

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



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Chapter Thirteen

July–December 1896

During the first three weeks of July, Sharp was writing and corresponding with Herbert Stone about American editions of *The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales* by W. S. and *Pharais* and *The Sin-Eater* by F. M. He told Stone his arrangement with Elkin Mathews in London specified Stone and Kimble had the right to publish another collection by Sharp, *Ecce Puella and Other Prose Imaginings*, in America, and the book was issued simultaneously by the two publishers in November. On July 5 he and Elizabeth went to Hindhead in Haslemere, Surrey to spend the weekend with the Grant Allens, “a brief respite,” he told Stanley Little. In a letter thanking Mrs. Allen for an enjoyable time, Sharp assured her she need not be concerned about a rumor floating through London involving her husband and a “literary Parisian.” Since he was anxious to assure Mrs. Allen it would soon pass, the rumor must have come up during the weekend. Most people, he wrote, knew Allen had been in Paris not with a French woman named Belloc, but with his wife. Sharp’s focus on this rumor is notable given the likelihood he was recently in Paris with a woman not his wife — before she was replaced by his wife.

In a postscript, Sharp declared the publisher John Lane “should be careful how he speaks,” and advised Allen “not to give himself away.” Having received the manuscript of Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* and agreed to publish it, Lane let it be known Allen was its author. Allen intended to publish the novel pseudonymously, and Sharp advised him to stick with that intent despite Lane’s indiscretion. When the novel appeared several months later, its author was Grant Allen. The book attracted a great deal of attention, positive and negative, and made its author both famous and infamous. Soon after it appeared, Victoria Crosse produced *The Woman Who Didn’t*, and Mrs. Lovett Cameron



Fig. 37 "The Croft," Grant Allen's House in Hindhead, Haslemere, Surrey (1906).
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produced *The Man Who Didn't*. The woman in one and the man in the other adhered closely to the norms of Victorian society. Allen's woman believed women should throw off the shackles of male dominance and assert their equal rights, views shared by Sharp. In recommending Allen publish pseudonymously, Sharp knew the book would generate a good deal of outrage. The novel has recently emerged from obscurity as an important contribution to the *fin de siècle* feminist movement known as the "New Woman." The Paris rumor, Sharp's concern about Lane's indiscretion, and the negative response to Allen's novel offer a glimpse of the self-reflective and interconnected London publishing scene in the 1890s.

Allen shared Sharp's interest in authorial deception. He published several books as the work of invented males, and in 1897 he issued *The Type-Writer Girl* as the work of a woman, Olive Pratt Rayner. By that time, he knew Fiona was Sharp, and Sharp's use of a female pseudonym may have encouraged him to follow suit. Two years earlier, however, in 1895, Sharp worried Allen might learn the truth. Writing to Allen on July 15 as Fiona, he made a "small request." If Allen intended to write anything about her *Mountain Lovers*, she hoped he would "not hint playfully at any other authorship having suggested itself." She continued, "And, sure, it will be a pleasure to me if you will be as scrupulous with Mr. Meredith or anyone else, in private, as in public, if chance should ever bring my

insignificant self into any chit-chat.” Sharp was especially anxious to keep Fiona’s true identity from George Meredith as he thought he might lose his friendship if he discovered the deception. Fiona ended her letter by telling Allen she looked forward to meeting him “when she came south in late Autumn.”

In early July Sharp began writing the ten lectures totaling, he estimated, 70,000 words promised Patrick Geddes for his August Summer School. On July 13, he went down to the Burford Bridge Hotel in Surrey for a dinner meeting of the Omar Khayyam Club, an organization of literary figures dedicated to the pleasures of good wine and food. Many important writers attended, among them Grant Allen, Thomas Hardy, Theodore Watts-Dunton, George Gissing, and George Meredith who was the guest of honor. Meredith seldom appeared in public, but he was lured to the dinner by his friend Edward Clodd, the club’s president, and arrived only for the dessert course. Clodd welcomed him “in a charming and eloquent speech not devoid of pathos,” and Meredith, overcoming his famed reticence about speaking in public, responded graciously and wittily. After Sharp attended this dinner as a guest, Edward Clodd recommended him for membership in the Club, and he joined in November (*Memoir*, 246).

In a July 11 letter, Sharp told Richard Le Gallienne, who was living near Allen and Meredith in Surrey, he hoped to see him at the Omar Khayyam dinner to arrange a private meeting. He knows Fiona will be gratified by Le Gallienne’s “kind words of praise for *The Mountain Lovers*” in that evening’s *Star*, but he must again make “a friendly protest” against Le Gallienne’s “inference as to her pseudonymity.” He concluded: “Please Don’t! — for her sake much more than for that of Yours ever in Friendship, William Sharp.” Four days later, on July 15, he wrote again to Le Gallienne. He was sorry Le Gallienne had not attended the Omar Khayyam dinner. It was “a memorable as well as a pleasant one because of George Meredith” who has sent Fiona “a letter of splendid praise & encouragement.” He appreciated anything Le Gallienne says about Fiona in print, but “she and her unworthy cousin [Sharp] earnestly hope for no more confusion respecting her actual authorship of ‘The Mountain Lovers,’ publicly or privately.” Le Gallienne had compared the two writing styles and concluded — first privately and then publicly — Fiona was Sharp. Sharp wanted a private

talk, probably to tell Le Gallienne a version of the truth and extract a pledge of secrecy, but Le Gallienne could not meet that week, and Sharp could not meet the following week. He was leaving London and would not return until October, by which time Le Gallienne would be in America. The July 15 letter was his only hope of silencing Le Gallienne, and he concluded by returning to Meredith who knows, he wrote, Fiona is "my cousin, but, I hope, will never be 'put about' by hearing any other rumor." Wherever the fires threatened to rise, Sharp tried to extinguish or at least contain them.

Sharp also wrote to Patrick Geddes on July 15: he would be in Scotland the following week, but not in Edinburgh until the end of the month when his wife would join him. He enclosed the titles of his Summer School lectures and informed Geddes he ("or rather Fiona") received a letter from Meredith in which he "slips the laurel into Fiona's dark locks right royally & prophesizes big things of her." When Geddes learned Sharp was coming north in advance of his wife, he proposed a hiking trip. Sharp declined, saying he could "see no one for the week I shall be 'hanging about.'" He would be in Edinburgh only intermittently until the end of July when he would be available to talk with Geddes about *The Evergreen* and other publications of the new firm. He planned to visit Murray Gilchrist on his way to Scotland, but he wrote on the 18th to say he could not leave London until the morning of the 22nd and had to be in Edinburgh that evening. Few of his lectures had been written, and he was beginning to panic. Before leaving London, he found time to write a heartfelt letter to Annie Alden, whose mother, Susan Alden, recently died after a long and debilitating illness. While visiting the Aldens in Metuchen, New Jersey during his visit to America in 1891, he developed a sincere affection for the family. The letter reveals something of his conception of death and the afterlife. Everyone who knew Annie's mother loved her. Certainly, he did. In fact, he had a special spiritual connection with her. He often dreamed of her, and once he had "a kind of vision of her, white and sunlit, walking through a shadowy wood that was all bright where she went." She was one of the few who "go through life as white spirits clothed with the accident of body," and now she has been "born into new life." She has had "still another resurrection — that resurrection in the minds of all who knew her, which keeps new and fresh a vivid and dear memory." She now lives twice, as a spirit in the

afterlife and in the memory of all who knew and loved her. In concluding, Sharp hoped Annie would enjoy the copy of Fiona's *The Mountain Lovers* he sent to her father and asked her to preserve the secret of her identity he had shared with the Aldens.

In a late July letter Fiona thanked Grant Allen for his favorable review of *The Mountain Lovers* in the *Westminster Review*. The letter contains a clue as to Sharp's whereabouts during the week of July 22. As he passed through Edinburgh, he had his sister copy the letter into the Fiona hand with a "temporary" return address of 144 North St. | St. Andrews | Fife, (now a shopping area across the street from the University), and Sharp mailed it from there. In the letter, Fiona says she is visiting friends in St. Andrews and that her cousin Will Sharp is "coming to spend the weekend" with her — "or I with him, I should say, as I am to be his guest, at almost the only Celtic place we know of on this too 'dour' shoreland of Fife." From later correspondence, we know Edith Rinder was vacationing in or near St. Andrews until late August, when she left for Brittany to collect folklore. Sharp's insistence on being alone that week and his claim Fiona was visiting him in St. Andrews suggest he was using a rendezvous with Fiona as a cover for one with Edith. As the years went by, Sharp claimed Fiona as his cousin, and sometimes he implied they were romantically involved, though both were married to another. Fiona's movements as portrayed by Sharp in correspondence and conversations often modeled those of Edith. When Edith was in Scotland, Fiona was there; when Edith was abroad, so was Fiona; when Edith was with him, Fiona was with him. This was a convenient way to keep track of Fiona's whereabouts and, if necessary, account for the presence of a female companion. It also signaled his predisposition to conflate the two women, one real and the other imagined.

In an early August note Sharp assured Stanley Little his lectures were going well, but they had "told upon" him heavily, and he was "far from well." According to Elizabeth, while he was delivering the first of ten scheduled lectures on "Life & Art" in the Summer School, he "was seized with a severe heart attack and all his notes fell to the ground. It was with the greatest effort that he was able to bring the lecture to a close: and he realized that he must not attempt to continue the course; the risk was too great" (*Memoir*, 251). The plural in the letter to Little implies more than one lecture was delivered, but apparently that was not the case.

At the end of August, he informed Herbert Stone he had not been at all well, "the strain of lecturing" had been too great. As much as he liked to sketch out the topic of lectures, Sharp was less successful in forming his notes into a coherent narrative. Delivering a lecture provoked great anxiety. The "heart attack" must have been an episode of angina brought on by nervous apprehension. Whatever the case, he repaired across the Firth of Forth to recuperate at the Pettycur Inn in Kinghorn where Edith Rinder could visit from St. Andrews. Elizabeth stayed on in Ramsay Gardens "to keep open house for the entertainment of the students."



Fig. 38 Ramsay Gardens from Princes' Street, Edinburgh. The Outlook Tower is on the High Street behind this impressive group of buildings. Photo by David Monniaux (2005), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=228032#/media/File:Edinburgh_old_town_dsc06355.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.

In an August 12 letter with a Ramsey Gardens return address, Sharp informed Herbert Stone "Miss Macleod" was staying with him and Elizabeth for a day or two to hear his lectures, "particularly that on The Celtic Renaissance." This was the fifth lecture of the ten he had planned to give, and, if Elizabeth's recollection was correct, he did not get beyond the first. Having Fiona with him at Ramsey Gardens at the halfway point of his planned lectures explains why he was able to add a brief note to a Fiona letter to Stone, also dated August 12. The simultaneity of the two letters was possible because Sharp's sister Mary was close by in Murrayfield to supply the Fiona handwriting. In an August 30 letter to Stone, Sharp reported Edith Rinder had entered the Ramsay Gardens milieu during the previous week. She had been staying in Fifeshire

during August, and she was leaving the next day for Brittany “to work up Breton legends and folklore.” Sharp was sure Stone would be pleased with her Belgian book, *The Massacre of the Innocents and Other Tales by Belgian Writers*, which his firm published in its Green Tree Library series in November 1895. He offered to write “a short article on the Belgian Renaissance” for Stone’s *Chap-Book* to publicize the book.

There followed one of Sharp’s many stratagems. Edith, he wrote in the August 30 letter to Stone, was “Miss Macleod’s most intimate woman-friend” and the “dedicatee of *Pharais*.” Since she was William Sharp’s “most intimate woman friend” and since it was William Sharp who dedicated *Pharais* to her, he was equating himself with Fiona. Continuing, he said Edith and Fiona had been “staying together recently and (I believe) writing or planning something to do together.” It was William Sharp and Edith Rinder who had been staying together recently. After broaching the possibility of joint authorship, Sharp quickly denied it — “that, from what I know of Miss F. M., will never come off, as she is far too essentially F. M. to work in harness with anyone.” The passage increases the likelihood Edith was with him on St. Andrews and at the Pettycur Inn, but why, we wonder, did he raise with Stone the possibility of joint authorship only to dismiss it. Since he was corresponding with Stone about the writings of both Fiona and Edith, Stone might succumb to rumors and equate Fiona with Edith or, more likely, with William Sharp. Edith was not Fiona; nor was she collaborating with Fiona. Rather, she was translating and editing continental stories and folktales, including those of Celtic Brittany. By sharing these details of the Sharp | Macleod | Rinder triangle with Stone, Sharp reinforced the separate identity of Fiona. The three were good friends and compatriots in the Celtic cause, but quite independent of each other.

Sharp’s careful manipulation of people’s locations was not limited to Edinburgh. He and Elizabeth had taken a cottage with his mother and sisters for September in the west of Scotland. In his August 30 letter to Stone, Sharp said he was leaving the next day for Tigh-Na-Bruaich in the Kyles of Bute, in Argyll where he planned to stay at least ten days and where “his cousin, Miss Macleod,” would be with him “most of the time.” A postscript to Fiona’s August 12 letter informed Stone that her address throughout September would be “c/o Mrs. William Sharp [not Mr.] | Woodside | Tigh-Na-Bruaich | Kyles of Bute | Argyll | Scotland.” Having

brought Fiona to Ramsey Gardens in mid-August, he would have her in the West with him during September. More correspondence with Stone about the publication of *The Sin-Eater* and *Pharais* would be necessary, and sister Mary would be in Tigh-Na-Bruaich to supply the requisite handwriting. Correspondence could move back and forth more rapidly between Chicago and Tigh-Na-Bruaich without having to pass through Edinburgh. This sort of manipulation of Fiona's whereabouts was a fact of Sharp's life until his death in 1905. It was necessary to sustain the fiction of Fiona's separate existence, and he enjoyed orchestrating the complexities.

In mid-September, the Sharps were joined in the Kyles of Bute by Agnes Farquharson Sharp, Elizabeth's mother and William's aunt. On September 18 Sharp told Stone their party was breaking up the next day, but he and Elizabeth would stay on till the end of the month. By September 26, the plans had changed. Sharp wrote Gilchrist to say he was taking his aunt back to London because she was prostrated by a telegram from abroad saying her son had suddenly developed a malignant cancer and was dying so rapidly he had given up hope of coming home. This turn of events disrupted his plan to visit Gilchrist, but he promised to stop for a visit in late October when he would be returning to Edinburgh.

On September 27, William, Elizabeth, and Agnes left the Kyles of Bute for Edinburgh, where Sharp posted a long birthday letter to E. C. Stedman; he should receive from Stone and Kimball "on or about the 8th" — Stedman's birthday — a copy of *The Gypsy Christ*. He wanted to send a book of "prose imaginings," *Ecce Puella*, but Elkin Mathews had delayed publication until late October. Stedman would also soon receive from Stone and Kimball as a special present a copy of the American edition of *The Sin-Eater* by his cousin Fiona Macleod, who "is now admitted," Sharp wrote, "to be the head of the Scots-Celtic movement — as W. B. Yeats is of the Irish-Celtic." The British edition of *The Sin-Eater*, which would be published in Edinburgh, "is novel & beautiful as a piece of book-making." He was responsible for its type, paper, binding, & general format. Apart from *The Evergreen* it was the first publication of Patrick Geddes & Colleagues of which he was "chief literary partner." The books published by the Geddes firm in 1895–1896 are, indeed, beautiful examples of bookmaking. As described in the

previous chapter, Sharp also played a critical role in their content since all the initial publications were written by 1) Sharp as Fiona Macleod (*The Sin-Eater*, *The Washer of the Ford*, and *From the Hills of Dream*), 2) his wife (*Lyra Celtica*, with a lengthy introduction by her husband), and 3) his close friends Edith Rinder (*The Shadow of Arvor*) and Ernest Rhys (*The Fiddler of Carne*).

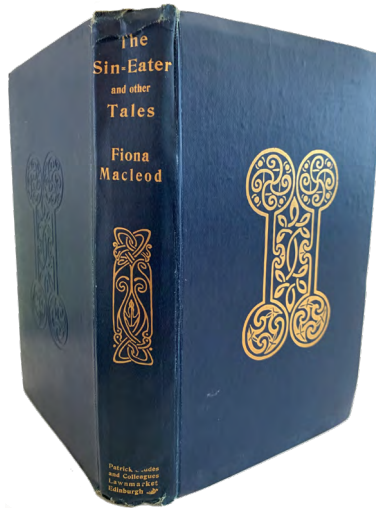


Fig. 39 Fiona Macleod, *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1895). Photograph by William F. Halloran (2019).

From Edinburgh on 28 September, Sharp sent Stone an article on the Belgian Renaissance for publication in the *Chap-Book* and told him it would not be necessary to send Mrs. Rinder proofs of her *Massacre of the Innocents and Other Tales by Belgian Writers*, since she was anxious for it to appear. It was published on November 15, 1895 in Stone and Kimball's Green Tree Library series. The book took its title from its first story, "The Massacre of the Innocents," by Maurice Maeterlinck, whose dramas had established his substantial reputation. In her introduction to the volume Edith wrote, "even the most enthusiastic admirers of the author need not be surprised at never having heard of the story" as Maeterlinck himself was amazed that she had unearthed his only published prose tale from an "obscure and long since defunct French periodical where it made its first appearance before anyone had heard a word concerning its author." Edith was in touch with Maeterlinck and the other authors as she assembled and translated their stories for the volume.

Sharp wanted to issue works by W. S. and F. M. at about the same time "in part to sustain what reputation belonged to his older Literary self, and in part to help preserve the younger literary self's incognito" (*Memoir*, 251). To counterbalance the publication of Fiona's *Sin-Eater* by the Geddes firm in October 1895, Sharp produced two books by W. S. One was *The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales*, which Stone and Kimball published in Chicago as the first in their "Carnation Series." The volume's titular story drew upon Sharp's experience as an adolescent with a band of gypsies in Scotland, and on a recent encounter while walking with Murray Gilchrist on the moors of Derbyshire. When the book was published in England by Archibald Constable and Co. in 1897, its second story was given preference in the title: *Madge o' the Pool: The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales*.

Sharp dedicated a second book, *Ecce Puella and Other Prose Imaginings* (published by Elkin Mathews in London on November 1) to his friend George Cotterell, editor of the *Yorkshire Herald*. Not one to pass up dedicatory possibilities, he ascribed each of the book's sketches to a close female friend. The title piece, "Ecce Puella," a revised and condensed rendition of "Fair Women in Painting and Prose," which Sharp wrote for P. G. Hamerton's *Portfolio of Artistic Monographs* in 1894, celebrates the beauty of women. Dedicated "To the Woman of Thirty," it begins with a quotation by H. P. Siwäärmill, an anagram of William Sharp: "A Dream of Fair Women: Every man dreams his dream. With some it happens early in the teens. It fades with some, during the twenties. With others it endures, vivid and beautiful under grey hairs, till it glorifies the grave." Sharp's dream of a fair woman became a reality and endured in the person of Edith Rinder who, born in 1865, was a "Woman of Thirty" in 1895, and was the dedicatee.

The second piece in the book, "Fragments from the Lost Journals of Piero di Cosimo," is one of Sharp's attempts to produce a prose version of Robert Browning's "dramatic monologues." Cosimo, an Italian Renaissance painter, records in old age his failure to measure up to the promise of his youth. Sharp dedicated this piece to E. A. S. — Elizabeth Amelia Sharp — who introduced him to the paintings of Cosimo and his more accomplished contemporaries. The next piece — "The Birth, Death, and Resurrection of a Tear" — is dedicated "To A. C." whose identity remains a mystery. She must have been a woman of great beauty,

since the narrator elaborately parallels the course of his unrequited love for her with the course of a tear which falls down “the lovely sunbrown cheek no bloom of any ‘sun’d September apricock’ could outvie.” Next, “The Sister of Compassion,” is dedicated “To A. M. C.” or Alice Mona Caird. The woman of the title is “so wrought by the tragic pain of the weak and helpless” that she laid down her life in order that she might be “a messenger of that tardy redemption which man must make in spirit and deed for the incalculable wrong which he had done to that sacred thing he most values — Life.” A well-known spokeswoman for the rights of women, Mona Caird was a vocal participant in the animal rights movement. The first-person narrator, a stand-in for Sharp, “loves and honors” her as Sharp surely did since she supplied shelter and sustenance for the Sharps whenever they were in need.

The next piece, “The Hill-Wind,” resembles the impressionistic prose poems Sharp was writing as Fiona Macleod, and he dedicated it to F. M. Personified as a beautiful woman, the Hill-Wind sees the “whiteness of her limbs beneath the tremulous arrowy leaves and the thick clusters of scarlet and vermilion berries” as she descends to become the bride of the Sea-Wind. The image of red berries against the white flesh recalls Sharp’s “Swimmer of Nemi” in *Sospiri di Roma*, the volume of poems he published in Italy in 1891. Since he associated that poem with the birth of Fiona Macleod, the dedication to Fiona is fitting, but the overwrought description of the forest through which the winds blow contrasts sharply with the restrained language of the poem.

“Love in a Mist,” the final piece in the volume, is dedicated “To a Midsummer Memory.” In this poem, “Love” is a young Cupid who spends a good deal of time examining a beautiful forest in search of something to do. He comes upon a handsome man and a beautiful woman, and they provide an opportunity to carry out his designed function; he shoots each with an arrow. He is concerned as they appear to fall in agony, but he soon realizes “they were not dead or even dying, but merely kissing and fondling each other, and this too in the most insensate fashion.” Sharp’s memory of this encounter, one supposes with the woman of thirty who was his dedicatee in the first essay, enabled him to end a book dedicated to the women in his life with a note of titillation for his female readers. *Ecce Puella* is yet another example of Sharp’s preoccupation with women, this example focused on the women in his life.

In a series of letters to Murray Gilchrist in the fall of 1895, Sharp revealed his deeply conflicted state of mind. His unfulfilled promises to visit caused Gilchrist to wonder if a rift had developed. From Argyle on September 26, addressing Gilchrist as "My dear boy," he wrote, "*Of course, my dear fellow, there is no 'shadow of a shadow of hill or sea,' as they say here, between us. At all times I bear you in affectionate remembrance: and then, we are comrades.*" He was sorry Gilchrist's year was filled with "mischances and misadventures." His own year had such extremes of "light and shade" that it was no wonder his friends noted the progressive greying of his hair. To further allay Gilchrist's concern, he closed the letter: "to you, my dear friend & comrade, my love, sympathy, & affectionate heed." With the letter, he sent a set of proofs of the "Tragic Landscapes" section of Fiona's *Sin-Eater* and asked Gilchrist, who knew the Fiona secret, what he thought of the three prose poems. He especially wanted to know what Gilchrist thought of the third piece — "Summer Sleep" — which Gilchrist would know was

an exact transcript of — Phenice Croft at Rudgwick, and that the three men are — you, Garfitt, and myself. I cannot explain aright: you must read into what you read. The most tragic & momentous epoch of my life followed that visit of yours to Phenice Croft, & is, so far, indissolubly linked with that day I met you, and that time.

Published as the work of Fiona Macleod, the "Summer Sleep" section of "Tragic Landscapes" recounts an incident that occurred when Gilchrist and Garfitt were staying with Sharp at Phenice Croft in 1894. As discussed at some length in Chapter Eleven, Sharp wanted Gilchrist to read that section carefully and decipher its hidden meaning.

Shortly after returning to London, Sharp wrote another letter to Gilchrist to say he would spend a day with him between the October 13 and October 19. He was disappointed by Gilchrist's failure, in his note of acknowledgement, to say what he thought of "Tragic Landscapes." He would elicit Gilchrist's thoughts when they met in person. Sharp returned to Edinburgh on October 12 without stopping to see Gilchrist, and, on October 14, he asked Gilchrist by what means he could go from York to his house in Derbyshire when he returned to London at the weekend. Two days later, he told Gilchrist he was ill with a diarrheic weakness and wondered if Gilchrist could meet him on Friday October 18 after 9:00 p.m. at the Station Hotel in York where he would spend

that night and where Gilchrist would be his guest. The meeting did not take place.

On November first, Sharp wrote again to Gilchrist thanking him for a letter praising *The Sin-Eater*. Grateful for Gilchrist's favorable opinion, he remained unsatisfied by what he did not say in his "little message." He wanted to know what Gilchrist felt and thought about the entire book which, he wrote, "is full of myself, of my life — more than any (save one other than myself) can ever know." Edith Rinder, as we shall see, was the only one other than himself who knew *The Sin-Eater* was full of his life. That he would make Gilchrist the third to know shows he considered him an intimate friend and trusted him to preserve the secret of Fiona Macleod. He continued with another confession: "I am in the valley of Deep Shadow just now. Great suffering, of a kind that must not be shown, has led me stumbling and blindfold among morasses and quicksands. I see the shining of my star — and so have hope still, and courage. But, while I stumble on, I suffer." He wanted Gilchrist to know he was in the throes of a deep depression.

What, we must wonder, had Sharp embedded in *The Sin-Eater* that he hoped Gilchrist would uncover? The tales in the first section — "The Sin-Eater," "The Ninth Wave," and "The Judgment of God" — each tell the story of a man who commits an infraction of the norms of the Gaelic islands and ends up naked and consumed by the sea. In his depressed state, Sharp must have identified with these poor bedraggled men. In each of the volume's final three stories — "The Daughter of the Sun," "The Birdeen," and "Silk o' the Kine" — Sharp, disguised as Fiona, described a beautiful woman. In the first, she is Ethlenn "with her tall, lithe, slim figure, her dark-brown dusky hair, her gloaming eyes, her delicate features, with, above all, her radiant expression of joyous life." In the second, the Birdeen, or baby girl, grows into a young lady who is

tall and slim, with a flower-like way wither: the way of the flower in the sunlight, of the wave on the sea, of the tree-top in the wind. Her changing hazel eyes, now grey-green, now dusked with sea-gloom or a violet shadowiness; her wonderful arched eye brows, dark so that they seemed black; the beautiful bonnie face of her, wither mobile mouth and white flawless teeth; the ears that lay against the tangle of her sun-brown shadowed hair, like pink shells on a drift of seaweed; the exquisite poise of head and neck and body.

In the third, Eilidh was the "most beautiful woman of her time." Because of her "soft, white beauty, for all the burning brown of her by the sun and wind, she was also called Silk o' the Kine." She slays the man the King forces her to marry and joins Isla, the man she loves. They shed their clothes and swim out "together against the sun," and they were "never seen again by any of their kin or race." Sharp hoped Gilchrist, reading deeply, would recognize that in each of these stories of female beauty, intense love, and inevitable tragedy, Sharp was telling the story of his troubled relationship with Edith Rinder, which he had described to Gilchrist when they met at Phenice Croft. He concluded the November first letter with a dramatic appeal to Gilchrist: he needed his help, and he needed it "just now."

That plea reached its apotheosis in a late December letter, where he recalled for Gilchrist the "tragic issues" underlying his despair:

To me, 1896 comes with a gauntleted hand. It will be a hard fight against the squadrons of Destiny (for I hear the trampling of an obscure foe and menacing vague cries) — but perhaps I may — for a time, and that is the utmost each of us can expect — emerge victor. What a bitter strange mystery fate is! You know, dimly and in part, out of what tragic pain and amid what tragic issues I wrote "Summersleep," the third of the "Tragic Landscapes"? Well, every environment is changed, and circumstances are different, and yet the same two human souls are once more whelmed in the same disastrous tides & have once more to struggle blindly against what seems a baffling doom.

The imagery recalls that of the "Silk o' the Kine," but Sharp and Edith could not shed their responsibilities and swim out "together against the sun," never to be seen again. Sharp was "wrought by overwork, anxiety, and the endless flame of life," and he needed to have a long talk with Gilchrist. He told Gilchrist he was in financial trouble due to the indisposition of his wife, who had to spend the three winter months in Italy. He asked again if *The Sin-Eater* "wore" with Gilchrist. He wished Gilchrist would write a long letter, not "one of his usual notelets." He would be thankful if he could leap over "the black gulf of January" and be "safe on the shores of February."

Over-dramatized, but with a ring of truth, the letter is a long cry of desperation and a plea for help. It ends with an "offering" to Gilchrist, a "specially bound proof-revise copy of his last book: *Ecce Puella*:"

And Other Prose Imaginings.” The volume’s extensive ruminations on beautiful women were unlikely to interest Gilchrist, but the intensity of Sharp’s adoration might drive home the seriousness of his dilemma. The letter raises Gilchrist to the status of a secular priest whose receipt of an offering might elicit an absolution, a way forward. It is not clear how Sharp thought Gilchrist could help, but he may have assumed the restrictions placed on Gilchrist’s relationship with Garfitt resembled those on his relationship with Edith. Gilchrist’s experience may have produced insights that would alleviate Sharp’s depression. Gilchrist’s writings offer another clue to the intense language of Sharp’s appeal for help and to his repeated requests for Gilchrist’s response to Fiona’s “Summer Sleep” in which Sharp saw and feared the “Gates of Hell.”

Gilchrist was drawn to speculating about the dark mysteries embedded in the human psyche. Hugh Walpole, in his *The Apple Trees: Four Reminiscences* (Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire: Golden Cockerel Press, 1932), described a visit to Gilchrist (42–51):

So dark was the house that we lived for most of the day in candle-light. [...] He liked candles and Elizabethan thickness of atmosphere and, if possible, the rain beating on the leaded windows. [...] He liked to sit in the low heavily-beamed room and, as the candles flickered in the old silver candlesticks, and read aloud some of his favorite pieces from his writings.

In their introduction to a selection of Gilchrist’s tales — *The Basilisk and Other Tales of Dread* (ix–xvi) — John Pelan and Christopher Roden wrote:

The themes of madness and doomed love echo through the majority of his stories and in rare instances where his protagonists survive their encounters with the supernatural, it is a close call, and we know that they will carry the psychic scars left by their encounter with the Otherworldly for ever more. Gilchrist’s tales are High Tragedy; stories with an air of the morbid and grim, compressed into vignettes of just a few thousand words.

Sharp was especially interested in Gilchrist’s response to *The Sineater* because Gilchrist’s tales of “doomed love” and “psychic scars” resembled those he was writing as Fiona Macleod. Sharp’s attraction to Gilchrist was rooted in his belief that Gilchrist’s circumstances, his view of the world, and his state of mind resembled his own.

Pelan and Roden also described the "duality of Gilchrist," as shown by his shift in the late 1890s from "ornately crafted fantasies" to "deftly limned sketches of the Peakland District," from horror stories to local color. "It has been posited" they continue, "that Gilchrist abandoned the realm of the fantastic due to concerns for his own safety following the arrest of Oscar Wilde." They reject that supposition. While they agree that Gilchrist, as "a homosexual living in homophobic times [...] had reason to be concerned," their analysis of the full scope of his writings indicates Gilchrist turned to "charming travel books and mainstream novels" primarily because he recognized a change in the literary market and decided to produce writings that would sell.

In addition to the duality in his writing, Gilchrist, like Sharp, experienced a further, more basic splitting of self. Though he was living with George Garfitt in a homosexual relationship, the nature of the relationship unknown to those outside the relationship. Less flamboyant than Wilde, Gilchrist was not averse to distinctive role-playing. In *Eyam — The "Milton" of Robert Murray Gilchrist*, a small pamphlet of unknown date written by a resident of Eyam and available locally, Clarence Daniel recalled his father saying Gilchrist attended church services wearing "a cassock and girdle, as though it indicated membership of some religious order," while another villager said that Gilchrist was "a huge man, full of tricky humor, who could rattle off anything on a piano and surprise the stranger with the sweetness of a tenor voice coming from his massive frame." With occasional lapses, Gilchrist projected a distinctive but decidedly masculine image to the world. Sharp also projected that image while secretly wondering if he was more a woman than a man. Gender identity is not openly addressed in Sharp's 1895 letters to Gilchrist, but it is clearly a subtext. The confidential tone and confessional content of the letters suggest they shared while together their concerns about dual identities and gender fluidity. Gilchrist may have been surprised, if not perplexed, by the desperation conveyed in Sharp's 1895 letters, but he must also have recognized similarities in their interests and circumstances: their shared fascination with the supernatural, the psychic traumas lurking below accepted patterns of behavior, and their unconventional relationships, his with Garfitt and Sharp's with Edith. Sharp's pursuit of an intimate relationship with Gilchrist was based, at least partially, on his hope

the younger man might provide some solace, a path of escape from depression. Gilchrist's refusal to accommodate Sharp's repeated pleas for a more detailed and intimate response to *The Sin-Eater* reflected, as Sharp feared, his reluctance to deepen and shift the nature of their friendship.

Sharp seems not to have desired or needed a sexual relationship with another man, but he had a compelling need for a male friend to whom he could confide his deepest feelings. That need was rooted in his emotional distance from his father during his childhood, and in his father's early death, which prevented a healing of the breach. In the late 1870s and 1880s, Sharp confided in John Elder, the brother of Elizabeth Sharp's close friend, Adelaide Elder. They met just before Elder immigrated to New Zealand for reasons of health, and the intensity of their relationship, which ended abruptly in Elder's premature death, is preserved in Sharp's letters. Dante Gabriel Rossetti adopted Sharp as an acolyte in the early 1880s, and Sharp became a willing supplicant. Recently discovered letters to Hall Caine show how he became Sharp's confidant after Rossetti died in 1882. In the early 1890s, Sharp developed a close friendship with J. Stanley Little who found Phenicé Croft for the Sharps and lived nearby in West Sussex. When he met Gilchrist in 1894, Sharp, sensing their compatibility and the comparability of their circumstances, adopted him first as a confidant and then made him a confessor, a role Gilchrist resisted.

Sharp met his first cousin, Elizabeth Amelia Sharp, a well-educated girl from London, when they were children, and they became engaged when they were twenty. She became his companion and mentor, and she remained such until he died. In mid-life, he met, and came to depend on, the beautiful and brilliant Edith Rinder. The "needs and desires, interests and friends" of the Fiona Macleod side of his "nature," which was "deepening and becoming dominant," needed her presence. It was she who enabled him to summon and objectify his female self. "Without her," he said, "there would have been no 'Fiona Macleod'" (*Memoir*, 222). He came to love her; he needed to be with her; and several unpublished Sharp sonnets in the National Library of Scotland suggest his despair was deepened by the circumstances that prevented them from having a child. A passage in Elizabeth's *Memoir* (292) offers further insight into the state of mind that caused Sharp to reach out in despair to Gilchrist:

The production of the Fiona Macleod work was accomplished at a heavy cost to the author as that side of his nature deepened and became dominant. The strain upon his energies was excessive: not only from the necessity of giving expression to the two sides of his nature; but because of his desire, that, while under the cloak of secrecy F. M. should develop and grow, the reputation of William Sharp should at the same time be maintained. Moreover, each of the two natures had its own needs and desires, interests, and friends. The needs of each were not always harmonious one with the other but created a complex condition that led to a severe nervous collapse.

Here Elizabeth described her husband's condition in 1898, but the problem surfaced four years earlier when he first faced the effects on his psyche of his creation of a female persona.

To the extent Sharp identified Edith with the woman he experienced in himself, one might say one part of his nature had fallen in love with another — that, like Narcissus, he had fallen in love with himself. In November 1880, when he was twenty-five years old, he unabashedly declared his love to John Elder:

Don't despise me when I say that in some things I am more a woman than a man — and when my heart is touched strongly I lavish more love upon the one who does so than I have perhaps any right to expect returned; and then I have so few friends that when I do find one I am ever jealous of his or her absence.

This sentence should be read in the broader historical context of Tennyson's relationship with Arthur Henry Hallam, Matthew Arnold's with Arthur Hugh Clough, and many similar relationships between men in nineteenth-century Britain. In this case, however, Sharp was seriously attempting to come to terms with his gender identity: sometimes he identified as a man, and other times as a woman. The norms of his society dictated he identify as one — that of a man — not both.

Despite his mental anguish, Sharp continued writing and negotiating with Stone and Kimball about the publication of his *Gypsy Christ* and Fiona's *Pharais* and *Sin-Eater*. Annoyed by the firm's delays in sending proofs and checks, he was unaware of the managerial and financial problems that soon led to its dissolution. In late December he wrote to Sir George Douglas, a family friend in Scotland who had identified Sharp as the author of the Fiona writings. When confronted, Sharp admitted the truth and asked Douglas to refrain from telling anyone.

He also spoke of Fiona as though she were a separate person. He included several lines about the role of Edith Rinder in the emergence of Fiona Macleod, and then crossed them out as “too personal.” Sharp’s characterization of Fiona in this letter as a “puzzling literary entity” is both apt and revealing of the limits to his understanding. In his response to Sharp’s letter (*Memoir*, 253–234), Douglas obliged by speaking of Miss Macleod as a separate person, but said he detected her “mystical tendency” in the poems Sharp wrote in the early 1880s. He insightfully implied that Fiona had been there all along. In Sharp’s letter to Douglas, there is no hint of the troubled state of mind expressed so forcefully in his letters to Gilchrist.

He told Douglas Elizabeth’s doctor had ordered her to spend the three winter months in a warm climate, but he shared only with Gilchrist his worries about the strain this order placed on their finances. Far more worrying, however, was his state of mind. “Two human souls,” he wrote in his December letter to Gilchrist, “struggle blindly against what seems a baffling doom.” He and Edith were bound together in a hopeless love. In the story entitled “Daughter of the Sun” in *The Sin-Eater*, the narrator states: “We have all our dreams of impossible love. Somewhere, sometimes, the impossible happens. Then a man and a woman know that oblivious rapture of love [...] the ecstasy of the life of dream paramount over the ordinary human gladness of the life of actuality.” For Sharp, the impossible had happened, but the fact that he and Edith could not live together and build a family was tearing him apart. One cannot help but wonder if Elizabeth’s decision to spend three months in Italy was motivated, at least in part, by her desire to remove herself from what seemed a hopeless situation and give her husband and Edith time and space to work matters out for themselves.

1895 saw the launching of the Geddes publishing firm in Edinburgh with Sharp responsible for its literary affairs; *The Evergreen’s* appearance from the Geddes firm; the publication in London of Fiona’s *The Mountain Lovers* and Sharp’s *Ecce Puella*; the publication in Edinburgh of Fiona’s *The Sin-Eater*; and the publication in the United States of Sharp’s *Vistas* and *The Gypsy Christ* and Fiona’s *Pharais* and *The Sin-Eater*. It is not surprising that this level of productivity under two names, his extensive negotiations with publishers, his responsibilities with the Geddes firm, and the frustrations and fears in his personal life had, by the end of the year, taken a heavy toll on Sharp’s physical and mental well-being.

