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John Morrison

John Duncan was born in Dundee in 1866 and is often described as studying at the Dundee School of Art from 1877. As it was not founded until 1888 that part of his early history is doubtful but he certainly worked as an illustrator in Dundee from the early 1880s.[1] In the later 80s he moved to London and attended the West London School of Art before following a well established path and enrolling at the Antwerp Academy under Charles Verlat, followed by a brief period at Dusseldorf.[2] In 1890 he travelled to Italy by way of Paris before returning to Dundee to establish himself as a painter in 1891. It was in Dundee in late 1891 or early 1892 that Duncan met Patrick Geddes, who was in Dundee as Professor of Botany.

Geddes' arrangement at Dundee appears to have only required him to be resident for three months in the year. He was thus free to develop his sociological and other activities in Edinburgh and it is Duncan's association with these activities that this paper particularly discusses. Duncan was involved in both the 1895 launch and production of *The Evergreen* and in the decoration of Ramsay Lodge, Geddes' conversion of the former home of poet Allan Ramsay into an internationally focused scholastic community. It was in these two projects that Duncan's Celticism took form and it did so very heavily under the influence of Geddes. Though in part continuing the dominant Highlandist identity developed in Scotland in the earlier nineteenth century as a means of promoting Scotland's cultural specificity, painting such as John Duncan's makes its appeal on the grounds that there was once a unifying, pan-European Celtic culture to which all Scots were still fundamentally related. That understanding of the Celtic past as international, Duncan derived from Geddes. He then applied the general approach to any available Celtic related subjects he alighted upon. Thus the painter's source for the 1908 painting of *Angus Og* was most

[1] See J. Morrison, 'James Duncan of Jordanstone and the Art College in Dundee', in *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, vol.2, 1997, pp.52–63.

[2] From c.1870 Antwerp was a popular destination for young British artists wanting to study outside the Royal Academy/Royal Scottish Academy/South Kensington system. See J Sheehy, 'The Flight from South Kensington: British Artists at the Antwerp Academy 1877–1885', *Art History*, 20.1, March 1997, pp.124–153.

likely Lady Augusta Gregory's retelling of the Irish folkloric tale of *The Dream of Angus Og* contained in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* of 1902.[3] The subject is not, therefore, Highland Scottish, but Duncan used the tale to summon up an ideology of ancient Celtic virtue and strength and apply it to Scotland. The Highlands, as the last repository of a once trans-national Celtic culture are implicit rather than centre stage but the meaning is clear. It is in the vestiges of that Celtic culture that Scottish identity is to be found, and on that base that a new internationalised Scottish culture could be built.

Duncan's appropriation of an Irish tale rather than a source more immediately identifiable as Scottish, can be attributed to his work with Geddes in the 1890s. The painter's association with the Celtic Revival in Scotland was not a focus or an exemplar for narrow nationalism. It did not simplistically parade Scotland's supposed Celtic heritage as a mark of difference and therefore singularity. Frequently Scottish artists were concerned to promote their 'ancient heritage' as a conduit for a United Kingdom nationalism, to which Scotland contributed. Duncan can, on occasion, be understood in this way but more commonly his work consciously embraced a pan-European internationalism. Scottish autonomy was not the focus, and even Scottish distinctiveness within a British polity, so often the subject of earlier nineteenth century Highlandist art, was frequently subsumed into a celebration and promotion of this European identity. The strong Celtic links between Ireland and Scotland are the subtext in *Angus Og*, not the separateness of Scotland within the United Kingdom.

This cross border Celticism occurs repeatedly in various forms in the late nineteenth century, with among other manifestations the Pan-Celtic Society founded in 1888, and Pan-Celtic Congress held in Dublin in 1901.[4] That internationalism is what underlies Duncan's 1912 painting *Tristan and Isolde*.[5] Here the union of Celtic nations is made flesh in the guise of the eponymous protagonists. Tristan, prince of the kingdom of Cornwall, is shown with Isolde (or Iseult) of Ireland drinking a love potion which will bind them to each other eternally. Duncan had many available sources for his tale and the

[3] Lady Augusta Gregory, *Cuchulan of Muirthemne*, John Murray London, 1902. John Duncan *Angus Og*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 101.6 cm. National Gallery of Scotland.

[4] The first congress took place in August 1901 in Dublin with the aim 'to encourage cooperation in the study of Celtic languages, history, music, literature and other aspects of the common Celtic culture'.

[5] John Duncan, *Tristan and Isolde*, 1912. Tempera on canvas, 76.6 x 76.6 cm. City Art Centre: City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries.

most usually cited is Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* of 1865. It is possible, however, that the painter knew the tale in other forms. Walter Scott edited a Middle-English version of the poem S*ir Tristrem* in 1804 and Matthew Arnold wrote *Tristram and Iseult* in 1852, either of which Duncan could have known.[6]

At precisely the time Geddes and Duncan became acquainted, knowledge about Celtic Scotland was developing and being disseminated very rapidly. The heavily illustrated *Catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*, replete with representations of leaf swords and pennanular brooches, was published in 1892, the probable year Duncan and Geddes met. *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* did not appear until 1903 but there were earlier texts and illustrations available.[7] D. Wilson's *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* is from 1863, W.F. Skene's *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and other Early Memorials of Scottish History* was published in Edinburgh in 1867, and J. H. Stuart's articles on the *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* were produced in Aberdeen in the 1850s and 1860s.

The Celtic Revival in which Geddes and Duncan were major players developed in the context of all this increasing knowledge. Led principally by Patrick Geddes and by William Sharp (better known by his Celtic pseudonym of 'Fiona Macleod'), the Edinburgh focussed grouping had strong ties to the English Arts and Crafts movement. The reintegration of art with society, and the potential for that reintegrated art to be a tool in social reform, were central to Geddes' vision. This led directly to the development of much decorative public art painting in the period. Ideally painting was no longer to be the preserve only of those who could afford it. It was to inhabit communal spaces and to be readily accessible both physically and intellectually. In the words of G. Baldwin Brown, the first professor of History of Art at Edinburgh University, and an ally of Geddes, public mural painting might be expected to be 'expressive of national or civic life'.[8]

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[6] W. Scott, *Sir Tristrem: a metrical romance of the thirteenth century by Thomas of Ercildoune, called the Rhymer; edited from the Auchinleck ms. By Walter Scott*, Edinburgh 1804. M. Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. B. Fellowes, London, 1852.

[7] *Catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1892. An earlier edition of the Museum catalogue was published but without illustrations. J. Romilly Allen & J. Anderson *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1903. The Introduction by Anderson was based on a series of lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1892.

[8] G. Baldwin Brown, 'Some Recent Efforts in Mural Decoration', *Scottish Art Review*, 1:8, 1888–9, p.225.

Geddes' views on the role of the artist in society were forcefully expressed in his reflection on the Glasgow International exhibition of 1888. Responding to J.A.M. Whistler's characterisation of the artist in his *Ten O'Clock Lecture* of 1885, as one who was ever divorced from the ordinary everyday concerns of his fellow men, Geddes retorted, that far from being the member of a 'petty priesthood … the highest artist has always been simply the master workman.'[9] That artisan/artist role Geddes saw as vital. The artist ought, he felt, to be an active member of society who gave expression to ideas held in common, bolstered memory, created objects valued by society as their most treasured creations. Art took its place for Geddes as a functional part of a healthy society, and he reiterated that belief regularly, often using scientific or botanical metaphors or analogies to ground the art in practical material terms. He compared artists to naturalists who must both continually study nature.

Geddes sought an art which would dispense with what he saw as the long standing and artificial opposition between everyday practical matters on the one hand and human concern for 'spirituality' on the other. He wanted a new unified synthesis of art and science which would draw together these artificial divisions in the social and cultural order. He identified polarities in past conceptions of society, the Classical and the Christian, the Medieval and the Renaissance. These divisions he used as metaphors to return repeatedly to the same issue, the disjunction between art and society, either through the separation between the concrete realities of modern industrial Britain and the faux ethereality of modern art which sought to stand above society, or the crass commercialism which generated art as consumer product. This new role for the artist projected an art which led society, reflected contemporary social issues, moulded lives and promoted social progress. The way to do this, he felt, was to break down the artificial barrier between 'decorative pictures' and 'pictures proper' and through the commissioning of public murals, in 'halls and schools', promote an active socially engaged art which might inform, stimulate and educate in a manner far more efficacious than the simple 'sending up of more "stirks" to college'.[10]

With these aims Geddes set about fostering a socially concerned art which would both reflect and enhance Scotland, but always Scotland within the wider European context. Writing in the first issue of *The Evergreen*, the periodical

[9] P. Geddes, *Every Man His Own Art Critic, Glasgow Exhibition 1888: An Introduction to The Study of Pictures (1888)*, Glasgow 188, p. 41.

[10] Geddes, *Every Man His Own Art Critic*. The summation of Geddes's ideas are drawn from the entirety of the publication. The quotations are from p.29 & p.38.

he founded in 1895, Geddes decried those who were beginning to attack the British unionist position in favour of increased autonomy for Scotland. He wrote:

> Nor need we here speak of those who think that because we would not quarrel with brother Bull, nor abandon our part in the larger responsibilities of united nationality and race, we must needs also sink the older loves and kinships, the smaller nationality wholly.[11]

Geddes saw no dichotomy in asserting Scottishness and simultaneously acknowledging and accepting broader synchronous identities. He saw a Celtic Revival as a way of revitalising art and restoring its position of centrality in society. 'Art is not an exotic supplement to life', he claimed, 'but as inseparable from it as hygiene'.[12] He saw that renewal as both drawing on and contributing to a wider European culture, rather than being confined to Scotland. In rejecting a Scottish identity premised upon resistance to England he envisaged a Celtic Revival as a means of promoting internationalism.

> Though Charlie may no come back again, though the too knightly king, so long expected back from Flodden, lie for ever "mid the Flowers o' the Forest", though Mary's fair face still rouse dispute as of old, the Wizard's magic book still waits unmouldering in his tomb. The prophetic Rhymer listens from Elfland, Arthur sits in the Eildon Hills, Merlin but sleeps in his thorn.[13]

Geddes by-passed Scotland's long struggle with England and based his 'renascence', as he styled it, on a pan-European, Celtic culture. Rather than, as has been claimed, balancing his Scottish nationalism against his loyalty to Britain, Geddes conceived of his Scottish nationalism as wholly compatible with British and European sympathies. His vision of Scotland as distinctive and capable of stimulating and sustaining a major social rebirth, was always

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[11] P. Geddes, 'The Scots Renascence', *The Evergreen, Spring,* 1895, p.133. 'Bull' is a reference to England as in 'John Bull'.

[12] P. Geddes, 'On National and Municipal Encouragement of Art upon the Continent'. Paper delivered to Edinburgh Art Congress. Printed copy held by Geddes Archive, Strathclyde University.

[13] Geddes, 'The Scots Renascence', p.137. Geddes here dismisses Scottish identity revolving round the Stuart monarchs and their wars with England and embraces instead an earlier pan-British Celtic culture.

within a society conceived in terms beyond a narrowly Scottish identity. For Geddes there was no contradiction between these simultaneous identities and no need to balance anything.

Geddes circulated his writings on art to painters whom he knew, certainly to Charles Mackie and to John Duncan, and his 'Renascence' was highly influential on the Celtic Revival. That influence is seen most clearly in its impact on Duncan, whom he commissioned to paint mural decorations in the common-room of Ramsay Lodge. This influence was fully acknowledged by Duncan who wrote in 1900:

> I am your very faithful disciple. And I carry your notes with me as my scriptures, and shall diligently strive to live up to them. I have your suggestions and regard them as definite instructions to be punctually carried out. This will come all the easier as they so completely coincide with my own aspirations – aspirations which you have evolved in me.[14]

The paintings Duncan produced at Ramsay Lodge, beginning in c.1895, were a review of Scottish history stressing Scotland's internationalism as well as her individuality. The series began with three murals set in the Celtic period, *The Awakening of Cuchullin, The Combat of Fionn* and *The Taking of Excalibur*.[15] These fables are derived respectively from an Irish source, *The Tain*; a Scottish source, *Fingal*, one of the poems of Ossian, and an English source, the Welsh based Arthurian legends developed in England by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1130.[16] The range of sources thus consciously celebrate Celtic internationalism rather than utilise Celticism in praise of Scotland's independent past. Taken together the three subjects are strongly pan-Celtic. Interestingly, in the episode derived from a Scottish source, Duncan used the Irish form 'Fionn' for his protagonist

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[14] John Duncan to Patrick Geddes, 1900 written on his way to take up the post of Professor of Fine Art at Chicago Institute, 1900. Quoted in J. Kemplay, *The Paintings of John Duncan a Scottish Symbolist*, San Francisco 2009, p.34.

[15] The series of murals was completed between 1895 and 1898. Further panels were added by Duncan in the 1920s. The scheme illustrates heroes and events from Celtic and later Scottish history and literature.

[16] T. Kinsella, (trans.) *The Tain*, Dublin 1969, pp.142–7; J. Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works: James Macpherson*, ed. Howard Gaskill, Edinburgh 1996, pp. 90–104; Arthurian legend became closely tied to the English monarchy in the reign of Edward I. Edward I associated himself with Arthur, modelled the knighting of his eldest son on tales of Arthur's coronation and held 'Round Tables'. Edward III encouraged the belief that he was a second King Arthur.

rather than the more usually Scottish form 'Fingal'.[17] Even within the structure of each mural the identity promoted was collective rather than individual.

Both the pared down mural style adopted by Duncan at this time and the entire conception of the scheme reveal the artist's debt to Geddes. Geddes articulated the commitment to mural painting in a critique of the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888. His views were reinforced through knowledge of contemporary European practice. He saw Max Leenhardt's 1890 mural decorations for the Institut de Botanique in Montpellier and the works were highly praised in an article written for the *Scottish Art Review* by his wife Anna.[18] He and his wife had also spent time in Paris during the period when the much celebrated French muralist Puvis de Chavannes was decorating the Sorbonne (1889–91). In general the French influence on Geddes' evolving ideas was strong.[19] This is particularly clearly seen in the mid 1890s when *The Evergreen* was published with numerous contributions dealing with contemporary France, directly sourced from French contributors, or heavily influenced by modern French art.[20] His promotion of French practice should be seen as one of the central aspects of Geddes' influence as acknowledged by Duncan. In response to such encouragement, Duncan himself had sought out Puvis de Chavannes' mural painting in Paris in 1890, particularly admiring the muted tonal harmonies, and in general the Scot was thought to be well informed regarding modern French painting.[21]

Geddes' intellectual understanding of the role and functioning of painting in a healthy society was derived from a range of sources drawn from a variety of countries. It positively celebrated and promoted that internationalism. He saw no merit in narrow nationalism, indeed he ridiculed national specificity in art. That approach was directly reflected in Duncan's painting whether directly commissioned by Geddes or not. His *Mythological*

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[17] In his *Critical Dissertation* Hugh Blair dismissed the *Tain* and the stories of Fionn as a modern invention and accused their inventor of trying to graft the Scottish Fingal into Irish history. Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*, pp. 217–222.

[18] A. Geddes 'Montpellier and its Ancient University', *Scottish Art Review* 3, 1890, pp.130–4.

[19] This has been thoroughly explored in F. Fowle & B. Thomson (eds.), *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection*, Oxford 2004.

[20] See M. Macdonald, 'Patrick Geddes's Generalism: From Edinburgh's Old Town to Paris's Universal Exhibition', in *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection,* pp.83–94.

[21] Auguste Hamon wrote to the painter Lucien Pissarro from Edinburgh in 1895 saying that he had given the latter's address to Duncan and that the Scot 'knows French painting and the Impressionists'. See B. Thomson, 'Patrick Geddes's "Clan d'Artistes" : Some Elusive French Connections', in *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection*, p.61.

Subject of 1898, is strongly reminiscent of French Symbolist painting.[22] In particular the high horizon line, the vibrant colouring and the figure related to a wall in the background may all be associated with Paul Gauguin's *Yellow Christ* (1889), which Duncan could have seen at the Boussod & Valadon Gallery in Paris in 1890.[23] For all that it displays a knowledge of avant-garde contemporary French art, possibly its clearest visual borrowing is from George Henry's *Galloway Landscape* also of 1889.[24] Henry's painting itself reveals some commonality of interest with French symbolism, giving some logic to Duncan's amalgam. The sinuous, twisting burn which snakes its way across the Scottish painting from mid-way up the right hand side, is echoed strongly by a similar stream in Duncan's work. Even the bifurcation of the channel is repeated.

One of the significant features of Duncan's Celtic Revival style was just this eclectic use of original visual sources. This is worthy of comment even although the artist's method at Ramsay Lodge did not especially lend itself to the detailed depiction of the intricacies of Celtic ornamentation and thus the identification of specific visual references. The real significance of these works lies in the choice of subject, the grouping of these three specific Celtic themes, the European-derived technique and the whole conception of mural painting. However, that said, as with the literary hybridity evidenced by the change of name in *Fionn*, so the other two works exhibit similar national intermingling visually articulated. In the English subject, the *Taking of Excalibur*, the action is set irrefutably on Duddingston loch outside Edinburgh. In the Irish-derived *Awakening of Cuchullin* there is much generic Celtic decoration. Variants on the triskele form are seen in the painted decoration above and below the main event. Spirals decorate the hero's helmet. However *The Tain* describes jewellery, weapons and clothing in considerable detail and prominent in Duncan's *Cuchullin* is an accurate depiction of a penannular brooch. The catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities illustrated many such examples and living in Edinburgh the originals were readily available at first hand.[25] A particularly close comparison might be drawn between Duncan's painted brooch and an example purchased by

[22] John Duncan, *Mythological Subject*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 60.96 x 40.64 cm. University of Dundee.

[23] Paul Gauguin, *The Yellow Christ*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73.4 cm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

[24] George Henry, *Galloway Landscape*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 121 x 152.4 cm. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.

[25] *Catalogue of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1892, FC1, p.200.

John Duncan *The Riders of the Sidhe*, 1911
Image courtesy of Dundee Art Gallery

the National Museum of Scotland in 1888 and illustrated in the published catalogue. Duncan appears to have adorned his Irish hero with Scottish jewellery. A similar cross-border association of figure and jewellery is found in Duncan's 1913 drawing of Cuchulainn.[26]

Duncan was more than simply a hand, giving form to Geddes' ideas. His painting evolved and changed in the twenty years after he painted at Ramsay Lodge and he developed in a manner which moved away from some of the latter's stipulations on technique. The high keyed colour, tempera based easel painting method adopted by Duncan for *The Riders of the Sidhe* of 1911 reveals his willingness to develop a manner not entirely based on Geddes' stipulations.[27] However the more detailed technique he evolved displayed his visual sources more clearly and these reveal that he remained committed to Geddes' view of the Celtic Revival as an embodiment of internationalism. The sources are many and various, drawn from the Celtic cultures of the

[26] John Duncan, *Cuchulainn*, 1913. Pencil on paper, 38.1 x 27.94 cm. National Gallery of Scotland.

[27] John Duncan, *The Riders of the Sidhe*, 1911. Tempera on canvas, 114.3 x 175.2 cm. McManus Galleries, Dundee City Council Leisure & Arts.

United Kingdom and Europe. The figure in the red tunic second from right carries a shield modelled on the English 'Battersea Shield'.[28] His sword however is Scottish, originating in the bronze leaf-shaped swords held in the National Museum in Edinburgh.[29] The helmet appears to be a recycling of the head of a carnyx or war trumpet. The Deskford carnyx, found in Banffshire in 1816, may be the source but as the find was fragmentary it is more likely that the three carnyces represented on one of the inner plates of the Gundestrup cauldron from Jutland were Duncan's model.[30] The well-preserved cauldron was found in 1891 and by 1911 was celebrated as an enigmatic masterpiece of Celtic art. Similarly his single disc brooch is not a typical Celtic form and is more likely to derive from an Anglo-Saxon source. The head pieces worn by three of the horses are closely based on Scottish models. The horns on the two left hand animals are based on an exemplar owned by Sir Walter Scott, first illustrated in 1829 and renowned in 1911, but now thought to be heavily altered in the nineteenth century.[31] The painting is an eclectic inventory of Celticism. It celebrates not the nationalism of independent Scotland but the country's broader British and European heritage.

The specific nature of Duncan's Celticism as derived from Geddes is illustrated in the eventual schism between the Irish and Scottish Celtic Revival movements. Irrespective of unbreakable bonds between Celtic nations there were significant differences between the two revivals. Following Matthew Arnold's championing of Celts in general and Celtic literature in particular as a means of leavening the mass of the English character, it was the contribution which a Celtic Scotland might make to a British whole that often motivated Scottish painters. Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* claimed sentiment, emotion and sensibility as the dominant Celtic character traits. While hopelessly impractical if dominant, as they were in the Celtic psyche, these qualities, it was claimed could benefit the 'English empire' and bring passion to native English efficiency and practicality. No nation was in a better position to benefit from Celtic influence for as Arnold observed 'only Brittany is not

[28] *Battersea Shield*, British Museum.

[29] *Catalogue of the National Museum*, illus. 146–147.

[30] *Deskford Carnyx*, National Museums of Scotland. *Gundestrup Cauldron*, diameter 69 cm., height 42cm, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen. The cauldron is made from 13 silver plates. One of the interior scenes shows a procession of warriors carrying a carnyx, a Celtic war-trumpet.

[31] Romilly Allen & Anderson, pp.lxxiv–lxxv. *Torrs Chamfrein*, 28 x 42 x 20 cm. National Museums of Scotland.

ours; we (the English) have Ireland, the Scotch Highlands, Wales, the Isle of Man, Cornwall'.[32]

Rather than Geddes' internationalism, the attitude that Celticism was a facet of British culture was common in the Scottish Celtic Revival. It is clearly reflected in William Sharp's conception of the movement. Sharp, Geddes's collaborator on *The Evergreen* and a leading Celtic Revival poet in Scotland, wrote an introduction to *Lyra Celtica,* an anthology of Celtic poetry in 1896. Sharp was a nationalist, yet still, in the 1890s, thought of his identity as both Scottish and British. After almost paraphrasing Arnold and attempting in his introduction to establish all important literature in Britain as in some way Celtic, he located the modern Scottish interest in Celticism entirely within an Anglo-Celtic context.

> More and more we may hope … that the strange, elemental, sombre imagination of the West Highlander and the Gael of the Isles; … will, before long, become a still greater, a still more regenerating, and lasting force and influence on our English literature.[33]

In seeing Scottish identity as part of a greater, British whole, Sharp's conception of the Celtic Revival was entirely in keeping with conceptions of Scottish national identity prevalent throughout the nineteenth century.

William Sharp was heavily influenced by the Irish revival. He saw there that the interest in a country's past could spark a wide-ranging cultural renaissance and sought to promote such a revival in Scotland. However, Sharp's belief that Celtic Scotland could breathe new life into the literature of all of the United Kingdom is far removed from the aspirations of the avowedly political concerns of many of those involved in the Irish movement.[34] The very different character of the movements in Ireland and Scotland is made clear in considering Sharp's contact with Irish Celtic Revival writers. Initially the Irish were very supportive of Sharp and his work. W. B. Yeats wrote praising poetry Sharp published (under the nom de plume Fiona Macleod) in *The Evergreen*.[35] Douglas Hyde, one of the chief advocates for the revitalisation of the Irish language, and president of the Gaelic League, wrote personally to Sharp

[32] M. Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, London 1867, p.143.

[33] E. A. Sharp & J. Matthay, *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Celtic Poetry,* Edinburgh 1896, p.xxxvi.

[34] For discussion of Irish and Scottish relations to Britain as 'Celts' see M. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, Manchester 1999.

[35] E. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir*, London 1912, p.79.

drawing direct parallels between the Scottish and Irish revival movements. 'I think Fiona Macleod's book the most interesting thing in the new Scoto-Celtic movement, which I hope will march side by side with our own'.[36] Sharp's lack of concern for political independence ultimately led, however, to a parting of the ways. When in 1900 Sharp published an essay entitled *Celtic* which outlined his conception of the revival, it was badly received in Ireland.[37] AE (George Russell) wrote to Yeats in June 1900. 'What do you think of Fiona's last book? "Celtic", the last essay is an abomination. She glories in the name Britisher and her English is provincial'.[38]

For all that Geddes and Sharp collaborated on *The Evergreen* and were equally committed to promoting the Celtic revival in Scotland, the approach of the two was very different. While Sharp had a relatively simple agenda, to encourage Scottish identification with its Celtic past as a vehicle for asserting the country's contribution to the collaborative state of the United Kingdom, Geddes never tendered such simplistic answers. His vision for art offered no pre-ordained answers. Instead it led artists, patrons and public into enquiries which might lead to unimagined new possibilities. *Arbor Saeculorum*, a stained glass window design for the Outlook Tower, embodied these ideas. It was designed in collaboration with Duncan and incorporated imagery drawn from the major cultures of western civilization. The explanation for the eclectic iconographic schema offered by Geddes and associates in the guidebook *A First Visit to the Outlook Tower* described a great tree metaphorically encompassing the history of the western world. On the left side of the tree are symbols of the temporal concerns epitomising each historic era, on the right the spiritual concerns. Smoke from the 'fires of life' obscures the achievement of one era from the eyes of the next, but ultimately society seeks answers to 'the eternal question of the Sphinxes' and the tree is crowned by a promise for the future, the opening bud of 'a flower as yet undefined'.[39] No trite solution is proffered but the future is seen to lie in drawing on all societies and across history.

Invented tradition, wrote Eric Hobsbawm, is an 'attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past'.[40] A number of Scottish artists at the end

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[36] G. Russell (AE), *The National Being: Some Thoughts on an Irish Polity*, Dublin 1916, p.59.

[37] W. Sharp, *The Winged Destiny: Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael*, London 1900. *Celtic* is the final essay in the collection.

[38] G. Russell (AE), Some Passages from the Leters of AE to W. B. Yeats, Dublin 1936, p.22.

[39] The quotations are from *A First Visit to the Outlook Tower*, 1906, pp. 26–29. Geddes Archive, Strathclyde University.

[40] E. J. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983, p.2.

of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth rediscovered and reinvented their Celtic past. Though there are notable exceptions, and against a backdrop of many painters who continued to work in more traditional and alternative forms, Celtic revivalists produced work which consistently asserted Scottish identity. That identity was often construed within a wholly loyalist conception of Scotland as a contributor to the United Kingdom. For them the suitable historic past embraced the annals of all of the United Kingdom, not exclusively Scotland. They drew heavily on their Scottish heritage for subject matter, yet aimed at a British not an exclusively Scottish audience.

In essence painters such as Thomas Millie Dow (1848–1919) and writers such as Sharp embraced an elegiac version of their Celtic past. It was important, but it was past. In keeping with the notion of the savage warlike Highlander, turned loyal British soldier, Celticism was part of Scotland's makeup which was distinct from England and could form a useful Scottish contribution to the collaborative state of Britain. While not Matthew Arnold's casual classification of the United Kingdom as the 'English empire', the Scottish conception of Britain as an agglomeration of peoples and cultures is sufficiently close to Arnold to allow both views to co-exist without too many obvious points of dispute. In Scotland the symbols of a Celtic identity were often used as a badge of acceptable 'difference' from England but not as a focus for political activity. Ultimately this descent of Celtic design into acceptable kitsch rendered it impotent. In Scotland, Celticism, became a badge of 'imperial localism', in Murray Pittock's phrase.[41] While never seriously challenging existing political structures it provided focus for divergent identities within the greater whole.

Under the influence of Patrick Geddes, John Duncan's Celtic imagery and his art as a whole offered a different vision. Duncan promoted a pan-European, modern conception of Scotland for the present and the future. Taking Geddes's maxim 'if we would be city builders we must first of all be archaeologist-historians' he drew on increasingly accurate knowledge of the Celtic past to offer ways of making art a vital part of a progressive transnational society.[42]

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[41] Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, p.106.

[42] P. Geddes, 'The Valley in the Town', *The Survey* 54, July 1925, p.396.