

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



WILLIAM F. HALLORAN



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William F. Halloran, *William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod": A Life*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0276>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800643260

ISBN Hardback: 9781800643277

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800643284

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800643291

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800643307

ISBN XML: 9781800643314

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0276

Cover image: William Strang, William Sharp (c. 1897), etching, printed by David Strang. Photograph by William F. Halloran of author's copy (2019).

Cover design: Anna Gatti.

Chapter Ten

1893

The Sharps boarded a ship bound for North Africa on January 7, 1893 and arrived a week later in Algiers. On January 16, Sharp sent a card to Arthur Stedman and asked him to share it with his father:

We have enjoyed our first week in North Africa immensely. Even apart from the Moorish and oriental life, everything is charming to the eyes after London fogs — the greenness, the palms, the orange and lemon trees, the roses and brilliant creepers, the blue of the sea and the deeper blue of the sky.

The next day they headed west, mostly by train, and in a letter to Stanley Little dated January 22 Sharp said they were in Blida at the base of the Atlas Mountains. They were headed to Tlemcen and planned to push on “across the frontier of Morocco to the city of Oujda” if the tribes were not up. The landscape was “strange & beautiful: miles of orange and tangerine trees in full fruit à terre, and on high the grand heights and fantastic peaks of the Atlas range.” They made it into Morocco for a few days before returning to Algiers and heading south across the mountains and into the desert.

On February 2, they were in Biskra, the City of Palms, where Sharp wrote to an unidentified friend a lengthy letter Elizabeth reproduced in the *Memoir* (208–212). The letter’s familiar tone and level of detail suggests the friend was Edith Rinder. “Here we are in the Sahara at last! I find it quite hopeless to attempt to give you any adequate idea of the beauty and strangeness and the extraordinary fascination of it all.” He proceeded, nonetheless, to a vivid description of their arrival the previous night. The sun was setting, and the hills became a deep purple:

For the rest, all was orange-gold, yellow-gold, green-gold, with, high over the desert, a vast effulgence of a marvelous roseate flush. Then came

the moment of scarlet and rose, saffron, and deepening gold, and purple. In the distance, underneath the dropping sparkle of the Evening Star, we could discern the first palms of the oasis of Biskra. There was nothing more to experience till arrival, we thought: but just then we saw the full moon rise out of the Eastern gloom. And what a moon it was! Never did I see such a splendour of living gold. It seemed incredibly large, and whatever it illumined became strange and beautiful beyond words.

Given the precision and beauty of this description, it is not surprising Sharp turned eventually to travel writing or that editors — British and American — welcomed his articles.

From Biskra the Sharps pressed further into the desert to the oasis of Sidi-Okba ("with its 5,000 swarming Arab population") where they spent a few days before traveling north to Constantine. There on February 12, he wrote again to "a friend" to say he had plunged into the "Barbaric East." Like so many nineteenth-century travelers from northern Europe, Sharp was fascinated by the availability of drugs and sex on the streets of North African cities. On the night of February 11, he wandered through the narrow, crowded streets of Constantine observing

the strange haunts of the dancing girls: the terrible street of the caged women — like wild beasts exposed for sale: and the crowded dens of the hashish-eaters, with the smoke and din of barbaric lutes, tam-tams, and nameless instruments, and the strange wild haunting chanting of the ecstasies and fanatics.

I went at last where I saw not a single European: and though at some risk, I met with no active unpleasantness, save in one Haschisch place where, by a sudden impulse, some forty or fifty Moors suddenly swung round, as the shriek of an Arab fanatic, and with outstretched hands and arms cursed the Gaiour-kelb (dog of an infidel!): and here I had to act quickly and resolutely.

Thereafter one of my reckless fits came on, and I plunged right into the midst of the whole extraordinary vision — for a kind of visionary Inferno it seemed. From Haschisch-den to Haschisch-den I wandered, from strange vaulted rooms of the gorgeously jeweled and splendidly dressed prostitutes to the alcoves where lay or sat or moved to and fro, behind iron bars, the caged beauties whom none could reach save by gold, and even then at risk; from there to the dark low rooms or open pillared places where semi-nude dancing girls moved to and fro to a wild barbaric music... .

I wandered to and fro in that bewildering Moorish maze, till at last, I could stand no more impressions. So I found my way to the western ramparts, and looked out upon the marvelous nocturnal landscape of mountain and valley — and thought of all that Constantine had been (*Memoir*, 213).

Seeking an authentic taste of Arab culture, a late-nineteenth-century Scot wandered into the exotic night life of a North African city and, so the passage implies, sampled the hashish. It may have been his first use of the drug, which, despite his wife's disapproval, he used later to obtain rituals for W. B. Yeats' Celtic Mystical Order.



Fig. 24 The Great Bridge in Constantine Algeria 1899.jpg Silverbanks Pictures Image Archive, Photographer unknown. Wikimedia Commons, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/159714170@N02/48311372867/>

From Constantine, the Sharps went north and east to Tunis where William visited the ruins of ancient Carthage, the “London of 2000 years ago,” and described it in a third letter to a friend:

The sea breaks at my feet, blue as a turquoise here, but, beyond, a sheet of marvelous pale green, exquisite beyond words. To the right are the inland waters where the Carthaginian galleys found haven: above, to the right, was the temple of Baal: right above, the temple of Tanit, the famous Astarte, otherwise “The Abomination of the Sidonians.” Where the Carthaginians lived in magnificent luxury, a little out the city itself, is now the Arab town of Sidi-ban-Said — like a huge magnolia-bloom

on the sun swept hill-side. There is nothing of the life of to-day visible, save a white-robed Bedouin herding goats and camels, and, on the sea, a few felucca-rigged fisher boats making for distant Tunis by the Strait of Goleta. But there is life and movement in the play of the wind among the grasses and lentisks, in the hum of insects, in the whisper of the warm earth, in the glow of the burning sunshine that floods downward from a sky of glorious blue. Carthage — I can hardly believe it (*Memoir*, 214).

After a few days in and around Tunis, the Sharps crossed to Sicily and made their first of many visits to Taormina, the town set high above the Bay of Naxos on the island's eastern shore.



Fig. 25 Ruins of the Baths of Antonius Pius, Carthage, Algeria. Photograph by BishkekRocks (2004), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karthago_Antoninus-Pius-Thermen.JPG, Public Domain.

A recently discovered undated and unpublished manuscript poem in Sharp's handwriting (blue ink on a folded piece of onion skin paper) must have written during or soon after the North African trip. It is another result of his "plunge into the Barbaric East."

The Sheik
(A Portrait from Life)

With heavy Turban o'er his brows
And white robe folded close to him,

Ismail, the Sheik, with aspect grim
Looks towards the desert's burning rim.

Before his tent the camels drowse
In the fierce heat: within. A shade
Is cast by curtains, rich with braid
Of gold, with jewels inlaid.

All round the sloping canvas walls
Bright cloths are placed; gay Syrian hues
Of crimson, green, and purple-blues
With which stray sunbeams interfuse.

Adown their midst a striped skin falls,
Against whose fur sharp weapons lean
Ablaze with steely light, and keen
As any deadly Damascene.

Beside the Sheik a table stands
With fragrant coffee, spices rare,
Dates that have known the desert-air
The wild fig and the prickly pear.

Beyond him stretch the burning sands:
Behind him pale Iskandra lies,
Nude, and with drowsy half-closed eyes
Still dreaming of Circassian skies.

A lithe brown boy close to his feet
Upon a reed a soft low tune
Doth make, and sings an Arab rune
Of love beneath the Desert-moon.

Still grows the blazing, burning heat:
Yet ever toward the sand-wastes rim
Looks forth, with gaze no glare makes dim,
Ismail, the Sheik, with aspect grim.

El Ah'br'a. William Sharp
Morocco

The Sheik's name, Ismail, is a variant of Ishmael, Abraham's and Hagar's son in the *Book of Genesis*. Shah Ismail I (1487–1524) ruled a vast Persian Empire from 1501 until his death. Iskandra, the nude boy in the background dreaming of his Circassian home, is a variant of Alexander

and calls to mind Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), the Macedonian who ruled another vast empire, and his supposed homosexual relationship with his companion Hephaestion. Sheik Ismail is pleased to have the "lithe brown boy close to his feet" singing "an Arab rune of love beneath the Desert-moon." The poem asks if the Sheik captured or lured for his pleasure the drowsy nude Iskandra lying half asleep dreaming of his homeland on the eastern bank of the Black Sea, another allusion to Alexander the Great and to the more recent subjugation of Circassia and its absorption into the Ottoman Empire. The poem's sensual and suggestive overtones account for it not being published. That Sharp wrote and carefully copied it signals his associating Arabic North Africa with "pagan" sexual practices and demonstrates his interest in sexual fluidity.

The Sharps returned to England at the end of February. On March 23 he told Charles Webster, in a letter proposing the publication of *Vistas*, he was just back from North Africa and had not returned to his house in the country. By March 29, both Sharps were in Phenice Croft wondering why Stanley Little was staying in Kensington. "It is glorious weather, & the Rudgwickian country, Bucks Green, and Phenice Croft are all looking their best." According to Elizabeth, it was "the finest English Spring in a quarter century." She listed some of the guests who visited them: Richard Whiteing, Mona Caird, Alice Corkran, George Cotterell, Richard and Edith Le Gallienne, Roden Noel, Percy White, Dr. Byres Moir, Frank and Edith Rinder, Laurence Binyon, Agnes Farquharson Sharp (Elizabeth's mother), Robert Farquharson Sharp (Elizabeth's brother), and Mary Sharp (William's sister), whose handwriting would soon become that of Fiona Macleod.

At Phenice Croft, Sharp began working on a series of articles about North Africa: "French African Health Resorts" appeared in the December 1893 *Nineteenth Century*; "The New Winterland of French Africa" in the January 1894 *Nineteenth Century*; "Tlemcen and Its Vicinage" in the February 1894 *Art Journal*; "Cardinal Lavigerie's Work in North Africa" in the August 1894 *Atlantic Monthly*; and "Rome in Africa" in the *Harper's Monthly* of June 1895. His travel writing had begun in earnest. He also began a new life of Rossetti which William Swan Sonnenschein commissioned for his publishing firm. According to Elizabeth, Sharp had become dissatisfied with his 1882 Rossetti book; he "considered

his judgment to have been immature." He wrote only a few sentences of the new biography and a "Dedicatory Chapter" to Walter Pater. The paragraphs Elizabeth reproduced in the *Memoir* (69–72) are all that survive of that dedication. They praise Rossetti and Pater and Pater's essay on Rossetti. "Of all that has been written of Rossetti's genius and achievement in poetry nothing shows more essential insight, is of more striking and enduring worth, than the essay by yourself included in your stimulating and always delightful *Appreciations*."

In an April 19 letter to his friend Henry Mills Alden, editor of *Harper's Magazine*, Sharp said he was busy "more maturely, more serenely, more hopefully, if with more mental & spiritual stress than heretofore. I shall write sometime & tell you more." What, we may wonder, caused his mental and spiritual stress? Elizabeth said her husband "was happy once more to be resident in the country, although the surroundings were not a type of scenery that appealed to him." She then touched on the stress:

At Phenice Croft his imagination was in a perpetual ferment.... Once again he saw visions and dreamed dreams; the psychic subjective side of his dual nature predominated. He was in an acutely creative condition; and, moreover, he was passing from one phase of literary work to another, deeper, more intimate, more permanent. (*Memoir*, 221–222).

His stress was due in part to what Elizabeth called his "psychic experiments," his efforts, some aided by drugs, to invoke visions.

Elizabeth went to Paris in early May to review the salons for the *Glasgow Herald*. On the seventh Sharp wrote a card to Stanley Little while waiting in Horsham station for the train that would take him to the coast to board a ferry to the Isle of Wight. He had expected Little to drop in the previous night. He had stayed up waiting until two in the morning and finally went to the house where Little was staying, found it dark, and returned to Phenice Croft. He could forgive Little only because he was leaving to spend a week leading a "virtuous life" on the Isle of Wight. On the tenth, he responded from "somewhere or other near Freshwater" to Little's letter of apology. He understood, of course, that Little was preoccupied with his guests, one of whom must have been a young woman. Sharp would not have gone looking for Little at two in the morning if a "young charmer" had been sitting up with him discussing "debatable subjects." He expanded, "It is glorious here. By

Jove, Life is well worth living!" He and Little will "have a chat over sins and sinners" when he returns to Rudgwick. With Elizabeth in France, Sharp may have arranged a week on the Isle of Wight with Edith Rinder.

In late June Sharp told Louise Chandler Moulton, who visited London annually, he was working hard, "making the wherewithal for 'daily bread' but not omitting dreaming and the weaving of dreams." He was also enjoying life in rural Sussex during an "unparalleled Spring & Summer! Here, in Sussex, we have had no rain (save 3 brief showers, 2 nocturnal) for 3 ½ months, & an almost unbroken succession of blue skies." He wrote again to Moulton in mid-July to apologize for not arranging to see her before she returned to America.

Alas, I have been so overwhelmed with work requiring the closest continuous attention that I have postponed and postponed and postponed. Besides this, I have purposely withdrawn from everything this year — having realized that my paramount need at present is isolation — or as much as can be had even at this distance from town. Each finds at last what he needs in order to do his best work. I do not know if I have found it yet: I doubt if I shall ever find it in England: but I am nearer to what I want than I have yet been.

He hoped to be able to call on her before the end of the month, when he and Elizabeth were going to Scotland for two months.

In a letter written the previous October, Sharp asked Robert Murray Gilchrist to visit him in Bucks Green when he came to London from his home in Derbyshire. Gilchrist did not accept Sharp's invitation until the Spring of 1894, but he invited Sharp to visit him in Derbyshire on his way to and from Edinburgh. He also mentioned Frank Murray, a bookseller in Derby, who had agreed to publish his novel, *Frangipani*, as the first in a projected Regent's Library series. He suggested Murray might consider a book by Sharp for the series whereupon Sharp, in early summer, asked Murray if he would like to publish a romance he had in mind. Murray responded favorably but said he could offer only ten pounds. In a July letter, Sharp said the terms for the projected romance were insufficient, but he would accept ten pounds for another book he had on hand. It was his "most individual imaginative work — a series of psychological problems or reveries wrought in a new form, nominally dramatic, [...] a series of seven studies collectively entitled 'Vistas'." Having offered that volume unsuccessfully to Elkin Mathews in London and Charles Webster in America, he was anxious for someone to accept it.

At the end of July, the Sharps went to Scotland where they spent three weeks in St. Andrews, stayed for a time with Marian Glassford Bell at Tirinie, near Aberfeldy in Perthshire, and then went to Corrie on the Island of Arran for a fortnight. In mid-September, Elizabeth left to visit friends, and William went to Arrochar and other places in the West. An early-August letter to Little from St. Andrews described his writing: "my 'Rossetti,' my new one-vol. novel, my vol. of short stories, & my French studies, fully occupy my mind here — when I am not swimming or walking, eating or sleeping or 'dreaming'." He described the new "one-vol. Novel" as the most "consequential" work he had in progress. It had no title, but it eventually became Fiona Macleod's *Pharais*. He planned to call the "vol. of short stories" *Comedy of Woman*. It became the volume of short stories published in 1895 by Stone and Kimball in Chicago as *The Gipsy Christ and Other Tales* and in 1896 by Archibald Constable in London as *Madge o' the Pool: The Gipsy Christ and Other Tales*.

On August 18, 1893 he asked Gilchrist if it would be convenient to spend a night with him in Derbyshire on his way back to London, on September 24. He looked forward to meeting Gilchrist, and he wanted to visit Frank Murray, the Derby bookseller, to discuss arrangements for the publication of *Vistas*. On September 30, after two months in Scotland, the Sharps left Edinburgh; Elizabeth went straight to London, and Sharp — by a complicated series of branch trains — to Eyam, Gilchrist's village in Derbyshire. After spending two nights with Gilchrist, he stopped in Derby to meet Frank Murray on his way to London. By October 7 he was back in Phenice Croft where he thanked Gilchrist for the lovely day they had on Sunday (October 1) walking on the moors. He was sending Gilchrist a copy of the etched portrait Charles Holroyd made of him in Rome and, for George Garfitt, Gilchrist's partner, a copy of the *Pagan Review*. The first meeting between Sharp and Gilchrist went well, and Sharp told Gilchrist he found Frank Murray "a decent sort of chap." Betraying his class consciousness, he added, Murray "dropped his h's" occasionally, and in certain small matters was oblivious of what some of us consider to be good breeding." Nonetheless, he thought Murray had "a genuine love of literature."

In an August 12 letter to Catherine Janvier, he described "a scene in a strange Celtic tale I am writing called *Pharais*, wherein the weird charm and terror of a night of tragic significance is brought home to the

reader... by a stretch of dew-wet moonflowers glimmering through the murk of a dusk laden with sea mists." He continued: "I was writing in pencil in Pharaïs of death by the sea — and almost at my feet a drowned corpse was washed in by the tide and the slackening urgency of the previous night's gale." This is Sharp's first mention of "Pharaïs" as the title of the novel that would become the first publication by Fiona Macleod. It was the "romance" he had in mind when he told Frank Murray in mid-July that the terms he offered were unacceptable. He wrote sometime in November to Richard Stoddart proposing for serial publication in *Lippincott's Magazine* a romance he called Nostalgia, which never materialized, and "another story, Pharaïs," which he described as "written deeply in the Celtic spirit and from the Celtic standpoint" (*Memoir*, 225). Neither proposal was accepted. A December diary entry indicates he had done "the first part of a Celtic romance called Pharaïs;" it was one of the things he needed to finish (*Memoir*, 216). In his December 20 Christmas greetings to Murray Gilchrist, he wrote: "Today I write 'finis' to my Celtic Romance — long dreamed of — I wish I could read some of it to you. It is out of my inmost heart and brain." That Celtic Romance was *Pharaïs: A Romance of the Isles*.

Where, we may wonder, did Sharp find that name and what did he mean it to convey. He said pharaïs is a "slightly anglicized lection of the Gaelic word Pàras = Paradise, Heaven. 'Pharaïs' properly is the genitive and dative case of Pàras, as in the line from Muireadhach Albannach which Sharp produced on the page following the title page, 'Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharaïs' — 'It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise.'" Muireadhach Albannach, spelled variously, was a Gaelic poet later known as Murdoch of Scotland. A portion of the poem from which Sharp quoted a line is found in the *Dean of Lismore's Book*.

When he visited Murray's Derby bookshop in September and saw the high quality of the paper, boards, and designs he was using for his Regent's Library Series, Sharp decided Murray should publish *Pharaïs* as well as *Vistas* despite his inability to pay more than ten pounds for each. In describing *Pharaïs* as a work in progress to Catherine Janvier in August and offering it as a story to Richard Stoddart in November, they naturally assumed it was the work of William Sharp. His December 20 Christmas greeting to Murray Gilchrist claimed the Celtic Romance as his own. The first recorded indication of his intention to publish it

pseudonymously occurs in a late December letter to Frank Murray. Sometime before that date Sharp told Murray he wanted the book issued not only pseudonymously, not only by a woman, but specifically by Fiona Macleod.

You will be interested to hear that last week I wrote “finis” to *Pharais*: and have not only finished it but think it the strongest & most individual thing I have done. For several reasons, however, I wish to adhere rigidly to the ‘Fiona Macleod’ authorship. I think the book will attract a good deal of notice, on account of the remarkable Celtic renaissance which has set in & will inevitably gather weight: it touches, too, new ground — and, I think, in a new way. What is perhaps best of all is that it is written literally out of my heart — and indeed, though the central incident has nothing to do with me, most else is reminiscent.

It is, in fact, your agreement to accept my two most paramount conditions — pseudonymity and publication by the end of March — that weighed with me against a letter from the Editor of one of the leading magazines in America, offering me high terms for a romance written not ‘to order’ but really *con amore*. However, for reasons into which I need not enter at present, I prefer to lose at the moment so as to gain in every way later.

Sharp enclosed with this letter the “opening section” of *Pharais*; his copyist had the rest and was more than halfway through the book. There is no evidence of an offer from an American publisher.

Sharp sent as a frontispiece for *Vistas* a rare etching by William Bell Scott of a William Blake design for Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that portrays Adam and Eve before the fall. Sharp thought the depiction of Adam and Eve in each other’s arms with a serpent hovering above would foreshadow the danger lurking above sexual pleasure depicted in the book’s “vistas.” If Murray objected to the nudity, he might ask the artist who produced the design for Gilchrist’s *Frangipani*, the first book in Murray’s Regent’s Library, to “do something satisfactory.” If neither alternative was acceptable, Sharp’s friend Theodore Roussel might do something. Murray did not object and used the Bell Scott etching for the special edition of seventy-five numbered and signed copies. For the frontispiece of the special edition of *Pharais*, Sharp could ask his friend William Strang to do an etching. Murray decided to use a photograph of a cold northern sea with its waves breaching the shore, a scene that reflected the book’s atmosphere and content. In addition to the special

editions on larger and on fine paper with white board covers and white jackets, Murray printed using the same type setting smaller trade editions of *Vistas* and *Pharais* with nicely designed green covers and without frontispieces.

Sharp's decision to publish *Pharais* pseudonymously is not surprising. Experimenting with pseudonyms during the previous two years, he came to like the mystery of disguise. More important, he believed creative work published under his name would generate skepticism or outright disdain due to his reputation as an editor and the enemies he made as a reviewer. His decision to publish under a woman's name was unusual, but predictable. His 1881 poem "Motherhood" describing a tigress, a primitive woman, and a contemporary woman giving birth was an early sign of his empathy with women. In writing the wife's letters in the 1892 epistolary novel, *A Fellowe and His Wife*, he had no trouble adopting the persona of a woman. "During the writing of *Pharais*," Elizabeth wrote, "the author began to realize how much the feminine element dominated in the book, that it grew out of the subjective, or feminine side of his nature. He, therefore, decided to issue the book under the name of *Fiona Macleod*" (*Memoir*, 226–227). The name she continued, "flashed ready-made" into his mind. Sharp said "Macleod" was born naturally from his friendship with Seamus Macleod, an older man from whom he learned Celtic lore as a young boy during summer holidays in the Hebrides. Fiona, on the other hand, was "very rare now. Most Highlanders would tell you it was extinct — even as a diminutive of Fionaghal (Flora). But it is not. It is an old Celtic name (meaning 'a fair maid') still occasionally to be found."

More than a recognition of his feminine qualities descended on Sharp at Phenice Croft in the summer of 1893. Elizabeth wrote: "So far, he had found no adequate method for the expression of his 'second self' though the way was led thereto by *Sospiri di Roma* and *Vistas*" (*Memoir*, 221–222). In 1877, when he was twenty-one, Sharp confided in a letter to Elizabeth: "I feel another self within me now more than ever; it is as if I were possessed by a spirit who must speak out" (*Memoir*, 25). At Phenice Croft, he began to entertain seriously the possibility not only that he had both masculine and feminine qualities, but that he was two people in one, both a man and a woman. The emergence of her husband's 'second self' began, Elizabeth said, in Rome in the winter/spring of 1890–1891.

There, at last, he had found the desired incentive towards a true expression of himself, in the stimulus and sympathetic understanding of the friend to whom he dedicated the first of the books published under his pseudonym. This friendship began in Rome and lasted for the remainder of his life.

This friend was E. W. R. — Edith Wingate Rinder — to whom he dedicated *Pharais*. In that dedication he was writing as a woman to another woman, and the disguise released him to speak with sincerity about their relationship, which was one of deep affection and commonality.

In the first sentences of the dedication, we hear the voice Sharp adopted for Fiona. "In the *Domham-Toir* there are resting places where all barriers of race, training, and circumstance fall away in the dust. At one of those places of peace we met, a long while ago, and found that we loved the same things, and in the same way." Most love the West of Scotland only "in the magic of sunshine and cloud," but Fiona (Sharp) and Edith love the land "when the rain and the black wind make a gloom upon every loch and fill with the dusk of storm every strath, and glen, and corrie. Not otherwise can one love it aright." Like Fiona, Edith worships at the fane of Keithoir, the Celtic god of the earth: "It is because you and I are of the children of Keithoir that I wished to grace my book with your name." We believe "the Celtic Dream" is not doomed to become "a memory merely." A few writers, Fiona among them, will revive *Anima Celtica*. They will lead readers to *Pharais*, "that Land of Promise whose borders shine with the loveliness of all forfeited, or lost, or banished dreams and realities of Beauty." Again Sharp conflated the word *Pharais* with Paradise. He associated Fiona's objectives with those of William Butler Yeats and the Irish Renaissance: "The sweetest-voiced of the younger Irish singers of to-day [Yeats] has spoken of the Celtic Twilight. A twilight it is; but, if night follow gloaming, so also does dawn succeed night. Meanwhile, twilight voices are sweet, if faint and far, and linger lovingly in the ear." The final paragraph returns to Edith by asserting a Paradise of Friendship wherein "we both have seen beautiful visions and dreamed dreams. Take, then, out of my heart, this book of vision and dream." By having Fiona identify with her dedicatee, Edith Wingate Rinder, Sharp found a voice for his "second self" and a means of expressing his love for the beautiful and accomplished E. W. R.

In a letter of instructions to Elizabeth in the event of his death, written before a trip to the United States in 1896, Sharp said he owed his development as Fiona to Edith Rinder; "without her there would have been no 'Fiona Macleod.'" After reproducing this statement in the *Memoir* (222) and without identifying Edith, Elizabeth commented with remarkable candor and generosity:

Because of her beauty, her strong sense of life and the joy of life; because of her keen intuitions and mental alertness, her personality stood for him as a symbol of the heroic women of Greek and Celtic days, a symbol that, as he expressed it, unlocked new doors in his mind and put him 'in touch with ancestral memories' of his race. So, for a time, he stilled the critical, intellectual mood of William Sharp to give play to the development of this new found expression of subtler emotions, towards which he had been moving with all the ardor of his nature.

Her husband's two natures were frequently at odds. They required different conditions, different environments, and different stimuli. That requirement "produced a tremendous strain on his physical and mental resources; and at one time between 1897–1898 threatened him with a complete nervous collapse." Gradually the two sides of his nature developed into two distinct personalities "which were equally imperative in their demands on him." He preferred the dreaming creative feminine existence, facilitated by the presence of Edith, in which he could produce the writings of Fiona Macleod. "The exigencies of life, his dependence on his pen for his livelihood... required of him a great amount of applied study and work." He came to associate Elizabeth — his first cousin, ever-supportive wife, and breadwinning critic and editor — with the mundane, practical side of his nature and Edith with the imaginative, creative, visionary, indeed romantic side.

Phenice Croft was linked by Sharp and his wife with the birth of Fiona Macleod and thus with Edith Rinder. Sharp "always looked back with deep thankfulness" to the two years at Phenice Croft. Initially, Elizabeth shared her husband's enthusiasm. "The summer of 1893," she wrote, "was hot and sunny; and we delighted in our little garden with its miniature lawns, its espalier fruit trees framing the vegetable garden, and its juvenile but to me fascinating flowers beds." Things began to change in the fall. She became ill again with the lingering effects of malaria. She attributed her continuing health problems to the moist air

and clay soil of Rudgwick, and she began spending more time with her mother in London. During those periods of absence, Edith Rinder was often a guest at Phenice Croft, and her presence may have been a factor in Elizabeth's change of heart. Her comments about Phenice Croft and Rudgwick in the *Memoir* were as close as she came to suggesting her relationship with her husband was strained.

There was another reason for her feelings about Phenice Croft. There, she said, Sharp was "testing his new powers, living his new life, and delighting in the opportunity for psychic experimentation". For such experimentation, Elizabeth wrote, "the place seemed to him to be peculiarly suited." To her, it seemed "uncanny" and "to have a haunted atmosphere — created unquestionably by my husband that I found difficult to live in unless the sun was shining" (*Memoir*, 223). Edith may have been cooperating in the experiments, which were widespread at the time. Indeed, Elizabeth went to mediums after her husband died in 1905 and left a record of her communications with his spirit. In 1893, however, she recognized the disturbing impact of the "psychic experiments" on her husband's mental balance. As we shall see, a crisis befell Sharp in the summer of 1894 which, coupled with Elizabeth's ill health and growing distaste for the place, caused them to leave Phenice Croft and resettle in London.

