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“The Celt’s far vision of weird and hidden things”? H. P. Lovecraft, William Sharp and the Celts

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That H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937) held and imbued his writing with racist ideas is an accepted commonplace, and an uncomfortable truth for many readers. His use of slurs and stereotypes and his fear and hatred of immigrant groups are both well known, clearly evident in stories such as ‘The Rats in the Walls’, ‘Polaris’ and ‘Herbert West – Reanimator’. Responses on the part of readers, scholars and other creative writers to the fact of Lovecraft’s racism vary, including frank acknowledgement of the tension of loving the work and resisting the hatred that runs through much of it (Taylor 2018). Some call for a separation of the art from the artist, seeing the undeniable racism of the man as a personal flaw that does not significantly taint the literature (Joshi 2015), others argue that no such separation is possible, and that Lovecraft’s racial hatred shapes his work in profound ways (Houellebecq 2008; Escarcega 2020; Steadman 2024). Escarcega calls for critical engagement, “interrogating how cultural productions reflect and reify social structures” (Escarcega 2020), something House sees as imperative because of the continuing influence – at least in the United States – of both Lovecraft as a writer and of violent white supremacy, sustained by the kinds of fears and hatreds that Lovecraft felt and wrote (House 2017). China Miéville argues that simple acknowledgement of Lovecraft’s racism is insufficient, and that it is necessary to interrogate the ideological roots (which many of us find repulsive) of Lovecraft’s literary aesthetics (which many of us find appealing) (Weinstock 2016: 240-242).

The roots of Lovecraft’s racism have been traced to the worldview of the declining, reactionary class of the New England ‘aristocracy’ (though it was much more aggressive than was the norm for this class), and his immediate family’s financial struggles, intensified by his time in the ethnically diverse and shockingly modern environment of New York City in 1924-26, as well as his own wide reading (Houellebecq 2008: 105-106; Steadman 2024: 19, 35).ⁱ

While his disgust towards races he considered inferior is well known, the structure of his racialized understanding of the world and of literature, and the intellectual roots of this structure have received less attention than his use of slurs and stereotypes. This paper discusses Lovecraft's racialized conception of literature with particular reference to the Celts, looking first at the intellectual roots of this conception and then at how this manifested in his own writing. Through this we will see how the Celts, in Lovecraft's racialized understanding, could be deployed in the literary project which was Lovecraft's development of cosmic horror. It will also consider a point of contact between Lovecraft and the wider racialisation of the Celts: the work of the Celtic Revival author and occultist William Sharp, alias Fiona Macleod (1855–1905).

My argument is not that what Lovecraft thought and wrote about Celts was as objectionable, hateful and damaging as what he thought and wrote about other peoples. Rather, building on Brantley L. Bryant's recognition that Lovecraft's racism 'manifests more subtly in his ethnically chauvanistic conception of world history and of literary tradition' than in the more obvious deployment of racial slurs and dehumanized descriptions of people from minoritized ethnicities (Bryant 2012: 115), I contend that to understand Lovecraft's racism we must look at his racialized worldview in a wider context, and that Celtic-speaking peoples are one well-evidenced but understudied part of that worldview (for instance, Celts are mentioned only in passing and their specific supposed characteristics *qua* Celts are not investigated in Steadman 2024, as this generally excellent study focuses on miscegenation and the master/slave dynamic of Lovecraft's racism, and Celts as such do not figure in those discourses).

While this study is focused on Lovecraft in particular, I hope that it will be useful or at the very least interesting to scholars and readers whose main interests lie elsewhere in the sprawling, gloomy forest of horror, Gothic, Weird and other speculative literature and other media. This hope is of course partially founded on the fact that Lovecraft is still a very influential writer, directly and indirectly, on many other important figures, he is, in the words of China Miéville, 'one of those epochally important artists [who had a] paradigmatically shifting impact on the field' (Weinstock 2016: 234). Secondly and perhaps less obviously, it is founded on the reality that many of the sources that he drew upon, the influences that worked upon him and the Celtic stereotypes and tropes that he knew continue to be influential in all manner of speculative literature and other media today (Wood 2023; Cox 2023). While these stereotypes and tropes are well known to Celticists, (see Rodway 2018 for a good, recent discussion), their development and deployment are less familiar to those working in other fields, and for this

reason I hope that a discussion of the origins and development of the racialized perceptions of Celtic-speaking peoples and the manifestation of these perceptions as part of Lovecraft's influential literary project, will be a worthwhile endeavour.

The racialisation of the Celts

Speakers of Celtic languages have a long history of being marginalized and essentialized by the speakers of the dominant languages in their respective states – English in the case of Irish, Manx, Welsh and Cornish; Scots and then English in the case of Scottish Gaelic; French in the case of Breton. This can be discerned in the medieval period and into the sixteenth century (Rodway 2018; Williams 2010: 148-152) but intensified in the early modern period, in particular due to developing ideologies about the state, nationalism and Romanticism.ⁱⁱ Relatedly, racial pseudo-science and the beginnings of capitalist land exploitation gave scientific and economic sanction to existing essentialist stereotypes, many of which are familiar in other global contexts (Stroh 2011: 153, 191-193). Pseudo-sciences such as phrenology gave support to these notions, George Combe writing in his *A System of Phrenology* in 1825 that as the Gaels had an overdeveloped 'organ of Wonder', they were predisposed 'to believe in dreams, sorcery, astrology, in the mystic influence of spirits and angels, in the power of the devil. Strange visionary experiences, such as second sight, are brought about by the confluence of this unique physical constitution with a particular topography... The mountains and the wild lawless habits of those who inhabited them are peculiarly adapted to foster the growth of such impressions in imaginative minds' (Richardson 2017: 74-77).

Many of these stereotypes are deployed in an influential essay by Ernest Renan (himself a Breton) in 1854, 'The Poetry of the Celtic Races': the Celts were a race of dreamers, which had 'worn itself out in taking dreams for realities, and in pursuing its splendid visions', was close to nature, childlike, lazy, easily dominated, driven by visionary impulses to alcohol abuse (Renan 1896: 9-10, 22, 49-50). A newer stereotype emerged during the nineteenth century, gendering the Celt as feminine and docile in contrast to the virile, dominant Saxon (Renan 1896: 8; Stroh 2011: 193).ⁱⁱⁱ

William Sharp, discussed in greater detail below, also wrote an influential essay which expounded the essential characteristics of the Celt, his introduction to the 1896 anthology *Lyra Celtica* (Sharp 1932: xix-li), a collection which, 'certainly promoted the association of Celts with mysticism' (Gibson 2013: 89). Sharp argued that many writers of the Anglophone British

canon, including Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and Byron, displayed distinctively Celtic characteristics, indicative of a ‘Celtic strain in [their] blood’ (Sharp 1932: xxiii – xxiv). His argument that Anglophone literature could preserve essential aspects of Celticity should be remembered when we consider his own fiction, as he himself spoke no Celtic languages. The essential traits marking literature as Celtic were for Sharp neither linguistic nor participation in traditions developed within the Celtic languages; they were atmospheric, for the Celtic racial genius was characterized by ‘strange melancholy’ (Sharp 1932: xlix). Gaelic poetry in particular displayed ‘the gloom of unavailing regret, of mournful longing, a lament for what cannot be again’ (Sharp 1932: xxii; cf. Renan 1896: 2). The Gaelic modernist poet and critic Sorley MacLean excoriated this ‘Celtic Twilight’ paradigm for its ‘misty, cloudy romanticism... attributing to Gaelic poetry the very opposite of every quality which it actually has... whose absurdity was plain to any Gaelic speaker’ (MacLean 1985: 19-20). Few ‘Twilightists’ could speak Gaelic or any other Celtic language, however. They did not write for Celtic-language audiences and were often unconcerned about the continued existence of Celtic languages, or the economic and demographic viability of the communities which spoke them. The regretted but inevitable and imminent demise of the Celts was a commonplace for such writers (Sharp 1932: xxii; Renan 1896: 2), opening the door for writers from the dominant linguistic cultures to assume the Celtic mantle for themselves, infusing their writing with whatever they thought attractive from Celtic literatures few of them could read or knew even in translation.

This was the central thesis of English poet Matthew Arnold’s *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (Arnold 1867). Arnold, like Sharp after him, knew no Celtic languages and based his assessment of Celtic literature on dubious sources, notably James Macpherson’s *Ossian* (Macpherson 1996),^{iv} and was also influenced by Renan’s essay (Arnold 1867: 75-76). He encouraged English writers to study Celtic literature, thus infusing English literature with a vitalising Celtic element. This worked to two ends. The first was to effect more harmonious relations between the dominant English and the (understandably, to Arnold) recalcitrant Welsh and Irish in the service of British Imperial unity. Or, rather, of integrating them into an English imperial state, writing that ‘of the shrunken and diminished remains of this great primitive race, all, with one insignificant exception [i.e. Brittany], belongs to the English empire.’ There is for Arnold no fig-leaf of pretence of a joint ‘British’ empire (Arnold 1867: 177-178). The second, and more important, was to give English writers the weapons necessary to rout English bourgeois philistinism, for while the hard-headed, scientific, commercial culture of England

was most assuredly the way of the future, it needed to be sweetened with a beauty and sensitivity that Celts were best-placed to provide (Arnold 1867: i-xviii). In the forceful words of Patrick Sims-Williams's critique of the nineteenth-century construction of the ethnic characteristics of the Celt, 'Renan and Arnold set up the spiritual, impractical, rural, natural and poetic Celtic peoples as the antithesis to materialism, "Saxon" philistinism, utilitarianism, excessive rationalism, artificiality, industrial urbanization, and all the other failings of the modern European world' (Sims-Williams 1986: 72). For all the value of its literature, though, Arnold saw none at all in the continued existence of Welsh as a spoken language:

I quite share the opinion of my brother Saxons as to the practical inconvenience of perpetuating the speaking of Welsh. [...] The fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous, English-speaking whole, the breaking down of barriers between us, the swallowing up of separate provincial nationalities, is a consumation to which the natural course of things irresistibly tends [...] and its accomplishment is a mere affair of time. The sooner the Welsh language disappears as an instrument of the practical, political, social life of Wales, the better (Arnold 1867: 11-12).

Consequently, English was the language of modern literature. The Celtic past offered resources to the contemporary writer, but the best way to use them was to write in English (Arnold 1867: 13). Imperial Britain's new culture was to be English-speaking, English-reading, English-writing. Whatever value it might draw from Celtic-language literature was to be drawn exclusively from the past and applied in English.

While Anglophone culture could be improved by the leaven of Celtic literature, Arnold was clear that there were essential, racially-determined differences between the peoples. These included such physical characteristics as the shapes of their skulls (Arnold 1867: 95), but also inherent behaviours rendering Celts aesthetically admirable, but unsuited for the world of the present, much less of the future. The Celt may have access to the secrets of nature that a poet might envy (Arnold 1867: 160, 163), but this was no help in the practical business of commerce and state formation:

For good and for bad, the Celtic genius is more airy and unsubstantial [sic], goes less near the ground, than the German [...] balance, measure, and patience are just what the Celt has never had (Arnold 1867: 102).

If his rebellion against fact has thus lamed the Celt even in spiritual work, how much more must it have lamed him in the world of business and politics! The skilful and

resolute appliance of means to ends which is needed both to make progress in material civilisation, and also to form powerful states, is just what the Celt has least turn for (Arnold 1867: 105).

The formation of powerful states is an unquestioned good for this bard of the mighty Empire, and the failure of Celtic peoples to have achieved this themselves is exactly that: a failure.

The connection between Celtic-speaking peoples and mystery, the supernatural and charming but backward superstition remained strong in literary and artistic works. For instance, Proust writes that ‘if [Swann] had been in love with a Breton woman, he would have enjoyed seeing her in a coiffe [a headdress in traditional Breton costume] and hearing her tell him she believed in ghosts’ (Proust 2003: 249). Similarly, in Fritz Lang’s *Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse*, the master criminal Professor Jordan/Dr. Mabuse, disguised as a blind clairvoyant (as Macpherson’s Ossian was also blind) attributes his supposed powers to having ‘grown up in Ireland, where people still believe in the elementary powers of nature’ (Lang 1960). The Celt continues to be constructed as superstitious, preoccupied with the supernatural, barely present in the present.

These stereotypes of the innately wild, emotional and superstitious Celts were firmly established in the minds of Anglophone and Francophone writers. In the nineteenth century it was common knowledge that ‘races’ were predisposed to behave in certain ways, and this pseudo-scientific belief was very much present in literature, including in the Gothic fiction that was so influential on Lovecraft and the development of the Weird. In his 1892 short story ‘Lot No. 249’ Arthur Conan Doyle, for instance, writes of his character Monkhouse Lee having:

...a Celtic intensity of manner which contrasted with the Saxon phlegm of Abercrombie Smith (Doyle 2005: 115).

In the same year Grant Allen wrote in his ‘Pallinghurst Barrow’:

...all the world knows that Cameron, though a disbeliever in most things (except the Brush light), still retains a quaint tinge of the Highland Scotch belief in a good ghost story (Allen 2005: 156).

The supposedly innate superstition of the Gael is also present in the account by Ada Goodrich-Freer (“Miss X”) of the investigation of an alleged haunting in Perthshire. She writes of the (unnamed) steward of the estate of Ballechin House as being unaware of any old tradition of haunting at the house, “[y]et he is a Highlander, and not without superstition; for he gave it as his opinion that *if* there was anything in these noises, they must be due to the Black Art”

(Goodrich-Freer and Bute 1899: 52-53. Italics in original). This can be distinguished from stories such as Doyle's 'John Barrington Cowles', for instance, in which the Scottish setting is incidental to the weird happenings in the story, which have no direct origin in purported Scottish or Celtic characteristics or dispositions (Doyle 1912).

The melancholy longing of the Celts, so central to Macpherson's *Ossian* and which so enraptured Arnold also filtered into international literature, as seen in the work of the Finnish writer Mika Waltari. In his historical horror/fantasy story 'Island of the Setting Sun', published in 1926, he wrote:

My mother belonged to the Celts, ennobled in lore. [She] would sing in a strange, soft and wistful language peculiar songs which I did not understand, but which filled my heart with a yearning for far-off lands (Waltari 2005: 41-42).

Here it is not merely the songs that are soft and wistful, in contrast to the 'proud, menacing songs' the narrator's fellow vikings sing (Waltari 2005: 43), but the language itself, a cultural flattening that precludes its speakers speaking of joyful, amusing or even prosaic things.

There were of course those who wrote back, contesting these essentialist fantasies and asserting the intelligent, civilized nature of Celtic-speaking peoples. For instance, Alexander Nicolson's collection of Gaelic proverbs has this entry for one expression:

Cha tug Fionn riamh blàr gun chumhna – Fingal [Macpherson's Anglicisation of *Fionn*, by then standard in English] never fought a fight without offering terms.

This very old proverb, and the still oftner quoted one, 'Cothrom na Fèinne', indicate a sense of justice and generosity of which the most civilised nations of the 19th century exhibit too little in the conduct of war (Nicolson 2011: 109).

Similarly Edward Dwelly – an Englishman who learnt Gaelic and compiled a dictionary still considered authoritative by Gaelic speakers – included this comment in his definition of *fulang dorainn*:

Fulang dorainn (s.m.) The banner of Fergus, i.e. the banner of one who could sustain a defeat, and play a losing game when necessary, contrary to the English idea that the Gael can only make one rush and are soon disheartened (Dwelly 1977).

It should also be noted that when Gaels wrote about what they saw as their particular ethnic traits their focus tended to be those of generosity, sympathy for the poor and loyalty to their wider kin-groups, to Gaelic communities and the Gaelic language as such. Noble defeatism and affinity with nature are conspicuous by their absence and spirituality is almost always

presented as sincere Christian piety (Gillies 1913; Mac Eanraig 1918). The outside world, however, already knew what it wanted to know about Celts.

For a fuller development of Celtic literary stereotypes, and for a direct connection to Lovecraft, we must turn to one of the most curious figures of the Celtic Revival, the writer, critic and occultist William Sharp, alias Fiona Macleod.

William Sharp and Fiona Macleod

William Sharp (1855–1905) was a key figure in the Celtic Revival in Scotland, both in his own right and in masque as Fiona Macleod.^v Macleod was less a *nom de plume* than an alter ego, whose existence was maintained as real to all but a few until after Sharp's death (Williams 2016: 370-393). Macleod's persona (a Gaelic-speaking woman from an unspecified Hebridean island) granted Sharp (a middle-class Anglophone Scot from Paisley in the Lowlands) cultural authority for his 'Celtic' fictions and spiritual speculations. While this pose was an uncommon one, Sharp was an influential writer in the Celtic Revival and his prose style and ideas about the Celticity of literature are reasonably representative of both the Scottish and occultist strands of that movement, as well as being – as we shall see – congruent with Lovecraft's ideas.

The cultural authority conferred by Fiona allowed Sharp to ventriloquize as a Gael and give a stamp of approval to the appropriation and control of whatever future Gaelic culture was to have to Anglophones like Sharp himself. Writing as Macleod in the introduction to *The Sin-Eater and other Tales and Episodes*, Sharp made explicit use of Macleod's position as a Gael to legitimize his use of (his presentation of) Gaelic culture:

this apparition of a passing race is no more than the fulfilment 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 mightier conquering people. The Celt falls, but his spirit rises in the heart and the brain of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of the generations to come (Macleod 1893: 8-9).

Sharp's prose is a good example of the Celtic Revival school, abounding in attempts to render the homely speech of the Celtic peasant, with –generally garbled– Gaelic, with reference to real or invented ancient customs and with the personification of (invariably gloomy) nature. Examples of the latter abound in the opening of 'The Sin Eater':

A wet wind of the south mazed and moaned through the sea-mist that hung over the Ross. In all the bays and creeks was a continuous weary lapping of water. [...] Curlews wailed in the mist; on the seething limpet-covered rocks the skuas and terns screamed, or uttered hoarse rasping cries. Ever and again the prolonged note of the oyster-catcher shrilled against the air, as an echo flying blindly along a blank wall of cliff. Out of weedy places, wherein the tide sobbed with long gurgling moans, came at intervals the barking of a seal. Inland by the hamlet of Contullich, there is a reedy tarn called the Loch-a-chaorinn. By the shores of this mournful water a man moved (Macleod 1893: 16-17).

In heightened passages, as in the introduction to this collection, Sharp's writing resembles the lofty fantasy style which the Anglo-Irish writer Lord Dunsany (1878-1957) pioneered and which was so influential on Lovecraft's Dream Cycle stories:

... half hidden beneath an overhanging rock, is a Pool of Healing. To this small, black-brown tarn, pilgrims of every generation, for hundreds upon hundreds of years have come. Solitary, these: not only because the pilgrim to the Fount of Eternal Youth – which, as all Gaeldom knows, is beneath this tarn on Dùn-I [sic] of Iona – must fare hither alone, and at dawn, so as to touch the healing water the moment the first sunray quickens it, – but solitary, also, because those who go in quest of this Fount of Youth are the dreamers and the Children of Dream, and these are not many, and few ever come to this lonely place. Yet, an Isle of Dream, Iona is, indeed. Here the last sun-worshippers bowed before the Rising of God; here Columba and his hymning priests laboured and brooded; and here Oran dreamed beneath the monkish cowl that pagan dream of his. Here, too, the eyes of Fionn and Oisìn [sic], and of many another of the heroic men and women of the Fiàna [sic], lingered often; here the Pict and the Celt bowed beneath the yoke of the Norse pirate, who, too, left his dreams, or rather his strangely beautiful soul-rainbows, as a heritage to the stricken; here, for century after century, the Gael has lived, suffered, joyed, dreamed his impossible, beautiful dream; as here, now, he still lives, still suffers patiently, still dreams, and through all and over all, broods deep against the mystery of things. He is an elemental, among the elemental forces (Macleod 1893: 3-4).

In recent years Gaelic critics such as Murdo MacDonald and Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart have scorned Sharp's 'cultural necrophilia', which made rhetorical use of the imminent demise of Gaelic to facilitate its aesthetic appropriation by members of the economically and politically dominant Anglophone majority to which Sharp belonged (MacDonald 2008: 143-145; Stiùbhart 2008: 20). That Macleod was a fiction created by an English speaker was apparent to Gaels, as Sharp included many garbled Gaelic phrases in Macleod's writings. His Gaelic seems to derive mostly from Mary MacKellar's *Tourist Handbook of Gaelic and English Phrases*, which as Priscilla Scott notes will serve for cobbling together a stilted facsimile of conversation, but hopelessly inadequate beyond that for someone unfamiliar with the language

(Scott 2013: 172). Any Gaelic speaker could see that Macleod was not who she was presented as being, as one anonymous contributor to the Highland newspaper the *Oban Weekly Times* clearly did in 1905:

Ged a tha i a' sgrìobhadh le spéis agus le mùirn a thaobh na Gàidhealtachd, tha amharus làidir aig mòran dhaoine nach ban-Ghàidheal i idir. Chan eil e duilich fhaicinn nach eil eòlas mionaideach aice air a' Ghàidhlig agus nach eil i comasach aon chuid air a labhairt no sgrìobhadh gu h-eagarra no gu ceart. Tha i ri mearachdan thall 's a bhos a thaobh grammar agus cruth na cànan [...] Na'n innseadh i a fìor ainm, agus sloinneadh, chite nach robh coir no dlighe aice tighinn mar coinneamh 'an cruth ban-Ghàidheal. Mhilleadh so a cliu. Air an aobhar sin cha chluinn sinn gu brath cò i da-rìreadh Fiona NicLeòid! (Scott 2013: 173)

[Though she writes with esteem and fondness for the Highlands, many people strongly suspect that she is not a Gael at all. It's not hard to see that she has no detailed knowledge of Gaelic and she is unable to either speak or write it precisely or correctly. She makes mistakes all over the place in grammar and idiom [...] If she told her real name and descent, it would be seen that she has no right or legitimacy to come before us in the guise of a Gael. This would ruin her reputation. Thus, we shall never hear who Fiona Macleod really is!] [Translation my own]

Two examples of the paucity of Sharp's familiarity with the Gaelic language must suffice, one from the introduction to *The Sin Eater* collection (using the phonetic system from MacKellar's *Tourist Handbook*), the second from 'The Sin Eater' itself.

To the little one I spoke. But all she would say, looking up through dark, tear-wet eyes, already filled with the shadow of the burden of woman was: "*Ha mee dūvāchūs.*"
"*Tha mi Dubhachas!* – I have the gloom."
Ah, that saying! How often I have heard it in the remote Isles! (Macleod 1893: 2)

Although this is the collection's introduction, and thus ostensibly non-fictional (though in the persona of Fiona Macleod), Sharp is unlikely to have heard this ungrammatical phrase (which treats a noun as an adjective) at all, never mind often, whether in 'the remote Isles' or anywhere else. Child interlocutor or no, this is garbled nonsense of Sharp's own creation, which, typically, he then uses as the basis of his meditations on the essential character of the Gael.

The second example is spoken by Macallum, the titular sin-eater:

...Andrew Blair, I will say this; when you fare abroad *Droch caoidh ort!* and when you go upon the water, *Gaoth gun dìreadh ort!* Ay, ay Anndra Mhic Adam, *Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodann – agus bas dunach ort!* *Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa!*

Which is glossed in a footnote:

- (1) *Droch caoidh ort!* “May a fatal accident happen to you” (lit. “Bad moan on you”).
(2) *Gaoth gun dìreadh ort!* “May you drift to your drowning” (lit. “Wind without direction on you”). (3) *Dia ad agaidh, etc!* “God against thee and in thy face – and may a death of woe be yours. Evil and sorrow to thee and thine! (MacLeod 1893: 43)

The second of these is in Nicolson’s collection (Nicolson 2011: 214), though the only explanation is the literal meaning in Sharp’s brackets, the expanded definition seems to be Sharp’s own. The other expressions are not in Nicolson, and I have been unable to trace a source for them in the standard collections of proverbs and idioms, and there is no sign of anything like them in the database *Dachaigh airson Stòras na Gàidhlig* (<https://dasg.ac.uk/gd> (accessed 07.11.2022)). There is also nothing similar in the collection of Gaelic idioms and curses by Rev. Dr. Kenneth MacLeod (another ‘Twilightist’ of the Revival movement, though a Gaelic-speaking one) (Campbell 1996). If there were no published sources, this may explain why those expressions contain grammatical errors (the non-lenition of *caoidh* following *droch*; the needless lenition of what should be *donas* and *dolas*; the mistranslation of *leat-sa* as “thine”, which would be expressed more naturally by *dod chuid* or *dod shìol* or the like) while the expression taken directly from Nicolson does not. The use of the English form of the name *Adam* rather than the Gaelic *Àdhamh*, an uncommon name, but familiar to any Gael from the Bible, also points to Sharp’s lack of facility with Gaelic. The scepticism of the anonymous contributor to the *Oban Weekly Times* was justified.

Some (presumably non-Gaelic-speaking) people suspected that the real Fiona MacLeod was Ella Carmichael, native Gaelic speaker, folklorist, literary scholar and language and feminist activist. Carmichael was disgusted by the notion that Sharp’s writings might be thought to be hers, and evidently (and correctly) suspected that she knew who their real author was, writing to her friend, the Catholic priest, Gaelic poet and folklorist Father Allan McDonald in 1900:

[M]any people suppose that I am “Fiona MacLeod”. As if I would make out Highlanders to be such soft-brained lunatics! [...] Have you seen any man or woman wandering about Uist [North Uist, South Uist and Benbecula, Gaelic-speaking islands in the Western Isles, where McDonald was priest] who could possibly write these things under the name “Fiona MacLeod”? Have you ever seen or known of Mr William Sharp being in Uist? (Scott 2013: 172)

She wrote to McDonald again in 1901, asking his opinion of MacLeod’s novel *Phàras, A Romance of the Isles*:

I have never spoken [...] to any Celt who did like [MacLeod's stories], they do not seem to take among the race they are supposed to represent – but Sassanachs [= English people] like them and think she is just the Celtic thing (Scott 2013: 172).

We can see that Gaels did not passively accept Sharp's travesty, but as a marginalized minority they no longer had the power to stop his fantasies being taken for the real thing by Anglophones, as Carmichael noted.

In adopting this pose Sharp can in some respects be compared to another writer who moved in similar circles, the occultist Ada Goodrich Freer (1857-1931), who while presenting "her" researches into the second sight in Gaelic Scotland (largely plagiarised from Fr. Allan McDonald. Campbell and Hall 1968: 223–246, 310–323), claimed an equally fictitious Highland ancestry (Campbell and Hall 1968: 82). A.R. Wright's obituary for Freer in *Folklore* refers to her 'inherited Highland sympathy with the mysterious' (quoted in Campbell and Hall 1968: 223), again demonstrating how well-established was the notion that such sensitivity to the supernatural was an essential element of Gaelic ethnicity.

Lovecraft and Sharp

It is Macallum's series of curses in 'The Sin-Eater' that provides a link between Lovecraft and Sharp. Lovecraft's 'The Rats in the Walls' makes direct, though uncredited, use of Sharp's peculiar imprecations. At the story's climax, as its protagonist Delapore suffers a psychological breakdown, he declares the following:

It's voodoo, I tell you... that spotted snake... Curse you, Thornton, I'll teach you to faint at what my family do!... 'Sblood, thou stinkard, I'll learn ye how to gust... wolde ye swynke me thilke wys?... *Magna Mater! Magna Mater!.. Atys... Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodann... agus bas duanach ort! Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa! Ungl... ungl... rrrlh... chchch...* (Lovecraft 2008: 254–255).

As Delapore's sanity disintegrates, his consciousness recedes in time, backwards through his family's history and their languages, from twentieth-century English, back through pastiches of Early Modern and Middle English, then Latin and Gaelic, concluding with inarticulate Neanderthal grunting.^{vi} While Delapore had previously been shown to know Latin (Lovecraft 2008: 248), there is no indication of any prior knowledge of Gaelic, and it seems that the knowledge and experiences of his lineage are manifested supernaturally. Similarly, characters in 'The Shunned House' speak French, a language they had not hitherto known, as a

manifestation of the Weird legacy of the French Huguenot family buried on the site of their house centuries before (Lovecraft 2008: 292-313). In both cases new linguistic ability flows through the unaware characters from Weird forces from the past, an unholy perversion of the linguistic facility granted to the Apostles on Pentecost in Acts 2: 1–12.

As S.T. Joshi notes, Lovecraft had read ‘The Sin-Eater’ in a 1920 anthology edited by Joseph Lewis French, *The Best Psychic Stories*, and copied the Gaelic from there (Joshi 1997: 54-55, n. 53). Steadman also notes this as the source for the Gaelic phrase, but does not investigate it further (Steadman 2024: 109). There are some surprising things about Lovecraft’s use of Gaelic. Firstly, that modern Gaelic –even in Sharp’s garbled rendering– should be the intermediate stage between primitive grunting and Latin is obviously anachronistic. Secondly, the story’s setting in south-west England more naturally suggests Brittonic rather than Gaelic as the locally-spoken Celtic language prior to the introduction of English. Lovecraft was aware of this anomaly, writing to Frank Belknap Long that ‘...the only objection to the phrase is that it’s *Gaelic* instead of *Cymric* as the south-of-England locale demands. But as with anthropology – details don’t count. Nobody will ever stop to note the difference’ (Joshi 1997: 54-55, n. 53). He was mistaken: one reader who did note the difference was Robert E. Howard, and it was on account of this that he first contacted Lovecraft, initiating a correspondence which continued until Howard’s death in 1936 (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017).

Lovecraft and the Celts: Fiction

As we have seen, Celtic-identified peoples were characterized in racialized cultural discourse as being particularly preoccupied with or sensitive to supernatural things. Lovecraft frequently made use of this established stereotype in his fiction, deploying them as indicators and detectors of Weird activity. For instance in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, he included ‘wild rumour and legendary’ in western Ireland among the series of disturbances around the world heralding Cthulhu’s reawakening:

The press cuttings [...] touched on cases of panic, mania and eccentricity during the given period... Here was a nocturnal suicide in London, where a lone sleeper had leaped from a window after a shocking cry. Here likewise a rambling letter to the editor of a paper in South America, where a fanatic deduces a dire future from visions he has seen. A despatch from California describes a theosophist colony as donning white robes en masse for some “glorious fulfilment” which never arrives, whilst items from India speak guardedly of serious native unrest toward the end of March. Voodoo orgies multiply in Hayti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings. American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes bothersome about this time, and New York

policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines on the night of March 22-23. The west of Ireland, too, is full of wild rumour and legendary, and a fantastic painter named Ardois-Bonnot hangs a blasphemous “Dream Landscape” in the Paris spring salon of 1926 (Lovecraft 2008: 360-361).

It is notable that in this vast sweep of unrest the examples from London and Paris are attributed to individuals, as is the letter to the South American newspaper, while the others are of monolithic masses of people. It is as though English, French and at least literate South American people, as with the American sculptor Wilcox, receive these visions as individuals, as artists and dreamers, while the other groups –immigrant and indigenous populations, racially-identified peoples– act with the same undifferentiated unity of purpose as a cult colony. The west of Ireland had by this time, through the development of cultural nationalism in the Celtic Revival, become established in popular imagination as the repository of authentic Irishness, its idealized peasantry embodying cultural, linguistic and spiritual continuity with the medieval Gaelic and deep Celtic past, unbroken by conquest, plantation, famine and mass emigration (Ó Giolláin 2000: 102-106; Darwin 2018: 24-27). Lovecraft uses this established notion to reposition the Irish peasantry, understood to be sensitive to the supernatural, as sensitive to his recasting of the supernatural as the Weird.

Celtic sensitivity to supernatural realities is also apparent in ‘The Horror at Red Hook’. This story is one of Lovecraft’s most notorious for its racist depiction of the immigrant communities of the titular Red Hook in Brooklyn, New York (Steadman 2024: 111). The protagonist is another immigrant, Irish policeman Thomas F. Malone. Like many Lovecraft protagonists he has a particular sensitivity to the Weird – though unlike most of them this is ascribed explicitly to his ethnicity:

[Malone] was a man of sense despite his mysticism. He had the Celt’s far vision of weird and hidden things, but the logician’s quick eye for the outwardly unconvincing... (Lovecraft 2008: 315).

Malone *is* logical and rational, but this is positioned in opposition to his ethnically-defined sensitivity to the Weird, a sensitivity he has precisely *qua* ‘Celt’. Steadman quotes this same description in his study of Lovecraft’s racism, but seems not to appreciate the ethnic essentialism of the sentence, as he refers to Malone as a “privileged, white Anglo-Saxon protagonist”, and makes no comment on the fact that Malone’s mystical capacity is explicitly grounded in his Celtic origin (Steadman 2024: 118). It is precisely the qualities that racial

pseudo-science insisted distinguished the Celt from the Anglo-Saxon that fit Malone for his role in this story.

Something of the same sort of mystical capacity is suggested, though not explicitly stated, in 'The Shadow out of Time'. Here, the protagonist is alerted to evidence of an ancient civilisation in Australia by two men with Celtic names – Boyle and Mackenzie, names of Irish and Scottish Gaelic origin respectively (Lovecraft 2008: 975-977). Significantly, Mackenzie's letter also describes 'racial legends' of the 'blackfellows', and though he dismissively adds that 'there usually isn't much in what these natives say' (Lovecraft 2008: 975-976), these legends are, unsurprisingly, distant memories of the horrifying truth revealed at the climax. Noteworthy here is that the (unnamed, monolithic) indigenous people and the stones with strange markings on them are interpreted for the protagonist by these two 'Celts', as though they are conduits transmitting knowledge of the Weird to him. Lovecraft may here have taken a lead from Bram Stoker, in whose 1911 novel *The Lair of the White Worm* – a work replete with racial stereotyping and disgust of Black people in particular – the Australian-raised protagonist Adam Salton knows about second sight from Gaels, saying, "I have often heard of second sight – you know we have many western Scots in Australia" (Stoker 2006: 193). Lovecraft certainly knew this story, referring to it in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature". (Lovecraft 2008: 1080 – 1081)

There is a similar use of a 'Celt' in 'The Haunter of the Dark'. Here the protagonist Robert Blake is told about a deserted church and its use by a mysterious 'bad sect' by another policeman, 'a wholesome Irishman', and in his conversation with Blake the stereotyped Hiberno-English form 'ould' (= 'old') emphasizes his nationality (Lovecraft 2008: 1003). The officer further tells Blake that the deceased Father O'Malley – another Irish name – knew more about the sect, again positioning a Celtic-identified individual as an interpreter and bearer of knowledge about the Weird. Again, the established Irish – and generally Celtic – stereotypes of superstition and sensitivity to the supernatural are deployed to construct these characters who are reliably correct in identifying Weird activity. This, it should be noted, is very different to the use of Gaelic in 'The Rats in the Walls', in which a (modern!) Celtic language is used, not as a conduit for information about the Weird, but as a signifier of extreme antiquity.

Lovecraft and the Celts: Non-fiction

In his 1927 essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature”, which outlines the development of various horror, Gothic and supernatural literary traditions, Lovecraft identifies specifically ‘Celtic’ features in the works of several writers, which he fits into a schema of interpretation fundamentally based on the supposed characteristics of racial groups (Lovecraft 2008: 1041-1098). The Irish writer Charles Robert Maturin, for instance, was well suited to write his Gothic plays and novels by his ‘less sophisticated emotions and strain of Celtic mysticism’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1053). Similarly, Arthur Machen was equipped with ‘an impressionable Celtic heritage’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1087), and Lord Dunsany’s success lay in his ability to blend ‘Eastern colour, Hellenic form, Teutonic sombreness, and Celtic wistfulness’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1093).

These are comments on individual writers, but Lovecraft makes it clear that these traits determine literary styles on a broader level. He writes, for instance, of ‘the sly humour which only the Eastern mind knows how to mix with weirdness,’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1055) and that ‘the French genius is more naturally suited to this dark realism than to the suggestion of the unseen; since the latter process requires, for its best and most sympathetic development on a large scale, the inherent mysticism of the Northern mind’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1064). Similarly ‘[t]he Semitic mind, like the Celtic and Teutonic, seems to possess marked mystical inclinations’ (Lovecraft 2008: 1064). It is striking, and a good illustration of the arbitrariness of the supposed innate characteristics of various races, that the same group can be assigned diametrically opposed essential traits by different writers. We have seen how Arnold, Doyle and others ascribed to the ‘German’, ‘Saxon’ or ‘Teutonic’ race the phlegmatic qualities of rationality and balance in contrast to the wild and mystical Celts. Lovecraft, however, considers the Teutons to be quite as ‘mystical’ as the Celts in this essay, grouping them together as ‘Northern’ peoples in contrast to the rational pragmatism of the southern ‘Latin races’:

In the West, where the mystical Teuton had come down from his black Boreal forests and the Celt remembered strange sacrifices in Druidic groves, it assumed a terrible intensity and convincing seriousness of atmosphere which doubled the force of its half-told, half-hinted horrors. [...] Wherever the mystic Northern blood was strongest, the atmosphere of the popular tales became most intense; for in the Latin races there is a touch of basic rationality which denies to even their strangest superstitions many of the overtones of glamour so characteristic of our own forest-born and ice-fostered whisperings (Lovecraft 2008: 1044-1046).

Lovecraft's essay also demonstrates his familiarity with texts which shaped the racial stereotypes of the spiritual visionary Celt, including *Ossian* and the Anglophone Irish writers who 'reproduced' the 'salient features' of what was thought of as Irish mythology, such as J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats and George Russell. The latter two, significantly, were –like the Californian cultists of 'The Call of Cthulhu'– involved in the theosophical movement (Lovecraft 2008: 1047, 1085). Yeats was a central figure in the Celtic Revival, and did much to popularize the image of the Celts, and of the western Irish peasantry in particular, as having an innate capacity for the mystical and visionary, writing in *The Celtic Twilight* of Irish poems which were 'the very inmost voice of Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen', and comparing the visions of the Irish peasantry with those of Swedenborg (Yeats 1893: 18, 208-209). It is perhaps surprising, since he had already made use of 'The Sin-Eater' in 'The Rats in the Walls', that Lovecraft's essay does not mention Fiona Macleod. It may be that he simply felt he had little to say about Macleod, as there is no evidence that he had read any more of 'her' fiction than that single story (Joshi 2018: personal communication).

Lovecraft's ideas about race, and the role that race plays in distinctive literary styles, are developed in his correspondence with Robert E. Howard. As noted above, it was Howard's curiosity about the Gaelic in 'The Rats in the Walls' that first prompted him to contact Lovecraft. Both men were interested in the ethnic origins of the Celts, and though neither knew any Celtic languages, their letters show some familiarity with debates about where the language group had originated and how its different branches had developed (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 19, 24). They also debated theories about the Celtic settlement of Britain and Ireland and the potential for light to be thrown on such (pre)historic questions by medieval Irish literature (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 17-38). Both knew of the pseudo-historical schema laid out in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, or *The Book of Invasions*, which Lovecraft had earlier mentioned in passing, as *The Book of Invaders*, in his Irish-set story 'The Moon-Bog' (Lovecraft 2008: 158). Though Lovecraft admits that he does not know *Lebor Gabála* 'at first hand', he was clearly familiar with its basic outline (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 28).

Within a few months they were discussing how their own ethnic backgrounds, and a putative Celtic element therein, had shaped their writing. In October 1930, Howard defined the Celt's characteristic traits in terms strikingly similar to those of Arnold, Renan and Sharp:

Celtic nature has its moments of spontaneous gaiety and good nature, but it has depths of dark brooding and unexpected cruelty. It is wayward and uncertain as the wind; as

water that flows to the sea and the grey waves of the sea. The Celt is oppressed by the everlasting sadness of the world and the fleeting shadows of this ephemeral dream we call reality. He is a primitive creature of rivers and shadows and dreams that can instantly turn to nightmares. He is moved and shifted by all winds that blow; his actions are determined by moods that pass over his soul like the shadows of wind-blown clouds... (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 86).

In the same letter Howard advocates ending immigration to the USA originating outwith the British Isles, expressing anger that ‘any Jew, Polack or Wop, spawned in some teeming ghetto and ignorant of or cynical toward American ideals, can strut and swagger and blattantly [sic] assert his Americanship and is accepted on the same status as a man whose people have been in the New World for three hundred years,’ and states that while he has as yet made no contribution to American greatness, he at least comes ‘of a breed that helped build up the country, which is more than can be said today by any number of Hebraic-Slavic-Latins running around and calling themselves “Americans”’ (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 86, 88–89). The essentialisation of innate racial traits sits side by side with xenophobic and racist politics.

Like Arnold and Sharp, Howard believed that an essentially Celtic style could be detected in writing in English, and that the capacity to write in this style was racially inherited. As neither man –again, like Arnold and Sharp– had any detailed familiarity with Celtic literature even in translation, their assessment of ‘Celtic’ features in their own or anybody else’s writing was purely a matter of the inheritance of supposedly innate racial characteristics.

Howard attributed such an inheritance to Lovecraft, writing to him in around September 1930:

I have long been sure that there was Celtic blood in your veins [...] The Celtic influence is readily seen, to my mind, in the smoothly flowing style of your tales. Altogether, if I may venture to say so, your horror-work seems to me to lean toward the Gothic in conception and the Celtic in execution. You certainly seem to have as much connection with Celtic tradition as Machen (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 48-49).

More hesitantly, Howard claimed the same inheritance and style for himself – notably not on account of his actual writings, but of his “blood”:

As for myself, I can lay scant claim to either school, my tales being more on the action-adventure style than the true horror-story. If I had any particular method, I suppose it should be Celtic, since the great part of my blood is of that race (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 49).

Again, the assertion of racially-determined characteristics sits side by side with xenophobia, as Howard goes on to complain bitterly about ‘the overflowing of the country with low-class foreigners’ (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 51).

Howard also made use of Celtic elements in his own work, though he had less interest in the mystical and visionary Celts of popular and literary imagination than Lovecraft did. His most famous hero shares a name –though little else– with Conan Maol, a character in the Irish and Scottish Gaelic *Fiannaíocht/ Fiannaigheachd* tradition. Howard also applied Conan Maol’s patronymic, “mac Morna” to his Pictish character Bran Mak Morn, and he had a keen interest in early Scottish history, including that of the real, historical Picts (Howard 1968: 1-4). His Conan is a Cimmerian, the ethnic group which in the fictional historical framework for his writings are the forebears of ‘[t]he Gaels, ancestors of the Irish and Highland Scotch’ (Howard 2006: 15).

Lovecraft fully agreed that a Celtic racial inheritance was a benefit to a writer working in his field, and expanded on his ideas of what distinguished the Celts from other races in terms familiar from Arnold:

...I think it is a great asset from the standpoint of fantastic literature to have so predominant a share of Celt [in one’s ancestry]. I have often thought, in surveying the trends of literature and socio-political organisation today, that the Celtic group is really the only *young* and unspoiled race left on the planet. All the rest of the white race has passed the naive and adventurous and life-loving stage of its evolution, and has reached that prosaic, urbanised, social-minded, unimaginative condition out of which vivid art finds hard work in growing. Only the Celt, I sometimes reflect, continued to think and feel spontaneously in poetic fashion – that is, in terms of symbolism, pageantry, dramatic contrast, and adventurous expectancy. In him we see the strongest remaining manifestation of the pure Aryan spirit – the spirit of the natural bard and fighter and dreamer as opposed to the merchant, the builder, the administrator, and the instinctive city-dweller (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 74. Italics in original).

Like Howard, he then outlined his own Celtic ancestry and, again like Howard, bemoaned ‘the foreign overrunning of America, [...] the most tragic event in the continent’s history’ and the policy of attracting to the United States ‘any sort of human scum’ (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 75-77). In the same letter, he speculates that it was the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt ‘which first broke the spirit of the Jew, and gave him that readiness to submit to conquest which has made all his cultural heirs so peculiarly hateful to our unbroken and liberty-worshipping Western race-groups’ and scorns the notion that all non-indigenous Americans are immigrants, ‘as if the conquerors and builders of the nation were on a par with the latest

lousy Lithuanian dumped on Ellis Island!’ (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 52-79). Lovecraft in the same letter rejects Christianity, not because it is untrue but because ‘Eastern importations don’t suit us very well [...] This religion is Semitic in spirit and doctrine and has probably retarded us more than it has helped us’ (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 55). For Lovecraft it is the suitability of a religion or of modes of expression to a racial group that is important, not the value of the religion or expression *per se*, as he argues with respect to the ‘brilliant, mature, stimulating’ but still ‘fundamentally different’ civilization of medieval Islamic culture. It was a culture that ‘Celts and Teutons’ could learn from, but being ‘essentially the culture of a Southern and Semitic race’, they could never be wholly integrated with it (Joshi, Schultz and Burke 2017: 55).

Any examination of their published correspondence shows Lovecraft and Howard flitting between their conceptions of ethnic history, the effects of this history on literary composition and a deep fear and hatred of what they considered to be inferior peoples. These subjects were closely intertwined for both men.

It should be noted that Lovecraft’s attitude to his own purported Celtic ancestry was ambivalent, however, as three years earlier he had written to Wilfred B. Talman:

As for my attitude towards ancestral Celts — well, I fancy it’s still a bit ambiguous. I like ’em when they’re kings, yet after all mere Druid-hounds can’t compare in solidity & majesty with golden-bearded Vikings and conquerors. I’m for the Teuton in the last analysis — although of course a Celt or two on the loftier branches doesn’t poison a whole family tree! (Quoted in Escarcega 2020)

There is no horror of a tainted ancestry here, as long as the Celtic antecedents were of sufficiently prestigious social standing, but there is a clear racial hierarchy in operation here, and it is “the Teuton” who is atop it.

We can see, then, that in both his fiction and his public and private non-fiction, Lovecraft drew on and participated in pseudo-scientific racialized discourse about people identified as ‘Celts’. The construction of Celts as spiritual, sensitive to realities beyond the mundane and incarnating a continuity with a deep and mysterious past was something that fit well with the relationship of the Weird to humanity that was so central to much of Lovecraft’s fiction. Celts could be positioned as conduits or interpreters of the Weird precisely because of the racially inherited qualities ascribed to them by the theorists, occultists and fiction writers who succeeded

Macpherson in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As with Sharp, Yeats and other writers of the Celtic Revival, Lovecraft was able to work with existing, widely-held stereotypes of 'Celts' to develop his own literary project, working a deeply racialized understanding of real human cultures into his construction of the fictional Weird. Though he was, as we have seen, drawing a well-established tradition of perceptions of Celtic peoples, he recontextualised this tradition in a strikingly original manner.

For an atheist with little regard for traditional religion, and who detested Christianity in particular (Steadman 2024: 39), the stock Gothic and horror elements of devils and demons, vampires, hell, mad monks and much else were of limited appeal. He did make use of traditional horror elements such as witches ('Dreams in the Witch House', see Poole 2016: 216 – 222) and mummies ('Imprisoned with the Pharaohs'/ 'Under the Pyramids', written with Harry Houdini) but when they were used, they were radically recontextualised, reorientated towards Lovecraft's Weird. In their traditional forms many horror elements were too closely bound up with Christian notions of good and (especially) evil, and with a Christian cosmology. Lovecraft rejected Christian morality and found the Christian cosmology to be correspondingly too limited. For him, heaven and hell could be superseded by vast multidimensional planes of being, the awesome scale of which would dwarf the most ecstatic heights of traditional religion. The moral worldview bound up with this cosmology was also too small, and notions of good and evil, and of a loving – or even a vengeful – God were to be replaced by the terror of beings not only inconceivably more powerful than humanity, but indifferent to it. A writer who did not believe in and so did not fear spiritual evil could not make spiritual evil convincingly frightening. What was needed was a new and vaster fear to fill the empty space where most of his predecessors in horror fiction had – either from personal belief or from their culturally inherited worldvision – seen the terrible powers of heaven and hell. Through his embrace of racist pseudo-science, he found that the stereotyped construction of the Celts as a visionary, spiritually sensitive race could be deployed, that their supposed innate characteristics were available as a resource for his literary project. Spiritual sensitivity as such was something for which Lovecraft had little use, but the visionary capacity of the Celt could be redirected from the spiritual to the Weird while remaining recognisable and legible to readers whose understanding of the Celts had been shaped by similar influences as those working on Lovecraft himself, the result of the long process of the marginalization, exoticization and fetishization of the Celtic-speaking peoples.

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ⁱ See James Eglinton's introduction in Bavinck 2023: 10-16 for a useful distinction between the deliberately constructed worldview and the inherited assumptions of the worldvision.

ⁱⁱ The sixteenth-century Bannatyne Manuscript includes an anonymous poem on the creation of the first Gael from a horse turd. The new creature, 'blak as onie draff [any rubbish]' is no sooner created than he resolves to steal cattle, steals St Peter's knife and swears 'be yon kirk,/ Sa lang as I may geir gett to steill, will I nevir wirk.' ['by that church,/ as long as I may get gear to steall, I will never work']. This reflects a pre-Romantic set of stereotypes of Gaels as workshy and given to theft as a way of life. The general thrust of the poem is reminiscent of Lovecraft's notoriously foul doggerel on the creation of Black people (Murdoch 1896: 460-461).

ⁱⁱⁱ This stereotpye is by no means dead. YouTube user Beemerboy324 commented on a video of the Gaelic singer Julie Fowlis singing Óran an Ròin, 'Put on headphones, start this song, time stops. The Gaelic language and the female voice were made for each other.' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IB4TBIxtYI>. Accessed 13.11.2019). This version of the fantasy requires Gaelic-speaking men and boys to be silent, lest they spoil the illusion.

^{iv} Macpherson was a Gaelic speaker who starting in 1760 published a series of works, collectively known as *Ossian*, which he claimed were translations of Gaelic epics. Though certain elements from traditional Gaelic written and oral literature can be detected in his writings, these were original writings in English, written to appeal to the literary tastes of English speakers. *Ossian* was profoundly influential on the Romantic movement across Europe, as well as on external perceptions of the Gaels. Much of the gloom, mist and ghostly melancholy that Arnold, Sharp and others attributed to Celtic literature and culture derives ultimately from Macpherson.

^v Though Sharp and Macleod were the same person, I cite "their" publications under the names they used for each, for ease of finding the items referred to.

^{vi} I am grateful to Gregory Darwin for the suggestion that this might also be intended to represent an inhuman language, similar to the famous "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn" in 'The Call of Cthulhu'.