de genere

Rivista di studi letterari, postcoloniali e di genere
Journal of Literary, Postcolonial and Gender Studies

http://www.degenere-journal.it/
ISSN 2465-2415

P.B. Shelley's *Fin-de-Siècle* Reception in Scotland: The Case of William Sharp/Fiona Macleod

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This paper aims to explore the reception of P.B. Shelley in *fin-de-siècle* Scotland, with regard to the work of William Sharp (1855–1905). Firstly, it will compare his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1887) with other existing biographies in order to evaluate its degree of reliability: indeed, as Theresa Kelley has pointed out, despite a great deal of information, many biographies of Shelley are unreliable, such as those by Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1858) and Edward John Trelawny (1858, revised and expanded in 1878). Secondly, this study will look at how the work of P.B. Shelley influenced Sharp's oeuvre: specifically, it will focus on *The Washer of the Ford and Other Legendary Moralities*, published in 1896 under the female pseudonym of Fiona Macleod. In this respect, I will consider the intertextual references to P.B. Shelley (e.g. *On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery*, 1819) as well as the ways in which the subject matter challenged common assumptions about the relationship between gender and genre: as Thomas Janvier stated soon after its publication, *The Washer of the Ford* was "not impossible for a woman to write, but unlikely".

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Autopsy or Portrait? Notes on the Metaphorics of Biography

According to Hermione Lee, there are two recurrent metaphors associated with the genre of biography: autopsy and portrait. The former explicitly refers to the medical setting where the forensic examination takes place, allowing the doctor to scrutinise the dead body: in this case, writing a biography is seen as an investigation which aims to explain "what may have seemed obscure, strange, or inexplicable" (Lee 2009, 1); in so doing, this metaphor seems to substantially reduce the margin of error in reconstructing someone's life, since it tends to present the biographer as the one who actually solves "the case". The latter, instead, hints at the possibility of focusing on specific aspects, thus rejecting the need to produce a fully-comprehensive report: needless to say, the image of the portrait pairs with "flattery, idealization, flatness, inaccuracy, distortion" (Lee 2009, 3) because of the subjective criteria the author may have applied in selecting the necessary information. This also leads to another diatribe between account and story: if the autopsy is the exact presentation of facts (i.e. account), then the portrait is a form of narrative (i.e. story) where aesthetic and ethical implications seem to commingle.

In the United Kingdom, during the long nineteenth century, this debate grew to enormous proportions due to the huge number of biographies – be they real or fictitious[1] – published, which was paralleled by a theoretical reflection on the very nature of the genre. Indeed, Thomas Carlyle's philosophy of world history – famously articulated in his series of lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1850) – looks at the relationship between history and individual biography. Specifically, in "Lecture 6. The Hero as King", Carlyle criticises the misleading interpretation of Oliver Cromwell's Speeches in biographical writings about him: "The Histories and Biographies written of this Cromwell, written in shallow sceptical generations that could not know or conceive of a deep believing man, are far more *obscure* than Cromwell's Speeches" (Carlyle 2013, 432, italics in the original). Following Carlyle, Cromwell's biographies do not offer a straightforward introduction to – or an account of – his life, but they hermeneutically reflect upon his life and texts, up to the point that the reader will find "a real *speech* lying imprisoned in these broken rude tortuous utterances" (432, italics in the original). And yet, besides the risk of what we might define as "hermeneutic saturation", Carlyle does believe that the biographer's task is to discern a pattern in the biographee's life, as Margaret Stonyk has rightly pointed out: "Biography and the history of which it forms a part are nothing until the 'seeing eye' of the biographer sorts the distracting material details" (Stonyk 1984, 100). This ambiguous feeling towards the pleasure and perils of the genre is even more marked later in his life: before his death, even though Carlyle "expressed a desire in his will that of him no biography should be written" (Froude 1979, 77), he entrusted his papers to John Anthony Froude because "since a 'Life' of him there would certainly be, he wished it to be as authentic as possible" (Froude 1979, 78).

In 1883, in what seems to be a response to Froude's publication of *Life of Carlyle* (1882; 1884), which sparked several controversies "for making unauthorized use of private papers" (Lee 2009, 70), Margaret Oliphant published – in *The Contemporary Review* – an essay entitled "The Ethics of Biography", where she addresses the biographer as someone who "holds an office of high trust and responsibility" (Oliphant 1883, 83) in making sure the text – as opposed to Froude's – does not "give an erroneous impression of any man, living or dead, to the mind of his country and generation"

[1] As Nigel Hamilton states: "Such works ranged from Dickens' *David Copperfield* to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, from Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Gaskell's *Mary Barton*" (Hamilton 2007, 116).

(Oliphant 1883, 84). Nevertheless, Oliphant is aware that "a mere record of facts will not satisfy either the reader or the conditions under which such a writer ought to work" (Oliphant 1883, 83): that is to say, biography should not be seen as a mere chronological and impersonal record of someone's life, but as a portrait whose "differing surfaces and textures" (Oliphant 1883, 83) are to be cherished.

An opinion differing quite starkly from Carlyle's and Oliphant's is that of the champion of nineteenth-century biography, Leslie Stephen. In his 1893 essay "Biography", published in the *National Review*, he introduces the metaphor of the telephone: "A biographer [...] must put us in direct communication with the man himself; not tell us simply where he was or what he was seen to do, but put him at one end of a literary telephone and the reader at the other. The author should, as often as possible, be merely the conducting wire" (Stephen 1893–1894, 180). This metaphor is clearly in line with the autopsy metaphor, since the biographer's agency is reduced to accounting for the biographee's life only, thus opening up for a kind of biographical materialism which rejects hermeneutic approaches to the subject matter. As Trev Lynn Broughton has pointed out, for Stephen writing a biography "is a process of disciplining both the materials at hand and the biographer himself" (Broughton 1999, 43), by drawing on "some of the most powerful normative discourses of the day: on patriotism, realism and manliness" (Broughton 1999, 41).

In sum, the debate around the very definition of biography as a genre in the long nineteenth century, as we have seen through a selection of the (many) scholars and authors that delved into this *querelle*, is moulded upon two strays of metaphors which, nevertheless, stand side by side in a perpetual reverberation so as to give way – at the British *fin de siècle* – to a Hegelian dialectic, whereby thesis (i.e. Stephen's telephone metaphor) and antithesis (i.e. Carlyle's hermeneutic saturation) are solved via a synthesis, that is brilliantly represented by Oliphant's portrait metaphor and its (many) surfaces and textures, which neither diminish nor alter the quality and the truthfulness of the biography.

"A condensation of all really important material": William Sharp's Portrait of P.B. Shelley

When presenting the life and biographies of Shelley, in the by-now-canonical *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley* (2006), Theresa Kelley claims that it is not an easy task to look at Shelley's life, since there are many "layers of being and action that are psychic, cultural, political, philosophical" (Kelley 2007, 17). At first, Kelley's argument – moulded upon a post-structuralist approach whereby identity is understood as fluid and articulated in time – might seem quite ungrounded, and yet it is very well informed by the accurate references to the biographies of Shelley. This, in a way, gives the reader a fragmented image of the poet, and of the metamorphoses – to return to the impetus of this special issue of *de genere* – the poet experienced over his lifetime. Kelley then states: "Shelley's contemporaries produced a number of biographies, some less reliable than others" (Kelley 2007, 33), thus hinting at the question of reliability which, as we have previously seen, surrounds the genre of biography and the life of Shelley in particular, given his "family's efforts to sanctify his posthumous life" (Lee 2009, 58). As Kelley remarks: "The prize for the most unreliable goes to [Thomas Jefferson] Hogg: although his life of Shelley contains a great deal of information, much of it has to be sifted, given Hogg's tendency to present himself favourably" (Kelley 2007, 33). Hogg's biography thus proves to be an erroneous kind of portrait due to its subjectiveness or, to use Henry

Stephen Salt's words, "the utter inability of the author to realize the primary functions of a biographer" (Salt 1889, 11), being the drawing of "a more distinct line of demarcation [...] between the life of Shelley and the life of Hogg" (Salt 1889, 12). Aside from his contemporaries (Hogg, Thomas Love Peacock, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Medwin), Kelley also reviews – *en passant* – those biographies published soon after Shelley's death up to the present day (Newman Ivey White, Kenneth Neill Cameron, Ian Gilmour): the comparison serves the argument that, whilst the biographies written by his contemporaries were quite subjective, modern biographers seem to be more prone to distancing themselves from any judgment which could prevent them from sketching a fair portrait of the biographee, so as to foreground, for instance, the "Shelley whom the Victorians did not see or never knew" (Kelley 2007, 33).

Kelley's study was followed by a consistent body of scholarship on the life of Shelley. In 2013, Michael O'Neill, in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, aligned with Kelley's insight, talking about the "various Shelleys" (O'Neill 2013, 6) we can discern when dealing with his biographies: "They range from a red, revolutionary poet to a distinctly green one, from an anarchistic firebrand to a gradualist reformed, from a deconstructive sceptic to a celebrant of decentred process, from an Oedipally challenged figure ready for Lacanian analysis to a healer of psychoanalytical wounds" (O'Neill 2013, 6). In so doing, he also expanded Kelley's argument by looking at other biographical works – by Holmes, Cameron, and Reiman – which are to be considered less aleatory and more grounded in academic research (O'Neill 2013, 7). For instance, Holmes states that his analysis has nothing to do with the "angelisation" of Shelley that we find in the work of his contemporaries, such as Edward John Trelawny: "There will always be Shelley lovers, but this book is not for them [...]. That fluttering apparition is not to be found here, where a darker and more earthly, crueller and more capable figure moves with swift pace through a bizarre though sometimes astonishingly beautiful landscape" (Holmes 1975, ix).

In 2019, John Worthen published *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* in the acclaimed series "Blackwell Critical Biographies". Whilst returning to the question of unreliability in relation to both Hogg – when it comes to the details of the writing and printing of the *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* (Worthen 2019, 35) – and Trelawny's account of the supposed uselessness of Shelley as a sailor (Worthen 2019, 376), he concludes that it is important "to prioritize contemporary and documentary testimony" and, in so doing, we should be aware that "some kinds of evidence are better than others [...] written down many years after the events they describe" (Worthen 2019, xx–xxi). In other words, Worthen believes that biographical writing should be based on quasi-contemporary documents and not on late reminiscences which may let many biographers talk about the Shelley "they want" (Worthen 2019, xx), rather than the "real" Shelley.

This short overview of the critical studies of Shelley's biographies serves a specific purpose: in Kelley, we find no references to Edward Dowden's *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which has been a reference point for many, but it does indeed appear in the work of O'Neill and Worthen as a valuable tool in reassessing the often-misleading relation between Shelley the man and Shelley the poet. This confirms, if need be, the importance of carrying out research in order to revise the already-existent biographical material: indeed, in these very canonical – and distinguished – examples I have selected (*Cambridge Companion*, 2006; *Oxford Handbook*, 2013; *Blackwell Critical Biographies*, 2019), there is just one very quick – though no less important – reference to the *Life of Percy*

Bysshe Shelley by Scottish writer William Sharp as the biography which "offered a corrective to this tendency to idealize the idealist" (Stabler 2013, 657).

Written for the "Great Writers Series" (Walter Scott) – established by Eric S. Robertson – and published in 1887 as a one-volume book, in seven chapters, *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* is defined by Sharp himself as "a condensation of all really important material" (Sharp 1887, 14). Firstly, this is due to economic reasons, what Margaret D. Stetz otherwise terms "the factory-like conditions of mass production" (Stetz 2007, 128): the standard of biography at the Scottish – and overall, at the British – *fin de siècle* switched from a three-volume work to a maximum of two volumes. Secondly, and more importantly, this choice has to do with the aim of the series itself being the dissemination of "little monographs" combining biographical and bibliographical details (Guy and Small 2000, 7: 381): in order to achieve this, Sharp took his cue from Dowden, with whom he began a long correspondence following the publication of his first volume of poetry (*The Human Inheritance*, 1882).[2] In this light, as regards the paratextual apparatus, it is curious to see that there is no dedication but instead the following note to the reader: "It is unnecessary, in a note to a biography which naturally is based upon all prior records of the poet with whom it deals, to mention the authorities whose writings have been read or consulted. But a special acknowledgement of indebtedness is due to Professor Edward Dowden, whose two comprehensive volumes on Shelley form the completest and most reliable record extant" (Sharp 1887, 9). Accordingly, Sharp, already at *fin de siècle*, raises the question of reliability, alongside, also, his intertextual indebtedness to the work of Dowden as the main hypotext informing his compendium.

Moreover, as William Roscoe Thayer has pointed out, the structural reconfiguration biography undertook with Robertson's "Great Writers Series" had already started in 1870, as biographies "are much closer to life than those of the middle and earlier part of the nineteenth century" (Thayer 1920, 633). Thayer, who centred his discourse on John Morley's studies of Voltaire and Rousseau, discusses the development of what he calls "the oblique method in biography" (Thayer 1920, 639), whose definition also seems to fit Sharp's work because "he seems to be more bent on criticising than on describing, but when his portrait is complete you recognize its lifelikeness" (Thayer 1920, 639). In Sharp, the act of criticising must be intended as both the ability to critically examine the pre-existent biographical material and hermeneutically interpret his oeuvre. As regards the former, Sharp judges Hogg's memoir as "the only authentic record of this time" (Sharp 1887, 42). On the one hand, he is aware that "he has occasionally allowed his imagination to fill up the blanks of memory" (Sharp 1887, 42). On the other hand, "Hogg's remarks are not wholly exaggerated" (Sharp 1887, 44), such as the references to Shelley's voice and his "feminine beauty" (Sharp 1887, 24) which eventually led Nora Crook, amongst others, to talk about the paradoxical masculinity of Shelley (Crook 2013, 66). Similarly, when he relates to the lake-side days in Geneva of Percy and Mary Shelley, he highlights how Edward Dowden's monograph "says nothing about the appearance of M. G. Lewis upon the scene" (Sharp 1887, 121): given

[2] Specifically, in a letter to Dowden dated 26 November 1886, Sharp wrote: "It is exceedingly kind of you to send me your *Life of Shelley* – a book I shall always value for its own sake and for that of the donor [...]. In the new series of 'Great Writers' that is shortly to come out, I am to do Shelley – and of course could do nothing worth[while] unless I had your new work to go upon for definite facts etc." (Sharp 2018, 171).

the many stimuli which the author of *The Monk* (1796) granted the Shelleys,[3] Sharp tends to fill in the blanks left by Dowden, thus actively contributing to the development of Shelley's scholarship.

As regards the latter, Sharp's biography of Shelley contains critical and metacritical reflections which go beyond the mere biographical report: indeed, when introducing "To Ianthe" (1813) as the sonnet Shelley wrote for his daughter, Sharp is fully aware that "it is by no means always safe to accept a poetic record as a strictly veracious statement" (Sharp 1887, 93–94), thus hinting at Roland Barthes' warning of not relying on the author's life during the hermeneutic process.[4] Moreover, as for *Queen Mab* (1813), whilst providing a stylistic and thematic reading, he is also adamant that the supposed greatness of this poem is often determined by its "revolutionary bias" (Sharp 1887, 114). Here, again, he takes the chance to talk about the "fair" way of analysing a literary text: "For a poem must be adjudged *as* a poem and not as a philosophical treatise" (Sharp 1887, 114, italics in the original).

When reviewing Shelley's gothic romances, Sharp is instead interested in how and why the author engaged with source material: for instance, by drawing on his letters, Sharp identifies William Godwin's *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799) as the main reference book for *St. Irvyne* (1810); as regards *Zastrozzi* (1809; 1810), which was negatively received upon its publication, Sharp looks at its hypotexts, the more important being *The Monk* (1796) by Lewis, and the ways in which – from a stylistic viewpoint – it echoes Ann Radcliffe's writing. Besides assessing and acknowledging Shelley's sources, Sharp's approach also serves to open up the canon and avoid the marginalisation of the romances: "It is unjust [...] to speak of it as a ridiculous failure. So it will be enough to add here that *Zastrozzi* is a puerile and morbid story, sufficiently excellent in its degree to deserve to rank just below Lewis' and Mrs. Radcliffe's romances in point of interest and truth to life" (Sharp 1887, 38).

And yet, this text-based approach illuminates the very first pages of Sharp's monograph, where he questions the obsessive attention toward Shelley's life in comparison to the intrinsic – structural and aesthetic – value of his work. He states:

> What also is feared by some, at least, who have the fame of the poet deeply at heart, is that the rare bloom of his genius will altogether disappear in the mists of conjecture and dispute which now prevail; the poet will fade, and the socialist-philosopher will arise; the singer will become the political or sectarian stalking-horse. Instead of 'Adonais,' and an unparalleled lyric voice, there will be the Vegetarian and Irish pamphlets and much wearisome bluster and counter-fury. (Sharp 1887, 12)

[3] As David Ellis has pointed out: "While he was at Diodati, [Lewis] entertained his company with stories of this kind, five of which so impressed Shelley that he recorded their details in Mary's diary. What he also recorded was a philosophical disagreement which he had had with the two older men over the existence of ghosts" (Ellis 2011, 101).

[4] In "The Death of the Author" (1967) Barthes states: "To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing" (Barthes 1989, 53).

Sharp seems to warn against what Jonathan Culler has termed the "symptomatic reading" of Shelley, which treats his works "as instances or symptoms of something else rather than of interest in themselves" (Culler 2011, 50–51).

As a final note to the reader, Sharp provides a *captatio benevolentiae* when stating that his monograph is "but an introduction to the study of Shelley's life and work" (Sharp 1887, 192): as such, it should "induce towards study and individual criticism of the poet" (Sharp 1887, 192). As Flavia Alaya has pointed out, his uncertainties on the usefulness of his monograph are due to his being a neophyte to the genre. As a matter of fact, his approach to biographical writing was to be revised in the following years: "Before writing Heine[']s biography[], he armed himself with formidable amounts of research, something he had not done before with any of his biographical subjects, substantially thickening the little volume with a long addendum of sources" (Alaya 1970, 82). This self-assessment on the quality of his writing led Sharp – by proxy – to stress the importance of revising current Shelleyan scholarship and avoiding taking *verbatim* what critics suggest: "There is no such individual as a critic whose dicta are invaluable. It is only the sum of the best criticism that is of indubitable value" (Sharp 1887, 191). In this light, Sharp's portrait of Shelley – *à la* Margaret Oliphant – proves an invaluable tool precisely when read in the light of existent scholarship, which – without doubt – it improves.

Reading P.B. Shelley in William Sharp/Fiona Macleod's Oeuvre

As Elizabeth Amelia Sharp – Sharp's wife – stated, writing Shelley's biography "was a work of love, for Shelley had been the inspiring genius of his youth [...]. He was in sympathy with much of Shelley's thought: with his hatred of rigid conventionality, of the tyranny of social laws" (Sharp 1910, 131). Nonetheless, at an earlier stage in his literary career, Shelley's influence upon Sharp is first and foremost to be found in the "practice of using the third person instead of the first to camouflage the personal strategy" (Alaya 1970, 32), as is the case with his first volume of poetry *The Human Inheritance* (1882), where Sharp meditates upon the Australian landscape which he himself had the chance to admire between 1876 and 1877: "and then *he* rode / Far through the *bush* to bear alone his load / Of bitter anguish" (Sharp 1882, 76).

And yet, even though we find traces of Shelley in the texts published under his real name, it is in the "Fiona Macleod" phase that we can actually witness a major – and more original – influence of Shelley. Indeed, the life and work of Shelley prompted Sharp to take a quite unconventional stance regarding gender.[5] Specifically, in order to question the (heteronormative) *status quo*, he thought it necessary to cross the line dividing masculinity and femininity at the *fin de siècle*: after 1894, with the publication of *Pharais: A Romance of the Isles*, Sharp simultaneously wrote under the female pseudonym of Fiona Macleod. In 1896, whilst writing Heine's biography as William Sharp,[6] he authored a collection of short stories – as Fiona Macleod – entitled *The Washer of the Ford and Other Legendary Moralities*, where s/he mainly remoulded Celtic tales of the tenth century. *The*

[5] As he himself stated in a letter to Mr. Clarke, a not-yet-identified friend of his: "With Shelley it is one of my cardinal faiths – the equality of the sexes" (Sharp 2018, 201).

[6] This detail is crucial inasmuch as he took inspiration from Heine's *Traumbilder* series for sketching the figure of The Washer of the Ford. As Flavia Alaya has pointed out, there is also an erroneous interpretation advanced by Georgiana Goddard King, who asserted – overlooking the direct allusion to Heine in Sharp's writings – that the main source for *The Washer of The Ford* "was volume VIII of a contemporary collection of Spanish folklore, the *Biblioteca de las tradiciones españoles*" (Alaya 1970, 233).

Washer of the Ford mentioned in the title is "a Celtic war goddess whose office it is to warn the hero when his hour is come" (Schoepperle 1919, 61).

At a very general level, the influence of Shelley is to be found in the tight relationship between humans and nature, as the prologue makes clear: "That we are intimately at one with Nature is a cosmic truth we are all slowly approaching. It is not only the dog, it is not only the wild beast and the wood-dove, that are our close kindred, but the green tree and the green grass, the blue wave and the flowing wind, the flower of a day and the granite peak of an aeon" (Sharp 1919, 152). It reminds of the invocation to nature – specifically the belief in the Celtic trinity of Earth, Sea, and Sky – that we find in *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude* (1815; 1816), which is one of the passages Sharp analyses and praises in his *Life of Shelley*: "What dignity and beauty in the close of that invocation to Nature – 'Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood' – which opens 'Alastor'!" (Sharp 1887, 116–117).

In the prologue, Sharp also states: "Of the section Seanachas, the short barbaric tales, I will say nothing to you, whose favourite echo from Shelley is that thrilling line – 'The tempestuous loveliness of terror'" (Sharp 1919, 152). The word "Seanachas" immediately informs the reader of what to expect: it is an Irish word, in its Scottish Gaelic variant, which means "the telling of old tales" (Sharp 1919, 369) and by extension, in contemporary Scottish Gaelic, "storytelling". However, in this case, there is a direct intertextual reference to Shelley and his *On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery* (1819), which anticipates the lens through which Sharp re-reads the 'old tales': in other words, the old tales and their dialectic between violence and the beauty of Nature are, just as in Shelley's, "uttered in the same poetic breath" (Jacobs 1985, 167), so that loveliness comes to veil "The agonies of anguish and of death" (Shelley 1824, 139).

In the tale that inaugurates the section "Seanachas" – "The Song of the Sword" – it is the wind heavily affecting the wanderings of the Vikings that recalls the "unconquered Nature" Shelley mentions in the Medusa fragment, thus foregrounding "the intimate connection in nature of death and life" (McGann 1972, 6): "On the eve of the day following that sailing a wild wind sprang up, blowing straight against the north. All of the south-faring galleys save one made for haven, though it was a savage coast which lay along the south of Skye" (Sharp 1919, 373). Moreover, we must bear in mind that Sharp extensively reflected upon the hermeneutic value of the wind in his *Life of Shelley*, in relation to *Ode to the West Wind* as well as to *A Summer-evening Churchyard, Lechlade, Gloucestershire* (Sharp 1887, 111, 150–151).

Besides these textual elements, there is another layer worth mentioning. In writing his first romance as Fiona Macleod, Sharp wanted to delve into a kind of fiction which was thought to be unproper for men, but not so unusual for women writers:[7] for instance, *Pharais* (1894) is a romance devised on the so-called 'explained supernatural' (Clery 1995, 106–114), where a man – Alastair[8] – is diagnosed with hysteria, the female malady par excellence. In this light, *Pharais* was well received upon its publication, as is attested to by the positive feedback Sharp/Macleod received from George Meredith and Grant

[7] As Elisabetta Marino has recently pointed out in relation to Ellen Wood's *Parkwater* (1857), in the mid-nineteenth century a growing number of women writers started merging domestic fiction, sensation novel, and self-help manuals in order to challenge common assumptions about maternity, (female) madness and agency (Marino 2022, xxvii).

[8] Alastair – his name and wanderings – recalls Shelley's characters in *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude* (1815; 1816) and their "solitary communion with nature" (Richardson 1992, 176).

Allen (Sharp 1910, 228–230). Conversely, *The Washer of the Ford* was regarded with suspicion precisely for being authored by a woman, Fiona Macleod, who dared to treat such masculine contents. Indeed, Thomas Janvier, in reviewing it, stated: "The 'Seanachas' [...] and the opening of 'The Washer': not impossible for a woman to write, but unlikely" (Janvier quoted in Sharp 1910, 264). In "fathering" the female pseudonym of Fiona Macleod, and crossing the divide between masculinity and femininity, Sharp in all likelihood seems to follow the footsteps of Shelley himself, who published in 1810 – in conjunction with Thomas Jefferson Hogg – a poetry collection under a female pseudonym, namely *The Posthumous Fragments of Mrs. Margaret Nicholson*: indeed, in his *Life of Shelley*, Sharp examines this phenomenon, uncovering the pseudonym's origins – its connection to "a maniac washerwoman who [...] had attempted the assassination of King George III" (Sharp 1887, 41) – and delving into the "secret[s] of the real authorship" (Sharp 1887, 41), which he interprets as a burlesque attempt to cast doubt on the identity behind "a number of verses, most of them mere rhodomontade" (Sharp 1887, 40).

To conclude, I contend[9] that the Fiona Macleod phase is deeply affected by the ways in which Sharp previously engaged with the biography of Shelley: the remoulding of Shelleyan themes, including direct intertextual references, is tied up to the questioning of the *vexata quaestio* genre/gender (Lops and Rao 2014), which, in the case of *The Washer of the Ford*, results in the relationship between a typically male-orientated genre – barbaric tales – and gender. In so doing, as William F. Halloran has recently pointed out, "Sharp [...] was reaching toward an understanding of human sexuality that became widely accepted in western culture only a century later" (Halloran 2022, 197).

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[9] This is part of an ongoing research project on the life and work of William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, so I make no claim to be exhaustive at this stage.

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