Fiona Macleod, *The Winged Destiny; Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael ;* The Works of 'Fiona Macleod', vol. 5, *op. cit.,* pp. 195-6**

Scottish literature within a group of European literatures. Fiona Macleod contradicts, however, William Sharp who, in the introduction to *Lyra Celtica,* attributes by example a Celtic origin to the Brontë sisters, to Milton, to Shakespeare and even to Keats, an origin which, according to him, is revealed and highlighted by their writing and the patterns that they use. So Sharp and Macleod sort of pass the buck and thus contribute to a debate of ideas within this group, the comments of one nourishing those of the other.

***The Evergreen* opened its columns to many writers or illustrators whose tone, the subject or the style unmistakably correspond to what Yeats had encouraged at the the beginning of his career. In addition to authors whose name has not remained in posterity (Gabriel Setoun, Riccardo Stephens, Margaret Thomson, Philip Perceval Graves), let us also mention well-known Irish writers such as Douglas Hyde and Standish O'Grady as well as of course Edith Wingate-Rinder who translated Breton legends into English** [18]. **All these authors thus contribute to the pan-Celticism of this journal, a state of mind of the "Celtitude" denied by Yeats at the end of the nineteenth century and by the authors of Irish "Celtic Twilight": The Political Implications Associated with Ireland cannot, according to them, be encumbered with Scots, Welsh or Bretons. It is true that the politico-economic situation of the Highlands and Scotland had little to do to do with that of Ireland and Yeats incidentally pointed this out to Macleod after the release from "Celtic": "To some extent I have an advantage over you in having a very fierce nation to write for. I have to make everything very hard and clear, as it were"** [19]**.**

But for Macleod and Geddes, the Islands and the Highlands must be considered as the soil from which another symbolist poetics can emerge, imbued with all the traditions, myths and ways of life of the Gaelic populations. The tone of editorials by Geddes and subsequent essays written by Macleod emphasize the need not to isolate the Celtic world, but also not to reject and even to turn to continental and English influences.

---

[18] **Douglas Hyde, "From the Irish-Gaelic of Tadhg Gaolach O Suilliobhain", *The Evergreen,* summer 1896, pp. , "Christmas Alms," *ibid.,* Winter 1896-97, pp. 91-5. Standish O'Grady, "Dermot Spring", 36-7; — *ibid.,* winter 1896-97, pp. 101-5. Edith Wingate Rinder, "Amel and Penhor," *ibid.,* Fall 1895, pp. 93-8; — , "Telen Rumengol", *ibid.,* summer 1896, pp. 90-7; , "Sant Efflamm and King Arthur", *ibid.,* winter 1896-97, pp. 69-74**

[19] **Letter to Fiona Macleod, November 1901, Allan Wade, (ed), *The Letters of WB Yeats, op. cit.,* p. 358**

Macleod goes even further, the Islands and the Highlands are not the only representation Gaels and Celts in Scotland. He maintains that the Celtic heritage is still made felt in Edinburgh or Aberdeen: the Celtic elements of the country cannot be reduced to the only geographical area defined by the "Highland line" [20]**. Macleod thus exceeds in Macpherson's concept and establishes that the cultural synecdoche no longer has reason for being, since the whole of Scotland must be considered in its Celtic peculiarities. Let us recall here that Sharp was originally from the Lowlands and that he probably spent more time in Rome and Sicily during his lifetime than in the Highlands and the Islands.**

Macleod has no favorite place in the Highlands. She indistinctly evokes the entire west coast. But it is on the other hand the islands, and among them more particularly Iona, which become the mystical and magical place where his stories take place. Crossing by ferry to reach Scotland is sometimes strewn with pitfalls and this helps certain to the isolation of the island and participates in its presentation as the eternal place which knew keep legends and ways of life intact, the receptacle where we can rediscover ancestral traditions. In his short stories, the smuggler often has a role essential: the island being cut off from the land by an arm of the sea, it is he who makes the link between two worlds, it is he who informs the traveler about the changes and habits of the island where he may be going after a long absence. Nature is there too omnipresent and spared from the ravages of man. Macleod presents under aspects Virgilians this generous nature which knows how to be welcoming and benevolent for who loves and respects her. Sharp had always denounced the inhumanity of cities and the excessive urbanization that industrialization had brought about during the period victorian. Just as the Scottish Kailyard does for the Lowlands, the movement Celtic is also guilty of an idyllic and childish representation of the Highlands and He is. If the Kailyarders used the scots to give a touch of local color to their stories, Macleod punctuates his prose with interjections or Gaelic expressions that he does not sometimes doesn't bother to translate or explain. It is this majestic setting and perfect, with this imposing Nature and these ancestral traditions, which is witness to the martyrdom of a downtrodden population. Macleod takes up here the hypotheses of Renan and d'Arnold and their description of an "afflicted and losing race", which, conscious of its fall, would like to remind everyone of the richness of its cultural heritage before it

---

20 **William Sharp, "Introduction," in, Elizabeth Sharp, (ed),** ***Lyra Celtica; An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry,*** **Edinburgh, 1896, p.** XXV

completely disappear. And it is in fact this dejection which gives its power to Celtic voices: “The secret of the Celtic muse is veiled in tears. The poetry of the Gael is the poetry of sorrow” 21. But all this is done for a poetic purpose and not ideological.

Omnipresent themes in his stories, and that his pseudonym allows him a priori to develop without fear of being accused of ignoring the subject, are pregnancy and childbirth. The first lines of the first novel he published under his pseudonym, *Pharais,* indeed presents us with a pregnant woman who is waiting with looking forward to her husband's return from Glasgow. In his second novel, Macleod even wrote, and this can only appear as self-criticism when one knows the true identity of the one Yeats nicknamed: "the beautiful inspired woman living in remote islands » [22] :

> Passing strange, passing strange, this mystery of motherhood over which he [Alan] brooded obscurely. And, truly, who can know the long, bitter labor of the spirit, as well as the pangs of the body, which many women endure – except just such a woman, suffering in just that way? Can any man know? Hardly can it be so [23] .

The Irish poet Katherine Tynan had even declared herself embarrassed by the abundance of these scenes in Macleod's work and by the depressing and morbid side they [24]. This aspect obviously contributes to reinforce the theme of a lost civilization, of a people without a future, a negative vision that Macleod, like all the writers who, directly or indirectly, are associated with the "Twilight Celtic”, used extensively in his work. Parallel to this theme of childbirth, Macleod repeatedly made use of another, even more murky and pessimistic and that this time it is not possible to recover for ideological purposes: that of the hereditary madness that overwhelms a family. Many of his novels feature thus characters suffering from a mysterious disease which is transmitted from father to son. Macleod obviously takes the opportunity to compensate for this with what is undoubtedly the central theme of his stories: the supernatural and the famous double sight so celebrated by the Highland writers. A follower of theosophy, Sharp devoted much time to describe the occult phenomena of clairvoyance in the writings of Macleod. It is rare to

---

21 Fiona Macleod, “The Four Winds of Eirinn”, in, — 22 , *The Winged Destiny, op. cit.,* p. 290
William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs; Autobiographies – First Draft Journal,* London, 1972, p. 105
23 Fiona Macleod, *The Mountain Lovers,* in, — *Pharais ; The Mountain Lovers, op. cit.,* p. 390
24 Katherine Tynan, “William Sharp & Fiona Macleod,” *Fortnightly Review,* vol. 76, no. 471, 1/3/1906, pp. 571-2

find a single short story in which this theme is not present, in one way or another, or even a single critical essay that does not refer to these phenomena occult which according to him are the foundation of the spiritual life of the inhabitants of the Highlands. But people with this double sight paint pictures of the future very sad when they are called upon: deaths and disappearances of loved ones, tragedies and calamities for the community.

This writing obviously contributes to give more weight to the prophetic tone adopted by Macleod who, in his critical essays, often assumes the attributes of a medium, of a prophetess capable of predicting the future of the Celts and others in a peremptory. Macleod presents his novels and short stories as "legendary moralities" and this obviously participates in the prophetic angle and dialectic to which he was attached. He wanted his writings to take another dimension, far from the Celtic mists, to become reminders and warnings for the cultural future not only of the Highlands but also of England [25]**.**

Macleod evokes theosophy as one of the foundations of the populations of the Highlands and especially islands: he emphasizes that this gives them even more strength to the construction of myths. This vision is obviously part of the concept of "Great memory" by Yeats, a collective unconscious whose artists would be the means of expression. This also corresponds to the perspectives of the symbolists and decadents late nineteenth century. Sharp nevertheless defines a spiritual path somewhat different for his alter ego: he lends him a "Roman Catholic" confession . take this opportunity to denounce the Reformation and to wish a return to the old spiritual values. The Calvinists made it more difficult to access the legends and perverted the cultural development of Scotland in general and the Highlands in particular :

> **I do not think any one who has not lived intimately in the Highlands can realize the extent to which the blight of Calvinism has fallen upon the people, clouding the spirit, stultifying the mind, taking away all joyousness and light-hearted gaiety, laying a ban upon music even, upon songs, making laughter as rare as a clansman landlord, causing a sad gloom as common as a ruined croft** [27]

---

25 **Fiona Macleod, *The Dominion of Dreams; Under the Dark Star,* The Works of Fiona Macleod, vol. 3, *op. cit.,* p. 86**
26 **Katherine Tynan, "William Sharp & Fiona Macleod", *Fortnightly Review, op. cit.,* p. 578**
27 **Fiona Macleod, "The Gael and his heritage", in, — , *The Winged Destiny, op. cit.,* p. 235**

Macleod's attitude is therefore, like Sharp's ambivalent personality, subject to questioning. His approach and his reasoning were marked by equivocation and contradiction. She had never hidden her fascination for the roots of Scotland and had insisted, like Yeats, on the need to update Celtic legends and traditions. But she distanced herself from any involvement. policy and had made a point of denouncing those who insisted on the militancy that this Celtic revival. According to her, it was necessary to keep the Celtic dynamic in the only field where it deserved to be exercised, that is to say in the cultural and literary so that it participates in the Weltliteratur dear to Goethe [28] **. His brief stay at London with the friends of the Rossetti, including Yeats and the Pre-Raphaelites, was essential for the direction his career took. By emphasizing the discovery of the cultural past and traditional of the Highlands, it obviously adopts elements of the rhetoric of Macpherson, for whom he had great admiration** [29]. **But this is more than a ground from which he develops his aesthetic considerations than a commitment ideological for the Highlands or even Scotland. He obviously borrows from Arnold and to Renan the principles of Celtic defeatism and the need to recognize this heritage cultural as well as feminine character of the Celts, but he makes it the essence of his writing. Finally Yeats brings him the romanticism and the mysticism which come to complete table. But Macleod goes a little further: if he easily assimilates all these elements, it causes them to lose the ideological and political inspirations of their authors to consider them with the eye of an aesthete. A tireless cosmopolitan, the Highlands above all allow him to give free rein to his poetics. His message thus has a strangely optimistic conclusion that goes against what many professed: the disappearance of the Celtic civilization is according to him only one necessary stage and takes part in the enrichment and development of other cultures, in particular Anglo-Celtic: the culture will thus be reborn from these ashes:**

But this apparition of a passing race is no more than the fulfillment of a glorious resurrection before our very eyes. For the genius of the Celtic race stands out now with averted torch, and the light of it is a glory before the eyes, and the flame of it is blown into the hearts of the stronger people. The Celt fades, but his spirit rises in the heart and the mind of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of generations to come [30]

---

[28] ***ibid.,*** **pp. 165-6**

[29] **Elizabeth Sharp, (ed),** ***Lyra Celtica, op. cit.,*** **pp.** XXXI-XXXII ; **William Sharp, (ed),** ***The Poems of Ossian,*** **Edinburgh, 1926, pp.** XXIII-XXIV

[30] **Fiona Macleod, "Iona," in, — , *The Divine Adventure, op. cit.,* p. 246**

Like Yeats, Macleod was therefore of course keen to distance himself from the "Celtic school" in which he had been granted a preponderant position; he then insisted on the need to first consider these writers in the English context which was theirs:

When I hear, therefore, of this or that writer as a Celtic writer, I wonder if the term is not apt to be misleading. An English writer is meant, who in person happens to be an Irish Gael, or Highland, or Welsh" 31. "Celtic" therefore means more than a location geographical for Macleod: he sees in it an aesthetic attitude marked by the desire occult of a return to origins, because it is, according to him, the culture that has best preserved these primitive attributes, this contact with Nature and with the elements, this link with the forces mystics. Yeats also has an annoyed reaction and denounces the trampling of some Irish authors who, twenty-five years after "The Wanderings of Oisin", remain still frozen in the style and discourse he had forged. Unlike him, who created a universe but who knew how to stand out from it, some are still chimerically compartmentalized in the archaic and secure world of myths, legends and popular stories:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked 32

Sharp therefore manages to separate the pragmatic critique of *The Winged Destiny* from the sentimental novelist. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer applauded the insight into Macleod's judgment, regretting, however, that she had not rather exercised at his expense long before: "Fiona Macleod has moments of critical insight and lucidity when she will urge for you the very things which you may wish to urge against herself" 33. Macleod had no time to say more about his literary positions and cultural: Sharp died in 1905 and the true identity of Miss Fiona Macleod was announced to the literary world shortly thereafter. Besides its falsification, critics never forgave him his inconsistencies and became more and more bitter during and after the First World War: he was accused of having taken refuge within the framework of the

---

31 Fiona Macleod, "Celtic", in, — 32 , *The Winged Destiny, op. cit.,* pp. 179-80
William Butler Yeats, "A Coat", in, — 33 *The* , *The Poems, op. cit.,* p. 178
Times literary Supplement, 21/10/1904, p. 319

"Celtic Twilight", a haven of peace far removed from the reality of the Highlands, and having taken pleasure in kitsch romanticism and sentimentalism in bad taste. All like the Pre-Raphaelite painters who wanted to return to a more primitive, simple and devoid of artifice and ornament, somehow returning to that age of gold before Raphaël, Fiona Macleod wanted to rediscover this illustrious past. It is therefore also the reason for the nostalgia of the origins which animates her and pushes her to choose the Highlands as the place of his stories. The feminine soul that Sharp endorses allows her more easily to penetrate the intimate secrets of the Gaelic society of the Highlands and he is.

A complex character, it is therefore also and above all towards the theme of the mask, dear to writers of the end of the nineteenth century and in particular to Yeats, whom it is necessary to turn to try to understand it and, in order to conceive of its ambiguous relations with the Highlands is the reason for the nostalgia of the origins that must be considered. But a thing is certain: despite all its contradictions, Macleod rejected the narrow framework in which he had locked himself up and which he represented for many. Unlike Yeats, he did not however have time to evolve towards another type of writing: he will remain thus forever assigned to the Scottish "Celtic Twilight" movement.

Philippe Laplace
University of Franche-Comte