The mysticism of William Sharp (1855-1905) and the Celtic renascence: Spanish Carmelite and symbolist influences


Abstract

This thesis focuses on the mysticism that shaped the life and work of William Sharp and the Celtic Renascence. 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 Sharp's 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 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 in Sharp's writing as 'Fiona Macleod' in particular the Dark Night Spirituality of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila's 'The 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 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 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.
William Sharp 1855 – 1905 was a Scottish writer, of poetry and literary biography in particular, who from 1893 wrote also as Fiona MacLeod, a pseudonym kept almost secret during his lifetime. Sharp was also an editor of the poetry of Ossian, Walter Scott, Matthew Arnold, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Eugene Lee Hamilton, and he was a friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Butler Yeats, and many others. William Sharp was also a member of The Golden Dawn.

William Sharp was born in Paisley and educated at Glasgow Academy and the University of Glasgow, which he attended 1871-1872 without completing a degree. In 1872 he contracted typhoid. During 1874-5 he worked in a Glasgow law office. His first volumes of poetry, influenced by the symbolism of William Blake and Irish folklore and myth, are more romantic and dreamlike than his later work, which is generally more highly regarded. Composed in 1900, Yeats's influential essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" offers an extended definition of symbolism and a meditation on the nature of poetry in general. 'The Symbolism of Poetry'.

Many profound writers have in the last few years sought for a philosophy of poetry in the doctrine of symbolism, and how even in countries where it is almost scandalous to seek for any philosophy of poetry, new writers are following them in their search. Spanish Carmelite and Symbolist Influences. Master of Theology Department of Theology and Religious Studies. University of Glasgow c.Master of Theology Department of Theology and Religious Studies. University of Glasgow c. MTh Thesis. The Mysticism of William Sharp (1855-1905) and the Celtic Renascence: Spanish Carmelite and Symbolist Influences. Acknowledgements. Abstract. Photos of Figures of the Celtic Renascence. 1. introduction: setting the scene. a. William Sharp 1855-1905: An Overview. As a key figure of the Celtic Renascence 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.