37

The Celtic Twilight in Canada: William Sharp's Early Occult Influence on Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman

by Thomas Hodd

In 1885 Charles G.D. Roberts took a position as Professor of English, Economics, and French at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Quickly establishing himself as a favourite among his students, he made his Kingscroft home the literary centre of the college and a meeting place for aspiring artisans such as his cousin Bliss Carman, Carman's friend Richard Hovey, and many other writers from the United States and Great Britain. This second "strange aesthetic ferment"[1] invariably contributed to his literary output, for during his ten years at Windsor, he wrote many of his early important works, including the poetry collections *Songs of the Common Day* (1893) and *The Book of the Native* (1896), and the short fiction collection *Earth's Enigmas* (1896), which included some of his earliest animal stories. His exposure to international writers and contemporary intellectual movements also afforded him a welcome change from his High Anglican days in Fredericton and the scrutinizing gaze of his father, Deacon Roberts.

One of the more influential artisans to visit Roberts at Kingscroft was William Sharp. His posthumous memoir, published in 1910 by his wife Elizabeth, reveals a professional network of writers and editors that spans the Atlantic Ocean. His commitment to following literary movements in both Europe and North America is equally revealed in his publications. Not only did he publish his own fiction and poetry, he also wrote important early biographies of Browning and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, served as general editor of the Canterbury Poets series, and edited the anthology *American Sonnets*, a collection that included early Canadian poets such as Charles Heavysege and Archibald Lampman.

Apart from his literary career, Sharp was an avid traveler and during his short life of fifty years he visited many countries including Italy, Algeria, Greece, and the United States, a fact reflected in Elizabeth's chapter titles such as "Early Days in London," "First Visit to Italy," and "Winter in Ath-

ens." One visit of interest to early Canadian literature scholars occurs in chapter nine, "First Visit to America." Here Elizabeth recounts her husband's September trip to New York in 1889 as well as a stopover in Canada in mid-August—a tour of the Maritime provinces under the guidance of Roberts as well as a trek through "Evangeline's country" with both Roberts and Carman (*William Sharp: a Memoir* 150-52).

No critic to date has discussed in depth the relationship between Sharp and Roberts and Carman. Although several scholars mention the summer event at Kingscroft as a minor incident, few have given second thought to the significance of a well-established British writer and editor spending several weeks in Canada with a relatively unknown Canadian poet and his lesser-known cousin. Yet what appears to be the beginning of a literary relationship reveals a powerful influence Sharp had on the Canadians, an influence that would be occult in nature and last throughout their lives.

What information does exist about Sharp's stay at Kingscroft can be found in various biographies. Elsie Pomeroy, for instance, in her 1943 biography *Sir Charles G.D. Roberts* mentions Sharp's stay at Roberts's home in Nova Scotia: "Other visitors to Kingscroft were William Sharp and Joseph Edmund Collins. Mrs. Roberts was very much in awe of the former, when he arrived, a magnificent Viking with a blond beard….He took upon himself two tasks, that of always helping her wash the dishes and of carrying upstairs his own bath water" (84). She also mentions Sharp's alter-ego, Fiona MacLeod, under whose name Sharp published several Celtic stories and poetry collections including *The Dominion of Dreams* (1899), *The Divine Adventure* (1900), and *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (1904). She concludes her comments by suggesting that MacLeod's work "differs profoundly in literary and mystical quality from all the rest of Sharp's acknowledged production" (85). Coincidentally, after describing Fiona MacLeod's "literary and mystical" work, she devotes a few pages to Roberts's psychical research between 1885 and 1895, relating that Roberts communicated by Ouija Board with his dead friend Joseph Edmund Collins and "obtained certain results which almost seemed to imply something more than telepathy" (86). While there was something unworldly about the communiqués, Roberts eventually lost interest in the Board and "banished [it] to a trunk in the attic" (88). The subject of the occult at Kingscroft would not resurface until years later in a biography of his cousin Bliss Carman.

At first glance, Muriel Miller's *Bliss Carman: Quest and Revolt* (1985) appears to follow Pomeroy's lead by recounting similar psychical activities at Kingscroft. On closer inspection, however, her narrative differs sig-

nificantly. For instance, both biographers describe a parlour game played by the group called "Concentration," in which a subject is directed, while blindfolded, to a hidden object using the thought-waves of the other participants. Miller offers a description of the event without commentary; by contrast, Pomeroy downplays any psychic connection between the cousins and dismisses their game as "a kind of glorified 'Hide the Thimble' which was popular at Sunday School parties" (83). Similarly, both biographers mention that Roberts and Carman became involved in the Ouija Board and horoscope casting. Pomeroy claims that Carman's friend Hovey introduced Roberts to astrology (88). Miller, on the other hand, argues that it was Sharp who offered up occult secrets to the cousins:

> If Carman's and Roberts's ability to read each other's minds was uncanny, Sharp's inner sight went a long way beyond such a rudimentary psychical exercise. The clairvoyant Britisher (who did his mystical writing as Fiona MacLeod) seemed to be in direct communication with the forces of the occult. During his visit, he introduced his hosts to the secrets of the ouija board and horoscope casting in which both Carman and Roberts were to dabble for many years after that. (61)

Finally, Pomeroy takes Roberts's own words at face value—that he soon gave up on his interest in the Ouija Board. Yet Miller asserts that Roberts and Carman used the Ouija Board and participated in horoscope casting "for many years" afterwards. Such discrepancies in their early occult interests creates a bio-critical void between Pomeroy and Miller that is not easily explained: the fact that Roberts had considerable control over Pomeroy's biography is one possibility,[2] but given his High Anglican upbringing such an explanation would only fuel speculations about why he would want to minimize the events.

Compounding the debate is John Coldwell Adams's biography, *Sir Charles God Damn: the Life of Sir Charles G.D. Roberts* (1986), which mentions neither Roberts's and Carman's psychical activities at Kingscroft nor Sharp's affiliation with the occult. Instead, Adams confines his one-page summary of Sharp to literary accomplishments and to his gentlemanly behaviour at Kingscroft, in which he helped with the dishes and carried his own bath water (51). In fact, Adams focuses much of his chapter "The Kingscroft Years" on Roberts's financial troubles and the women in his life during that time, especially Jean Carré and Maude Clarke. Why he felt such occult-related matters were insignificant is surprising, given the attention both Pomeroy and Miller place on them. Regardless, two facts remain: first, in the fall of 1889 Sharp, a writer and student of the occult,

visited Kingscroft; second, during the Kingscroft years Roberts and Carman engaged in psychical activities.

Sharp's interest in the occult began when he was a university student in Scotland. He pored over mystical and occult writings between the years 1871-73 at Glasgow University and "read omnivorously; night after night he read far into the morning hours literature, philosophy, poetry, mysticism, occultism, magic, mythology, folk-lore" (*Memoir* 15). Even more significant is a letter Sharp wrote to Elizabeth from Paris on April 10, 1884: "On Sunday, if I can manage it, I will go to Mdme. Blavatsky" (*Memoir* 96). Madame Blavatsky, a well-known European occultist, founded the Theosophical movement and had a profound impact on several of Sharp's contemporaries, including W.B. Yeats, "AE" (George Russell), Ernest Rhys, and Arthur Symons.

Of particular note are Yeats and "AE", who were connected with Sharp through the Celtic Twilight, an artistic movement in which writers from Ireland and Scotland attempted to resurrect the mythical and mystical elements of their Celtic ancestors. They were avid practitioners of the occult: "AE", for instance, was a member of the Theosophical Society from 1890 to 1898, after which time he founded the new Hermetic Society, "a loosely organized discussion group, which met weekly to discuss the writings of Madame Blavatsky and other theosophical scriptures" (Davis 25). By the time Sharp met "AE" in 1897, he was already known to the Irish Theosophist, who had "begun to admire the books this man had published under the name Fiona MacLeod, books about Gaelic mythology, psychic phenomena, and communion with nature" (Summerfield 77-78). "AE" would later remark in a letter to Fiona MacLeod that "your inner nature preserves the memory of old initiations, so I talk to you as a comrade on the same quest" (*Memoir* 278). Yeats's interest in the occult is well documented and does not require further explanation.[3] Important is the fact that Sharp engaged in occult activities with the young Irishman: "From time to time he interested himself in definite psychic experimentation, occasionally in collaboration with Mr. W.B. Yeats" (*Memoir* 424). And Yeats remarked in a lecture to the Aberdeen Centre of the Franco-Scottish Society in 1907 that Sharp "was the most extraordinary psychic he had ever encountered" (*Memoir* 424).

Roberts's relationship with Sharp began sometime in 1887. Though biographers make little mention of their relationship prior to August 1889, there are several publishing events that suggest more than mere acquaintance between the two men. First, in 1887 three anthologies were published that included the work of Charles G.D. Roberts. The first anthology,

Ballades and Rondeaus, Chants Royal, Sestinas, Villanelles, was brought out by Gleeson White; the other two collections are connected to Sharp: he edited *Sonnets of This Century* and Elizabeth edited *Sea Music*. Roberts was encouraged by the attention he received in *Sonnets of This Century*. In a letter to William Douw Lighthall, he cannot hide his pleasure over the kind words Sharp said about him: "In [*Sonnets of This Century*] the editor—Wm. Sharp, who, as you know, was an intimate of Rossetti's & became his best biographer—puts a note to the following effect: 'I am unaware if he be of Canadian birth, but he is indisputably foremost among the poets of Canada.' And he says warm things of the sonnets which he quotes" (June 2, 1888; Roberts, *Letters* 81).

The second literary event to link the two writers was the publication of *Poems of Wild Life* in 1888. Sharp, the general editor of the Canterbury Poets series, wished to publish a collection of "nature" verse. Roberts was chosen to select and edit the collection, which contained poems by him as well as by Sharp. Sharp's poems constitute the collection's second largest contribution, spanning twenty-seven pages of the volume, and Roberts praises his abilities in the Notes section at the end of the book: "Mr. William Sharp's 'Wild Life' verse, the fruit of a sojourn in the wilds of Gippsland and New South Wales, and of a voyage in the Pacific, is characterized by that direct and interpretative truthfulness which constitutes the enduring charm of his Transcripts from Nature. In its feeling for the romantic and the supernatural, Mr. Sharp's song has a special significance" (236). He describes Sharp's poetry as "romantic and supernatural," for he saw in Sharp's writing an influence that was extraordinary.

The third literary event to link Sharp with Roberts was the publication of *American Sonnets* in 1889, the year of Sharp's visit to Kingscroft. Sharp edited the collection and wrote the introduction; he also included Roberts, Lampman, and Heavysege. In his introduction he singles out Roberts and Lampman as significant Canadian writers: "Foremost among these northern [Canadian] singers are Charles G.D. Roberts and Archibald Lampman. The former is admittedly at the head of younger Canadian poets, and his *In Divers Tones* and other volumes have gained attention here as well as overseas" (xlvi). Though Roberts is not the most abundant Canadian contributor (Heavysege has the most verse represented by the Canadians), there is an anomaly in the Notes that suggests Sharp favoured Roberts. The Notes are arranged alphabetically by the author's last name and the editor writes the contributors' biographies. In *American Sonnets*, however, Sharp's note on Roberts does not appear until after the final entry, positioning Roberts in a place of prominence at the end of the collection. He also offers consid-

erable praise for the young Canadian: "Roberts, Charles G.D. Professor of English Literature at King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia. Author of *Orion, and other Poems*. *In Divers Tones*, etc. Editor of *Poems of Wild Life*. The foremost living poet in Canada. The sonnets given are from *In Divers Tones*" (293). His admiration for Roberts's work would continue in later years.[4]

Sharp's generosity to and literary support for Roberts would be repaid in August, 1889 when he visited Kingscroft. Besides opening up his home to the British man of letters, Roberts also took Sharp on a tour of the Maritime provinces—a stopover that would last almost three weeks before Sharp continued on to New York to visit a mutual acquaintance, Edmund Stedman. The trip made a lasting impression on Roberts, who indicated as much in a letter to Lampman: "Wish you could have met Sharp! He was with me three delightful weeks. Have you his little vol. *Romantic Ballads & Poems of Phantasy*? If not, do get it" (November 10, 1889; Roberts, *Letters* 111). Later that week he wrote to Lighthall, expressing similar sentiments: "Have been deeply disappointed in Sladen's curious lack of sincerity & his selfishness. Sharp seems to me in every way more genuine, & more trustworthy. I got very fond of him" (November 15, 1889; Roberts, *Letters* 112).[5]

In the years following Sharp's visit, Roberts made constant attempts to review his work. In 1892, he wrote to Arthur Stedman expressing interest in writing an article on Sharp: "By the way, I believe Messrs[sic] Webster & Co are going to bring out a volume of Sharp's poems. If they care to send me a copy, I should take great pleasure in making it the subject of a short study, in my department of 'Modern Instances,' in the *Dominion Illustrated Monthly*" (June 5, 1892; Roberts, *Letters* 150). He also wished to review Sharp's book *Vistas* for *The Chap-Book*, though the review never appeared.[6] And in a letter to Miss Holly a few years later, he inquired about reviewing a collection of Fiona MacLeod's work for *The Bookman*: "Please ask Mr. Maurice if he wants a brief review, from me, of Fiona MacLeod's new poems just published by Mosher" (October 28, 1901; Roberts, *Letters* 264). On the back page of Fiona MacLeod's esoteric work *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (1904) appears the following critical quotation from Roberts:

> Throughout her pages one is ever keenly aware of the elements. Sun, wind, and flame, the dew and the flood, the dust and the mountain-top assume personality. The otherlife everywhere is immanent[sic]; and the horizons of life are continually lifting that the bodily eye may catch glimpses of spiritual things….Of such substance is the texture of the fabric which Fiona Macle-

> od[sic] weaves; and she weaves as one who has looked into the deeps of her heart and seen therein patterns both of time and eternity.

In a 1904 review of *The Winged Destiny*,[7] J.M. Synge notes that the first part of the book deals with "the more mystical side of Highland life, and [is] of considerable interest. All through [the first part] however, there is rather too much reflection, that is made up of a sort of esoteric platitude" (389). His recognition of MacLeod's esoteric themes is not surprising, given Sharp's interest in things occult; in fact, Sharp's other publications in 1904 are consistent in theme with *The Winged Destiny*, for earlier that year he had published the poem "A Dream" in the *Theosophical Review* and dedicated it to G.R.S. Mead.[8] Though Roberts's quotation is not as explicit as Synge's, he too recognizes the "otherlife" described in *The Winged Destiny*, as well as the possibility of catching "glimpses of spiritual things" in the book, leaving scholars to question whether his interest in MacLeod's/Sharp's work was solely aesthetic.

Roberts's publications after 1889 suggest a similar occult influence. For instance, Carol Martell (1978) points out that "in *Songs of the Common Day* and the *Book of the Native* are found most of the poems which Roberts later classed under the heading of 'Poems Philosophical and Mystical' in his own selected poems of 1936" (28-29). More specifically, when talking about *The Book of the Native* she notes that "the first section, which bears the same title as the volume itself, is a pot-pourri of mystical and pseudo-religious poems" (58). Donald Conway (1984) likewise suggests that the collection was "intended as an earthly ephemeris from which a nativity may be constructed analogous to an astrological chart" (7), which harkens to the astrological charting Roberts and Carman conducted while at Kingscroft. Furthermore, August Leisner (1984) concludes that "*The Book of the Native* is the generic title under which properly belong all of his mystical nature poems exclusive of the purely cosmic" (275).[9]

The most revealing criticism of Roberts's "mystical writings" during the early 1890s concerns *Earth's Enigmas* (1896). As a tribute to his growing international success, Roberts received favorable reviews in Canadian, American, and British journals, which, for the most part, praised him for his portrayals of the Canadian landscape. One review, however, focused on the more symbolic nature of *Earth's Enigmas*: in *The Canadian Magazine* Francis Sherman states that "undoubtedly the finest story [in *Earth's Enigmas*] is the one called 'The Perdu'…It is a strange, beautiful story which, with its perfect close of love unfilfilled[sic] and unsatisfied, is surely more symbolic than the tales of realism are wont to be" (180). He concludes: " 'The Perdu'…has in it more of beauty and color, and grace of language,

and a *higher, new meaning* than anything that the greater of the realists have ever attempted" (180; my italics). Later critics also stressed the story's "higher, new meaning": Fred Cogswell, for instance, describes "The Perdu" as a "dark epiphany…among the finest fantasies of its kind ever written" (218), and James Polk (1972) declares that "throughout his life, Roberts was fascinated by the occult….His interest in mysteries and coincidences shows up in several of his stories, one of the finest being 'The Perdu'"(85).

Roberts's letters reveal he was particularly fond of "The Perdu" and felt that it represented a key theme in *Earth's Enigmas*. While preparing the manuscript, he notes in a postscript that his collection explores a "mysterious" theme: "It occurs to me that a good name for my vol. of stories would be 'Earth's Enigmas,' or 'Riddles of Earth.' The mystery of life & fate plays [a] leading part in nearly all of them" (May 6, 1894; Roberts, *Letters* 182-83). Roberts would reaffirm the mysterious nature of his collection thirty-five years later in a letter to Walter McRaye: "I shall *love* to have that extra copy of *Earth's Enigmas*, Bless you. It contains some of my most significant yarns. Instance 'The Perdu.' The critics all miss the 'enigmatic' note,—because I dont[sic] stress it, as I dont[sic] like to be *obvious*" (November 24, 1929; Roberts, *Letters* 389; his italics). The most revealing letter about "The Perdu" is dated March 19, 1892, a note to Bliss Carman in which the story is first mentioned: "have just finished, & mailed to Gilder, a mystic psychological thing, a sort of story, called 'The Perdu'" (Roberts, *Letters* 144). Its description as a "mystic psychological thing" seems puzzling at first: since Roberts does not employ the phrase elsewhere in his letters, it is difficult to ascertain what he meant by the term. Despite this obstacle, there are several clues that clarify the context of the phrase. First, psychology as a discipline was gaining momentum during the latter part of the nineteenth century. More important, as Thomas Kerr points out, "during these same postwar years [1860-1900] there was a resurgence of popular interest in the consolatory and religious promise of Spiritualism" (108). Despite this popularity, Spiritualism also had its detractors: many mediums were targets of newspaper attacks and legal harassment; instances of fraud also began to appear in the 1870s (Kerr 116-17). In order to authenticate their supernatural abilities, spiritualists looked to the scientific community as a means to validate their mystical pursuits; the resulting conflation between spiritualism and science was the Society for Psychical Research. Contemporaries of Roberts reflect similar occult use of the term in their work. William James, for instance, includes a chapter on psychology and mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

(1902). James was a member of the Theosophical Society and also served as President of the Society for Psychical Research from 1894 to 1895. Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (1911) contains a related chapter entitled "Mysticism and Psychology"; she also discusses occult beliefs such as Gnosticism and Theosophy in chapter seven, "Mysticism and Magic." Such evidence, coupled with Roberts's own psychical experiments at Kingscroft, gives weight to the notion that the phrase "mystic psychological" resembles occult rhetoric employed by psychical researchers in the late 1800s.

Roberts's activities at Kingscroft, as well as the presence of occult topoi in his work after 1889, suggest that his friendship with Sharp was more than literary in nature. After he left King's College in 1895, Roberts maintained close contact with Sharp, staying with him and his wife at their home in Milton's village, Chalfont-St.Giles, on his trip to London in 1900 (Pomeroy 158). His interest in the occult did not die with Sharp's passing in 1905, either. On the contrary, evidence related to the later years of Roberts's life suggests that the occult was a more pervasive influence than one would expect from the "Canadian romantic." On March 18, 1933, he delivered an address to the Elson Club in Toronto, "Canadian Poetry in its Relation to The Poetry of England and America." Beginning with Isabella Crawford, Roberts proceeds to mention several important figures including Charles Mair, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, and W.W. Campbell. He suggests that there were key influences on these writers that made Canadian poetry distinct:

> There is another consideration which gives unity to our Canadian poetry of this period. In doctrine, in dogma, in creed, our poets may differ very widely, from strict orthodoxy, through a sort of mystical theosophy, to a Neo-Platonic pantheism or Nature worship. But they all worship. They are all religious, in the broad sense, in their attitude towards this life and the future. (82)

Given his early relationship with Sharp, as well as his statement that "mystical theosophy" influenced his literary generation, Roberts demonstrates an awareness of the occult and reveals that his literary kin drew on it for inspiration. Although he does not mention specific writers, his own affiliations with occultists like Sharp place him within the list of potential candidates. Reinforcing this notion are two poems he read after the address. In "To A Certain Mystic," for instance, the speaker asks a number of rhetorical questions in regard to the mystic's "experiences." Even though the tone of the poem suggests skepticism on the part of the speaker, he makes reference to several ancient traditions, including the Kabbalah and Rosi-

crucianism: "And did dawn show you… / Some shed gold leafage from the Tree Eternal, / Some petals of the Imperishable Rose?" (15). More striking is the poem's final stanza:

> But you came empty-handed, and your tongue
> Babbled strange tidings none could wholly trust.
> And if we half believed you, it was only
> Because we would, and not because we must.
> (15)

The speaker's declaration that his half-belief came "because we would, and not because we must" implies that his curiosity in such mysteries is a choice—not a spiritual necessity. Roberts also read "Re-birth," in which the theme of the ecstatic vision predominates: "But before the mists of temporal forgetting shut me in / I had seen, far off, the Vision and the Height" (12). One cannot dismiss his comments on Theosophy in his address, nor his choice of poems involving occult themes. These writings were directed to those who, like Roberts, were initiated into the spiritual enigmas of life.

One final revelation about Roberts's occult interest comes from his first biographer. Though Pomeroy mentions his involvement in the Ouija Board and horoscope casting at Kingscroft, her biography says little else about his interest in things occult. Yet Pomeroy was a critic as well as a biographer, and two of her lesser known publications suggest that she interpreted his work for its use of occult topoi.

The first article appeared over a decade before her biography in the October 1932 issue of the *Educational Courier*. In "The Philosophic Mystical Poetry of Charles G.D. Roberts," Pomeroy frames her argument around comments by William Archer, who referred to Roberts's poems as "the product of [his] cosmic imagination" (5). Echoing Archer's phraseology, she takes a similar stance, suggesting that "'Autochthon,' 'The Native' and 'Earth's Complines' exemplify another phase of cosmic consciousness'"(6). Her use of the term "cosmic consciousness," coupled with Archer's earlier phrase "cosmic imagination" to characterize Roberts's work, is significant, since both phrases are examples of occult rhetoric, the former a blatant reference to Richard M. Bucke's 1901 theosophical treatise *Cosmic Consciousness*.[10]

Pomeroy published a second article about Roberts in the September-October 1959 issue of *The Canadian Theosophist*—fifteen years after the Roberts biography. In "A Poet's Dream World," she describes his ability to create poems and stories from a personal "dream-world," including the

short stories "In the Accident Ward" and "The Hill of Chastisement" as well as the poem "The Night Sky." Equally important are the dates of publication of the stories she cites: "In the Accident Ward" was first published in *Harper's Bazaar* in March, 1891; it was included with "The Hill of Chastisement" in *Earth's Enigmas* (1896). Similarly, "Night Sky" was published in March 1890 in *The Independent*, only months after Sharp's visit to Kingscroft.[11]

Roberts's meeting with Sharp in the fall of 1889 was a turning point in the young poet's life. Their encounter deepened the literary relationship between the two writers; the presence of occult topoi in Roberts's work during his latter years at Kingscroft as argued by Pomeroy and others suggests that Sharp may have also shared occult ideas with the young Canadian. Significant are Roberts's later references to the occult in his 1933 Toronto club address, as well as his incorporation of occult themes in poems like "To A Certain Mystic" and "Re-birth." But Roberts was not the only one affected by Sharp's visit: equally impressionable was his younger cousin, Bliss Carman, whose fondness for Sharp would contribute to his incorporation of occult topoi into his work, and perhaps to his becoming a Theosophist near the end of his life.

Critics have noted the presence of the occult in Carman's work as well as Sharp's influence on Carman's writing. James Cappon, for instance, suggests similarities between Carman's early work and the writings of Fiona MacLeod.[12] In discussing Carman's 1891 poem "The Bugle," he suggests that one finds in the poem "a mystical symbolism which blends a cosmic sense of nature with the spiritual history of man" (22). He explains more generally that "phrases in Carman's poems [like] 'the lonely trail,' 'the shadowy quest,' 'the gates of doom,' 'the battle of Sombre Field,' represent the same gnostic exaltation and love of mystical horizon as Fiona [MacLeod]'s 'Hills of Dream' and 'high sweet call of release'" (22). More revealing are his later remarks, in which he speculates on the possibility of an occult influence on Carman's writing: when speaking of *Behind the Arras* (1895), he notes that Carman's phrase "'the lone bright lands of taciturnity'…represents a tendency to bring it nearer the speculative occultism of Oriental mystics" (99). But he chooses not to make the critical leap, concluding that "this occult strain never becomes more than a casual element in Carman's poetry, hardly representing the place it secretly occupied in his thoughts" (99). Another critic who mentions Carman's ties to the occult is D.M.R. Bentley, who notes in *The Gay]Grey Moose* (1992) that "for Roberts, as for Carman, Pan is not only linked with occult ('secret,' 'magical') knowledge, but also associated with the therapeutic powers of

the natural world" (244). Though Bentley, like Cappon, asserts the presence of an occult influence on Carman, he does not fully explore the origins of such an influence.[13] These ideas would have to originate in Carman's work through the help of someone intimately connected with the occult—someone like Sharp.

Sharp and Carman made an immediate impression on one another. Evidence suggests that Sharp knew of the young poet prior to their meeting at Kingscroft. He first mentions Carman in his Notes to *American Sonnets*. In his note on Edith Thomas, he writes: "Miss Thomas is one of the most charming of the younger nature-poets; and with her should be mentioned Maurice Thompson, A. Lampman, Bliss Carman, and W.Wilfrid[sic] Campbell" (292). Carman likely knew about Sharp through Roberts as well as through Sharp's biography of Rossetti, though his first mention of Sharp does not appear until after their meeting in the fall of 1889. In a letter to his sister, he writes of his pleasure in having met the English man of letters: "you will rejoice that I have made such a good friend. He is one of the very foremost literary men of London of this generation, a friend of Browning, and Swinburne, and Morris, and formerly of poor Rossetti. Then he knows all the ways of books and writing over there, so that you can see that it is tremendously useful to me to know him" (September 8, 1889; Carman, *Letters* 30). Carman saw initially in Sharp an important literary contact to bolster his career. And there appears to be some truth to this hope, for in February 1890, he received an unsolicited offer to publish a book of his poems that originated with Sharp.[14] Though Carman did not accept the offer, he thanked Sharp for his generosity by including his work in *The Independent*, the New York journal where Carman worked at as literary editor from 1890 to 1892.[15]

Further evidence of Carman's interest in Sharp can be found in the American journal, *The Chap-Book*, which ran from 1894-1898.[16] Carman was its first editor and invariably played a key role in Sharp's work appearing in its pages. Sharp's first contribution to *The Chap-Book* was "A Northern Night," a short story published in the journal's third issue (June 15, 1894). His work would appear several more times in the journal during Carman's tenure, especially in the September 15, 1894 issue, which Sharp's friend Edmund Stedman affectionately called the "Sharp Number" (*Memoir* 239). It included a poem, "To Edmund Clarence Stedman," a short story, "The Birth of a Soul," and a lengthy review of Sharp's work by Carman. And although Carman claimed he was not editing the journal at that time,[17] his relationship with Sharp must have influenced the issue's focus on the English man of letters. As for the contents of the "Sharp num-

ber," his review of Sharp's 1892 collection *Flower o' the Vine* is conservative in tone, focusing on Sharp's use of metrics as well as the elements of romance that pervade his work, especially in his earlier volume *Romantic Ballads*. Included at the end of his review, however, are some brief remarks on a private reading Sharp gave at Mr. Stedman's home in New York in 1892—an event that reads more like a psychical experiment than a poetic performance: "It was not a public reading, by any means, but entirely *sub rosa*. Closeted with this conjurer of weird suggestion out of unwilling words, I was the delighted victim, the spell-bound *corpus vile* of an editor, on whom things might be tried with impunity" (222; his italics). Equally compelling is Sharp's short story, "The Birth of a Soul," a piece of dramatic prose exploring the spiritual angst suffered by a mother, father, priest and nun during the birth. Also in the room is an unseen character referred to as "The Other," whose speech suggests its connection with spiritual darkness: "And the sin of the woman, the which I am, shall lie like a cankerworm within thy heart; and the evil of the man, the which I am, shall eat into thy inmost being" (224-25). The story in general deals with issues of spirituality and otherworldliness, and forms part of a volume of dramatic pieces that was influenced by the Belgian *symboliste* Maurice Maeterlinck.[18]

Another contributor to *The Chap-Book* was Sharp's fellow occultist, W.B. Yeats. His short story "St. Patrick and the Pedants" was published in the June 1, 1896 issue, a story that explores the spiritual tensions between Christianity and Celtic spirituality in a narrative about a dying druid who wished to touch Michael Bruin's rosary.[19] Also included at the end of the issue is an anonymous article entitled "A New Chapter in Literary History Especially Dedicated to the Curious." Although Carman stopped editing the journal in March 1896, this article reinforces *The Chap-Book*'s continued editorial affinity for occult-related material since the subject of the article is Sar Josephin Peladan, who in 1890 founded the Order of the Catholic Rose+Croix; the article discusses, among other things, Peladan's mystical writings and his association with Rosicrucianism.

One of the more curious pieces to appear in *The Chap-Book* during Carman's tenure was not a short story or poem, but an advertisement. Included in the August 1, 1895 issue was an announcement for *The Lamp*, a new occult journal published out of Toronto: "The Lamp is the only publication in Canada devoted to Theosophy—religion, philosophy, and science harmonised. In it the ancient Copt and the modern Kanuck meet on common ground" (233). In the magazine's few years of publication, from 1894 to 1900, several significant names would appear on its pages; the online

index for *The Lamp* includes key figures such as "AE", Yeats, Roberts, Sharp, and Carman. Though not all these men were contributors to the journal, the fact that they are mentioned lends credence to the belief that these writers' works were interpreted for their occult significance.

A third link between Carman and Sharp was Carman's friend, Richard Hovey, a writer and avid promoter of the European symbolist movement who published some of the first translations of Maurice Maeterlinck's plays. For his part, Maeterlinck was a friend of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, who introduced him to the "occult sciences of sorcery, spiritualism, and magnetism, and by the study of obscure philosophical concepts" (Halls 43); Maeterlinck would later publish in 1921 *Le Grand Secret*, a "historical study of occultism and esoteric doctrines from the dawn of history" (Halls 134). Sharp was fascinated by Maeterlinck's writing: after discovering his plays *La Princesse Maleine* and *Les Aveugles*, he noted in his diary that "[Maeterlinck] is a writer of singular genius; and I shall send for everything he has written" (October 1, 1891; *Memoir* 190). Given Sharp's love for Maeterlinck, it is unlikely that he missed Hovey's edition of the translations; nor does it come as any surprise that Sharp eventually published criticism on Maeterlinck, including the article "A Note on the Belgian Renascence," which appeared in the December 15, 1895 issue of *The Chap-Book*. Hovey believed that Sharp's work was influenced by Maeterlinck, and indicated as much in a letter to Carman earlier that year. Carman's response is one of ignorance and apology:

> Yes, old man, I know; my words on Sharp have all the grace and freedom which ignorance alone can give….But the scope of learning and philosophic grasp, so equally essential—these things I have not; and so I blunder. Yes, I see Sharp's indebtedness to Maeterlinck….But Maeterlinck himself does not get me yet. (January 7, 1895; Carman, *Letters* 83)

Hovey's posthumous publication, *To the End of the Trail* (1908) reinforces Sharp's place in Carman and Roberts's inner circle, for included in an advertisement for Hovey's poetic tragedy, *The Marriage of Guenevere*, are critical quotations by Sharp and Roberts.

In Carman's later years he became increasingly interested in the occult. In 1920, he began a friendship with the theosophist, Dr. Ernest Fewster, and frequently stayed with Fewster and his wife at their home in Vancouver. He also drew on Theosophy as a research subject for his writing. While working on the poem "Shamballah," for instance, Carman noted in a letter to Fewster's wife Grace how he "spent some time in the very pleasant reading room of the United Theosophists near here in connection with these

shambling Shamballistics" while on a trip to Los Angeles, California (circa Christmas, 1922; Carman, *Letters* 299). Carman would later meet the famous Theosophist, Annie Besant, a successor to Madame Blavatasky, who was President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. Critical reception of Carman's work also aligned him with other occult writers: his verse, for example, appears in the 1917 anthology *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, along with well-known occultists like "AE", Yeats, A.E. Waite, and Sharp/MacLeod. He also attended in 1928 the Annual Dinner of the Poetry Society in New Canaan, Connecticut, in which "AE" was the chief guest (letter to Grace Fewster, January 30, 1928; Carman, *Letters* 356). Perhaps most significant are Carman's letters to Margaret Lawrence between 1927 and 1929, which include several references to Theosophy and related occult topics.[20] H. Pearson Gundy suggests that Carman's interest in the occult in his later years is in many ways a return rather than a beginning: in the introduction of Chapter 14 of *Letters of Bliss Carman*, Gundy notes that "Carman attributed his ability to stand up to the gruelling pace he had set himself, to new friendships and to his new (or renewed) interest in the 'mystic truth' of theosophy" (316). By the end of his life Carman had finally embraced the influence that haunted his spirit for more than thirty years.

Though neither Roberts nor Carman explicitly proclaimed themselves occultists, evidence suggests that the occult was a pervasive influence at both the beginning and the end of their careers and that Sharp was a contributor to their occult education. Since no scholarship to date has fully explored the presence of occult topoi in either Roberts or Carman, it is difficult to ascertain how influential this subject was on their literary output. Regardless, the bio-critical evidence put forward challenges our understanding of the influences on Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman: William Sharp played more than a cursory role in the early careers of the two Canadian poets and is a figure who warrants better attention from scholars.

Notes

1 Ross, Malcolm. "A Strange Aesthetic Ferment." *Canadian Literature* 68-69 (Spring-Summer 1976): 13-25.

2 As John Coldwell Adams points out in "Elsie Pomeroy and Sir Charles G.D. Roberts," Roberts claimed that her biography "was almost a 'camouflaged autobiography,' and stressed that he had worked 'tremendously hard over it.' He gave [Lorne] Pierce (and others) the impression that he was practically dictating his memoirs to Elsie" (98).

3 See, for example, Leon Surette's *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B.*

Yeats, and the Occult (1993); Graham Hough's *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats* (1984); and George Mills Harper's *Yeats and the Occult* (1975).

4 In his October 21, 1893 review of *Songs of the Common Day*, for instance, Sharp proclaimed that "of the younger Canadian poets none has won so wide-spread and, it may be said at once, so deserved a repute as Professor Charles Roberts" (from *The Academy*; cited in Pomeroy 131).

5 Douglas Sladen stayed at Kingscroft during the same summer as Sharp's visit. An Australian poet who edited *A Century of Australian Poetry* (1888) for Sharp's Canterbury Poets series, he published a poem titled "Spiritualism" in the *Melbourne Review* in 1883.

6 In a letter to Hannibal Ingalls Kimball, Roberts points out that Kimball sent him the wrong book to review and that his wish had been to review Sharp: "By the way, you did not send Sharp's *Vistas*, but Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* instead. I will review this latter; but please send along the Vistas, as I want to make a separate paper on Sharp" (January 16, 1896; Roberts, *Letters* 218).

7 "The Winged Destiny." Included in the November 12, 1904 issue of *The Academy and Literature* (see Synge 388-9).

8 G.R.S. Mead joined the Theosophical Society in 1884. He met Madame Blavatsky in 1887, and was her London secretary from 1889-1891. He was also sub editor of the theosophical journal *Lucifer*, and later became editor of the *Theosophical Review* (see Surette 17).

9 The term "cosmic" was frequently employed by occultists in their work. See note ten below.

10 A related text published during this time was W.K. Clifford's 1888 *Cosmic Emotion*, a book which Flavia Alaya (1970) suggests was a source for the term "cosmic consciousness" recognized by occultists like Yeats and Sharp: "Clifford's attempt to devise a scientifically tenable bridge between man's delighted contemplation of self and his awe and veneration of the world not himself, his 'cosmic emotion,' perhaps lay behind the concept of 'cosmic consciousness' prevalent among the Theosophists and among many students of occultism and exponents of racial or organic memory in the later century, including, of course, Yeats, 'AE', and others, as well as Sharp" (153-54). Bucke presented an earlier version of *Cosmic Consciousness* as a paper to the American Medico-Psychological Association in Philadelphia on May 18, 1894.

11 A third related publication is Pomeroy's essay on Roberts's literary disciple, Robert Norwood, which appeared in a 1958 issue of *The Canadian Theosophist*—only a year before her article on Roberts. Also of note is Nicole Duffee's index for *The Canadian Theosophist* between 1920 and 1988, which includes a number of Roberts's contemporaries including Carman, Yeats, "AE" and Sharp/ MacLeod: Carman published the poems "Lord of My Heart's Elation," "Lord of the Far Horizons," and "Lord of the Grass and Hill"; Fiona MacLeod's "The Last Supper" appeared in v27: 197. Yeats and "AE" appear in several volumes.

12 Cappon suggests similar parallels between Charles G.D. Roberts and Fiona MacLeod in his 1905 study *Roberts and the Influence of His Times*, concluding that Roberts's next book would include "airs from the *New Mysticism* of Miss Fiona MacLeod and the Celtic School" (87-88; his italics).

13 Bentley qualifies Roberts's use of occult topoi in his 1999 essay "'The Thing is Found to Be Symbolic': *Symboliste* Elements in the Early Short Stories of Gilbert Parker, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Duncan Campbell Scott". He suggests that Roberts's early fiction in *Earth's Enigmas* was influenced by European Symbolistes like Maurice Maeterlinck. Bentley also includes a chapter on the Occult and Roberts and Carman in his forthcoming *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897*.

14 As Miller (1985) points out: "In February 1890, an almost unprecedented thing for an unknown writer was to happen to him. An unsolicited offer to publish a book of his po-

ems came to him—ostensibly through Sharp—from the London publisher, David Nutt" (64).

15 See Tracy Ware's "Letters to Carman, 1890-92, from Campbell, Lampman, and Scott." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 27 (1990): 46-66.

16 For a fuller description of *The Chap-Book's* origins and contributors, see Wendy Clauson Schlereth's *The Chap-Book: a Journal of American Intellectual Life in the 1890s* (1980).

17 Carman wrote in a letter to Gertrude Burton that "since July I have only contributed to the *Chap-Book*, not edited it" (November 6, 1894; Carman, *Letters* 80).

18 Sharp noted in his diary on October 1, 1890: "Reading these things of his [Maurice Maeterlinck] excited me to a high degree. It was the electric touch I needed to produce my *Dramatic Interludes* over which I have been brooding. I believe that much of the imaginative writing of the future will be in dramatic prose of a special kind" (*Memoir* 190). The "dramatic interludes" were published in Sharp's *Vistas* (1894).

19 Carman would travel to London later that summer and be introduced to W.B. Yeats by Arthur Symons.

20 Several of the letters demonstrate Carman's familiarity with a range of esoteric topics and figures, including tenets of Theosophy, Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, and Toronto mystic Albert Durrant Watson. As Bentley points out, Watson collaborated with Lawrence on *Mediums and Mystics: a Study of Spiritual and Psychic Forces* (1923). See *Bliss Carman's Letters to Margaret Lawrence, 1927-1929* (1995).

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