

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



WILLIAM F. HALLORAN



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2022 William F. Halloran



This work is licensed under a Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

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

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations.

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0276#copyright>. Further details about Creative Commons licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>. Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0276#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

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 Fifteen

July–December 1896

Less than three weeks after Sharp returned to London from Edinburgh in early July, he and Elizabeth left for a long summer holiday in the north. Before leaving, Sharp asked his friend Murray Gilchrist to join them for a few days on the Northumberland coast. In mid-letter, he changed course and asked if it would be convenient for him and Elizabeth to spend a few days with Gilchrist and his mother at Cartledge, her home in Derbyshire. Neither visit materialized. They spent the night of July 20 at the Station Hotel in York and went on to Bambrough, a coastal village in Northumberland. After a week of “sea bathing,” as Elizabeth described it, they crossed to “the little Holy Isle of the Eastern Shores, Lindisfarne, Iona’s sister.” During the years he was writing as Fiona Macleod, Elizabeth noted, her husband “was usually in a highly wrought condition of restlessness, so that he could not long remain contentedly anywhere” (*Memoir*, 266). After two weeks on Lindisfarne, they went to Edinburgh, and, after a few days, left for Dunoon, a seaside resort town on the Firth of Clyde west of Glasgow, to be near Sharp’s mother and sisters who were there on holiday.

In Bambrough, in late July, Sharp wrote a long letter to John Macleay of the *Highland News* in which he tried to dispel rumors he was Fiona.

I confess I share to some degree in Miss Macleod’s annoyance in this persistent disbelief in her personality to which you allude — as, indeed, to some extent in her resentment against the impertinence of those persons who try to intrude upon her privacy or seek to ascertain what for good reasons of her own she does not wish made public. [...] Did you not see the explicit statement I caused to be inserted in the “Glasgow Evening News,” & elsewhere (because of one of these perverse misstatements) to the effect that “Miss Fiona Macleod is not Mr. William Sharp; Miss

Fiona Macleod is not Mrs. William Sharp; and that Miss Fiona Macleod is — Miss Fiona Macleod." Surely that ought to have settled the matter: for it is scarcely likely, I imagine, that I should put forth so explicit a statement were it not literally true. I trust, therefore, that you will do your best at any time to counteract all other misstatements.

Near the close of this letter, Sharp said he hoped to go north to Inverness in early October and, if so, he "might perhaps say something on, say, 'The Celtic Spirit.'" Macleay took that possibility seriously and informed Sharp he was working with others to find a venue for Sharp's lecture, which would be welcomed by many in Inverness. In Edinburgh, on his way to Dunoon, Sharp quashed that possibility in another letter to Macleay: his doctor had forbidden him from lecturing "on any condition whatever, this year at any rate." He thanked Macleay and others who would have given him a friendly welcome, but he would have to defer a lecture till the spring of 1897, or even the autumn, when Inverness would host the Mod, a large annual gathering of Celtic enthusiasts which moved and still moves from city to city in Scotland.

When Sharp arrived in Dunoon on August 15, he saw the August 14 issue of the *Highland News*, which contained a lead article by John Macleay titled "Mystery! Mystery! All in a Celtic Haze." Hoping to attract attention and increase readership and disregarding Sharp's assertions, Macleay described an article in the *Glasgow Evening News* that asserted Fiona Macleod was William Sharp. This unexpected development produced a flurry of letters from Sharp to Macleay during the next week — nearly one per day — in which he indignantly denied he was Fiona and tried, with expressions of camaraderie and implied threats of legal action, to dissuade Macleay from pursuing the issue further. Intended as an interlude of rest and relaxation, the visit with his family in Dunoon turned stressful as Macleay seemed intent on discovering and broadcasting the truth. Sharp summoned all his verbal skills in a hasty effort to preserve the fiction and thus prevent both embarrassment and erosion of income. He had received a letter from Fiona which expressed "deep resentment" against the writers of the *Glasgow Evening News*. She was especially insulted by the cruel & inexcusable phrase: "I hear again & again that she is a greater fraud than Macpherson of Ossianic fame." She would "ignore all unwarrantable interference, conjecture, & paragraphic impertinence." Macleay's initial praise of the Fiona writings

and support for the cause of Scottish Celticism was a welcome stimulus for the sale of the Fiona books in Scotland. Now Macleay's pursuit of Fiona's identity, unless handled properly, threatened a public debacle. By the end of the week, Sharp had derailed Macleay's probes and decided the conflict had the beneficial effect of focusing attention on the Fiona publications.

On Saturday, August 22, the Sharps took his mother to Edinburgh, stayed for only two days, and left again on Monday with Sharp's sister Mary for Tigh-Na-Bruaich, west of Glasgow on the Kyles of Bute. From there, in early September, William and Elizabeth paid a brief visit to Inverness, where they met Macleay, and went on to see the Falls of Lora. In mid-September, Elizabeth returned to London and her art reviewing for the *Glasgow Herald*. William and his sister took the ferry across Loch Fyne to Tarbert where Edith and Frank Rinder were vacationing. Elizabeth reproduced (*Memoir*, 166–167) a section of a letter Sharp wrote to her from Tigh-Na-Bruaich, and sections of two letters he wrote from Tarbert, one on September 23 and one on September 26. His writing was going well, but he was not well enough to carry out his plan to go off by himself in the Hebrides.

Sharp found it easier to write as Fiona Macleod when Edith was nearby, and a burst of creativity in Tarbert produced many pseudonymous stories, poems, and letters. On September 23 he told Elizabeth he had written "the long-awaited 'Rune of the Passion of Women' the companion piece in a sense to the 'Chant of Women' in *Pharais*." On September 26 he said he had finished what had stirred him "so unspeakably, namely the third and concluding 'Rune of the Sorrow of Women.'" That rune, he said, had tired him "in the preliminary excitement and in the strange semi-conscious fever of composition." All three runes appeared in *From the Hills of Dream*, the volume of Fiona poems Patrick Geddes and Colleagues published in the fall of 1896, where he said he did not use the word "Rune" in "its ancient or exact significance, but rather as a suitable analogue for 'Chant.'" Occasionally, he continued, they have "something of the significance of the old Ru'n, meaning a mystery, or the more or less occult expression of mystery." All three runes express the travails of women suffering at the hands of men. Recalling Sharp's early poem called "Motherhood," they focus particularly on the burden of bearing children and then being cast aside

for younger women. The runes deserve attention for the varied nuances of Sharp's critique of the repression of women. Equally interesting is his description of the composition process in his letter to Elizabeth:

In a vague way not only you, Mona, Edith and others swam into my brain, but I have never so absolutely felt the woman-soul within me: it was as though in some subtle way the soul of Woman breathed into my brain — and I feel vaguely as if I had given partial expression at least to the inarticulate voice of a myriad women who suffer in one or other of the triple ways of sorrow.

The image of breath entering the brain aside, Sharp admitted his need to become a woman in order to write as Fiona. He projected himself into the minds of the three women he knew well (Elizabeth, Mona, and Edith), identified the qualities he shared with them, and coalesced those qualities into a fourth woman he introduced to the world as Fiona who was, herself, an advocate of women's rights. This is one of Sharp's several efforts to explain the emergence of Fiona Macleod.

A letter he wrote to W. B. Yeats from Tarbert in late September continued his lengthy and complicated relationship with the Irish poet. In an August 25 letter to Sharp from Tillyra Castle, Edward Martin's home in western Ireland, Yeats described a recent vision:

I invoked one night the spirits of the moon & and saw between sleep & waking a beautiful woman firing an arrow among the stars. That night she appeared to [Arthur] Symons who is staying here, & so impressed him that he wrote a poem to her, the only one he ever wrote to a dream, calling her the fountain of all song or some such phrase. She was the symbolic Diana (*Collected Letters II*, 47–49).

Yeats described his archer vision in a letter to Fiona the previous day, but that letter has not surfaced. At Tarbert in late September Sharp composed Fiona's response, which began with an apology for "unforeseen circumstances" that prevented her from writing sooner. She claimed to have begun a letter describing her archer vision in a letter to Yeats before she received his of August 24:

Alas, a long penciled note (partly apropos of your vision of the woman shooting arrows, and of the strange coincidence of something of the same kind on my own part) has long since been devoured by a too voracious or too trustful gull — for a sudden gust of wind blew the quarto-sheet from

off the deck of the small yacht wherein I and my dear friend and confrère of whom you know were sailing, off Skye.

Sharp's goal was to convince Yeats of Fiona's visionary compacity, and he made further use of the archer vision by tacking it to the end of a Fiona story he finished earlier called "The Last Fantasy of James Achanna."

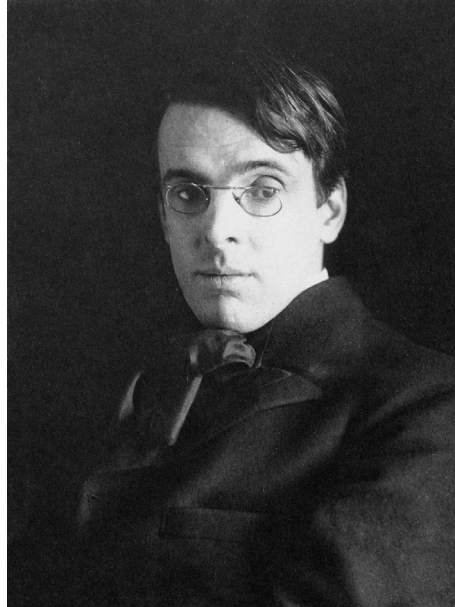


Fig. 40 William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). Photograph by Alice Boughton (1903), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yeats_Boughton.jpg#/media/File:Yeats_Boughton.jpg, Public Domain.

The story begins in the authorial voice of Fiona, who says she will tell a story she heard from a fisherman named Coll McColl. In the story, a woman who is married falls in love with another man but finally chooses to remain with her husband. It would kill him to choose otherwise, and, not surprisingly, the body of the spurned lover is found several days later. Sharp attached two archer visions to this depressing story and changed its name to "The Archer." On the night the dead body was found, Coll McColl saw "a tall shadowy woman" draw "a great bow" and shoot an arrow through the air, which pierced the heart of a fawn. He believed "the fawn was the poor suffering heart of Love" (or the spurned lover) and the "Archer was the great Shadowy Archer that

hunts among the stars." The next night, Coll saw a woman "shooting arrow after arrow against the stars."

Arthur Symons, who was staying with Yeats at Tillyra Castle, was editor of the *Savoy*. Encouraged by Yeats, he had asked Fiona to submit a story for publication. In his September 23 letter to Elizabeth, Sharp said he had "done the *Savoy* story 'The Archer' (about 4,500 words)," and shortly thereafter he sent it to the *Savoy*. He assumed correctly Symons would mention Fiona's archer story to Yeats when they returned to London in early October. As Sharp expected, Yeats decided Fiona could not have heard about his archer vision before she wrote "The Archer," and that buttressed his belief in Fiona's visionary powers.

In the last paragraph of Fiona's late September letter to Yeats, Sharp burnished her visionary powers by recounting yet another vision:

I had a strange vision the other day, wherein I saw the figure of a gigantic woman sleeping on the green hills of Ireland. As I watched, the sun waned, and the dark came, and the stars began to fall. They fell one by one, and each fell into the woman — and lo, of a sudden, all was wan running water, and the drowned stars and the transmuted woman passed from my seeing. This was a waking dream, an open vision.

After claiming not to know what the vision means, Sharp, as Fiona, suggests a meaning:

I realise that something of tremendous moment is being matured just now. We are on the verge of vitally important developments. And all the heart, all the brain, of the Celtic races shall be stirred. There is a shadow of mighty changes. Myself I believe that new spirits have been embodied among us. And some of the old have come back. We shall perish, you and I and all who fight under the "Lifting of the Sunbeam" — but we shall pioneer a wonderful marvelous new life for humanity.

Having provided evidence of Fiona's visionary powers, Sharp proceeded to place her firmly in line with Yeats's aspirations by having her forecast "a new life for humanity" arising from the spiritualist heart of the Celtic revival.

Sharp incorporated another stratagem in the late September Fiona letter. She was sailing off Skye with her "dear friend and confrère of whom you know." That good friend, William Sharp, was with her during "much sailing about and faring in remote places," and he has participated in the "work we are doing and putting together the volume

of verse." The volume of verse was *From the Hills of Dream: Mountain Songs and Island Runes* which was published in November 1896. When Sharp composed the Fiona letter, he and his sister Mary were in Tarbert. Uniquely, two manuscripts of this letter survive: Sharp's draft is in the National Library of Scotland, and Mary's copy is among the Sharp letters in Yale's Beinecke Library. In the draft, Sharp first wrote "our" when referring to the volume of poetry, but he crossed this out and replaced it with "my [Fiona's] own book of verse." Mary copied "my own book of verse," but there is a caret after "my" in the copy and "(our)" is written above the line in Sharp's hand and then lightly crossed through. Since Mary was with him in Tarbert, he saw Mary's copy before it was posted and added the "our." The main purpose of the letter was to convince Yeats he had found in Fiona a fitting companion in the Celtic cause, but it also introduced Sharp as an enabler of the Fiona writings and raised the possibility of some collaboration. In substituting "our" for "my" and then crossing it out, Sharp wanted Yeats to recognize he was responsible for more than the "putting together" of the book of poems. Later, as we shall see, he told Yeats Fiona was a separate personality speaking through him. In reviewing *From the Hills of Dream* in the *Bookman* of December 1896, however, and in his January 1897 reply to Fiona's September letter, Yeats treated Fiona as a woman entirely separate from Sharp and entirely responsible for the poems in *From the Hills of Dream*. Events in January 1897, as we shall see, indicate Sharp succeeded in convincing Yeats he and Fiona were bound inextricably together.

Sharp left Tarbert on October 2 spent the night at the Caledonian Station Hotel in Glasgow and continued to Edinburgh and London. Before leaving Tarbert, he wrote an exuberant birthday letter to E. C. Stedman which announced his intention to come to New York in early November. The trip was necessary if he hoped to recover the money Stone and Kimball promised for works the firm had published and promised to publish. He asked Murray Gilchrist to accompany him to America, both for the sake of Gilchrist's health, and for "friendship's sake." Gilchrist declined the unexpected invitation, and Sharp wrote from London on October 18 to say he wanted to see Gilchrist when he returned in December. After three weeks in London, Sharp went to Southampton on October 22 and boarded the "Augusta Victoria" of the Hamburg American line which left for New York the next day. He

arrived in New York on Saturday, October 31 and found "the streets thronged with over two million people" in the weekend before the fiercely contested Presidential election in which William McKinley, the Republican candidate, defeated the Democrat William Jennings Bryan. Since no business could be done until the following Wednesday, he crossed the Hudson River to spend a few days with Henry Mills Alden. On Sunday, he described the pre-election scene to his wife:

New York itself is at fever heat. I have never seen such a sight as yesterday. The whole enormous city was a mass of flags and innumerable Republican and Democratic insignia. The whole business quarter made a gigantic parade that took 7 hours in its passage — and the businessmen alone amounted to over 100,000. Everyone — as indeed not only America but Great Britain and all Europe — is now looking eagerly for the final word on Tuesday night (*Memoir*, 174–175).

Following McKinley's victory, business resumed, and Sharp returned to the city where E. C. Stedman's son Arthur arranged for him to stay at the Century Club as a temporary member.

Before leaving London, Sharp threatened lawsuits against Stone and Kimball and armed himself with power of attorney from Fiona so he could act on her behalf as well as his own. One can but wonder who drew up a document that authorized one aspect of Sharp's personality to act for the other. During his week in the city, however, Kimball succeeded in charming Sharp into submission. He described Herbert Stone's loss of interest in the firm, the withdrawal of financial support by Stone's father, Kimball's acquisition of the firm's stock of bound volumes, sheets, and plates, and his move of the enterprise to New York, where he was determined to make a success of it. The firm remained in perilous condition, but Kimball managed a small check for Sharp to take back to Fiona. On Friday November 13 Sharp thanked Kimball for his hospitality and expressed his hope that Kimball would soon visit London where his kindnesses would be repaid. His faith in Kimball had been rekindled to the extent that, ever optimistic, he proposed a book for him to publish the following year. When Sharp boarded the Fürst Bismarck on Saturday November 14 for his return to London, he was satisfied with the results of his American trip.

During his absence, Archibald Constable and Co. in London, and Harpers and Brothers in New York published Fiona Macleod's *Green*

Fire: A Romance. The first half of the novel takes place in Celtic Brittany, and the second on a remote island near Skye in the Hebrides. The two parts are held together by the love of Alan de Kerival for his beautiful cousin Ynys de Kerival. When Ynys' father kills Alan's father in a duel, the two realize they cannot remain together in Brittany, and they escape to a Hebridean island where they both have family roots and where the second half of the romance, "The Herdsman," takes place. Years later, Sharp rewrote the Hebridean section and published it separately in Fiona Macleod's *The Dominion of Dreams*. Before he died in 1905, he asked Elizabeth to promise she would never reissue *Green Fire* in its entirety. In fulfilling that promise, she said Sharp thought only the second "Herdsman" section was produced by the Fiona impetus, while the first — "The Birds of Angus Ogue" — was the work of William Sharp.

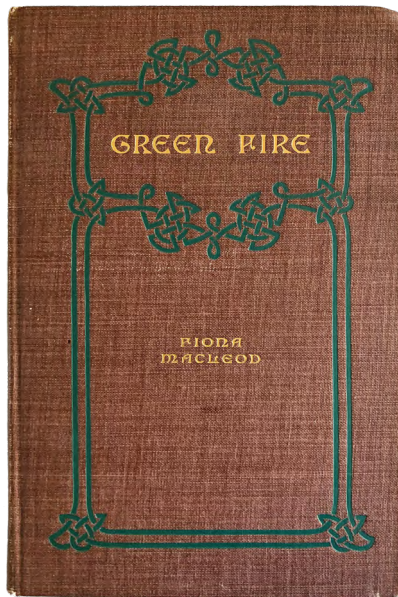


Fig. 41 The first American edition of Fiona MacLeod's *Green Fire. A Romance* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1896). Photograph by William F. Halloran (2019).

While it is true that the first half of the romance sounds more like Sharp and the second, set in the Hebrides and focusing on a deeply held folk belief of the native Gaels, sounds more like Fiona, a closer look at the

two sections reveals a deeper reason for suppressing the Brittany section of the romance. While studying in Paris, Alan dreamed of Ynys with "ever deepening joy and wonder." She was his "real life; he lived in her, for her, because of her." She was "his strength, his inspiration." When Alan returned to Brittany, Ynys saw him as "the fairest and comeliest of men," and when Alan turned

the longing of his eyes upon Ynys he wondered if anywhere upon the green earth moved aught so sweet and winsome, if anywhere in the green world was another woman so beautiful in body, mind, and spirit as Ynys — Ynys the Dark, as the peasants call her, though Ynys of the dusky hair and hazel-green eyes would have been truer of her whom Alan de Kerival loved. [...] there was but one woman in the world, but one Dream, and her name was Ynys.

Alan was a poet, and Ynys "was the living poem who inspired all that was best in life, all that was fervent in his brain." Beyond that, recalling Sharp's fascination with women, it was Ynys who gave Alan his "sense of womanhood, [...] In her, he recognized the symbol as well as the individual." She was "his magic; the light of their love was upon everything; everywhere he found synonyms and analogues of Ynys. Deeply as he loved beauty, he had learned to love it far more keenly and understandingly, because of her." Recalling Sharp's early poem "Motherhood," Alan, through his love for her, "had come to understand the supreme hope of our human life in the mystery of motherhood." Ynys "was at once a child of nature, a beautiful pagan, a daughter of the sun; was at once this and a soul alive with the spiritual life. [...] Indeed, the mysticism which was part of the spiritual inheritance came with her northern strain that was one of the deep bonds which united them."

In Alan, Ynys "had found all that her heart craved," but she had found that "nearly too late." While Alan was in Paris, Ynys was "formally betrothed" to Andrik, a friend of her childhood, and in Brittany a betrothal was "almost as binding as marriage." Ynys asserted that "betrothal or no betrothal" she belonged only to Alan: "How could she help the accident by which she had cared for Andrik before she loved Alan." She still cared for Andrik, but what she felt for him paled in comparison to her love of Alan. She was the flame that lit his torch. Even if forced to marry Andrik, she would still love only Alan. "Affection, the deepest affection, is one thing; the love of man and woman" as they knew it was "a thing apart."

The only way Alan and Ynys could escape the betrothal and build a life together was to board a ship and sail to the Hebrides, where their love prevailed, despite further complications arising from the case of mistaken identity that became the story of the Herdsman. Those complications caused Alan to slip in and out of depression, “a melancholy from which not even the love of Ynys would arouse him.” To ward off that depression, he dwelt upon the “depth and passion” of his love for Ynys,

upon the mystery and wonder of that coming life which was theirs and yet was not of them, itself already no more than an unrisen wave or an unbloomed flower, but yet as inevitable as they, but dowered with the light which is beyond where the mortal shadows end. Strange, this passion of love for what is not; strange this deep longing of the woman — the longing of the womb, the longing of the heart, the longing of the brain, the longing of the soul — for perpetuation of the life she shares in common with one whom she loves; strange this longing of the man, a longing deep-based in his nature as the love of life or the fear of death, for the gaining from the woman he loves this personal hostage against oblivion. For indeed something of this so commonplace, and yet so divine and mysterious tide of birth, which is forever at the flow upon this green world, is due to an instinctive fear of cessation. The perpetuation of life is the unconscious protest of humanity against the destiny of mortality.

When this abundance of overwrought prose is disentangled, we identify the belief often expressed by Sharp — that the love between a man and a woman reaches its zenith only in the production of children as “hostages against oblivion.” When the complexities of the Herdsman section were cleared away, Alan and Ynys boarded a ship and returned to Brittany, where Alan assumed his rightful position as Lord of the Manor, and the two lovers would produce a child. Unlike the lovers in earlier Fiona Macleod productions, Alan and Ynys find a way to consummate their love and live happily ever after.

The love story of Alan and Ynys is the central theme of both sections of *Green Fire*. Again, and most directly, Sharp, disguised as Fiona, was attempting to reconcile his passionate love for Edith Rinder with his affectionate love for his wife. In a letter to John Macleay dated late July 1896, Sharp said the book was written “a year or so ago,” which would be the late summer and fall of 1895, a period in which he was in agony

over the conundrum. The title page carries the following lines below the author's name: "While still I may, I write for you | The love I lived, the dream I knew." The book is dedicated "To Esclarvoudo" followed by the Latin phrase from Ovid, "Nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum," which translates: "Neither without nor with you is it possible to live." The book was written for and about Edith Rinder.

Esclarmonde of Foix was a prominent figure associated with Catharism in thirteenth-century southern France. She figured prominently as a heroine in several medieval epic poems, including one titled "Esclarmonde" by Bertran de Born. Esclarmonde was also the heroine of an opera by that name composed by Jules Massenet and first performed in Paris in 1889. Sharp's more immediate source for the name was a Provençal poem, *La Glorie d'Esclarmonde*, edited in both Italian and French by Marius Andre, and published by J. Roumanille in Avignon in 1893. Characteristic of the Provençal tradition, a beautiful woman inspired the poem. Sharp dedicated his novel, which recounts his own



Fig. 42 Poster advertising the premiere of *Esclarmonde*, libretto by Alfred Blau and Louis de Gramodt, music by Jules Massenet's, Paris, May 1889. August François-Marie Gorguet, *Esclarmonde* (1889), chromolithograph. Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Esclarmonde.jpg#/media/File:Esclarmonde.jpg>, Public Domain.

love of a beautiful woman, to Edith Rinder — the object of his love disguised as the heroine of a Provençal love poem and further protected by his female pseudonym.

How can we be sure? There is another equally revealing Esclarmoundo. While Sharp was in America, Fiona Macleod's *From the Hills of Dream: Threnodies, Songs and Other Poems* was published. Sharp dedicated the book to Arthur Allhallows Geddes, the newborn son of Patrick and Ann Geddes who would become Sharp's godson. Arthur was born in 1895 on Halloween, the day Sharp arrived in New York and the anniversary of William and Elizabeth Sharp's marriage. The last section of the volume — a series of "prose rhythms" called "The Silence of Amor" (the silence of love) — is dedicated "To Esclarmoundo." Cast in the usual heightened Fiona prose, the dedication exposes the intensity of Sharp's love for Edith and his manic state of mind:

There is one word never spoken in these estrays of passion and longing. But you, White Flower of these fugitive blossoms, know it: for the rustle of the wings of Amor awakens you at dawn, and in the last quietudes of the dark your heart is his dear haven of dreams.

For, truly, that wandering voice, that twilight-whisper, that breath so dewy-sweet, that flame-wing'd lute player whom none sees but for a moment, in a rainbow-shimmer of joy, or a sudden lightening-flare of passion, this exquisite mystery we call Amor comes, to some rapt visionaries at least, not with a song upon the lips that all may hear, or with blithe viol of a public music, but as one wrought by ecstasy, dumbly eloquent with desire, ineffable, silent.

For Amor is oftentimes a dreamer, and when he dreams it is through lovely analogies. He speaks not, he whispers not, who in the flight of the wild swan against the frosty stars, or the interlacieries of black branches against the moonlight, or the abrupt song of a bird in the green-gloom of the forest, hears the voice that is all Music for him, sees the face of his unattainable Desire. These things [the poems that follow in this section] are his silences, wherein his heart and his passion commune. And being his [Amor's], they are mine: to lay before you, Dear; as a worshipper, wrought to incommunicable pain, lays white flowers before the altar, which is his Sanctuary and the Ivory Gate of his Joy.

The author of this dedication identifies with Amor or Cupid, the male personification of love. Since he cannot express his love openly, the poems that follow are silences, but in them his heart and passion "commune." He lays them before the object of his desire just as a worshipper, hoping

for salvation, lays flowers before an altar. He is "dumbly eloquent with desire" and "wrought by ecstasy," but also wrought to "incommunicable pain" by the need to be silent about the love and passion he shares with his beloved.

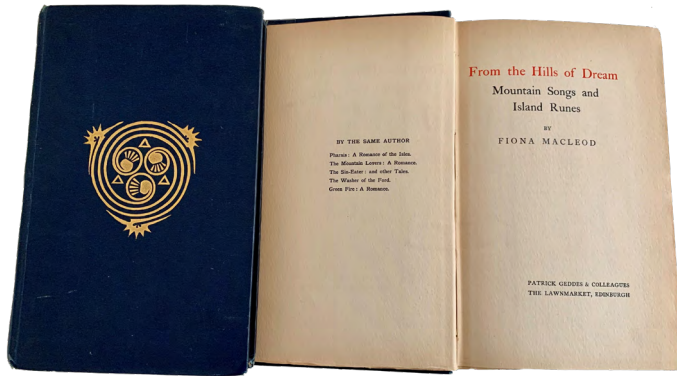


Fig. 43 Cover and title page of the first edition of Fiona Macleod's *From the Hills of Dream* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1896). Photograph by William F. Halloran (2019).

All that is clear enough, but the author of the dedication and the "silences" that follow was nominally Fiona, a woman. Was anyone paying close attention to what she was saying? Surely Elizabeth Sharp, a bright and well-educated woman fluent in French, knew what her husband was saying under the cover of Fiona. Edith and Frank Rinder surely knew. By the fall of 1896, when *Green Fire* and *From the Hills of Dream* were published, the two couples had reached an understanding that Sharp and Edith would continue their relationship discretely, but neither would leave the spouse they also loved. Sharp must have intended Fiona's readers to assume she was inventing a male persona, an interesting reversal to be sure. More likely, her readers simply ignored the matter. Sharp was able to disguise the identity of Fiona Macleod for a decade because a part of the reading public needed her. He recognized the need and set about fulfilling it. Descent into the Celtic past was an escape from the negative effects of rapid industrialization and the scientific discoveries challenging the tenets of Christianity. More to the point, Fiona's sentimentalizing of love and passion appealed mightily to many women and some men, one of whom claimed to have fallen in love with her.

In an October 18 letter, Sharp told Murray Gilchrist *Green Fire* was just published and called it “a strange book — some will say a mad book.” Gilchrist knew its true authorship and would read it as a disguised account of Sharp’s love of a beautiful woman. When the flame of his passion had cooled in 1899, Sharp repressed the book’s account of the love affair. He dropped the first half of “*Green Fire*” and erased from the second, which he called “*The Herdsman*,” any mention of the love affair. There is no Ynys, and there is no dedication to Esclarmoundo. At the start Alan Carmichael leaves Brittany and lands on a small island near Skye. He has “wed and lost” the unnamed daughter of the man who killed his father. His only companion is his “servant and old friend Ian M’Ian.” Sharp also eliminated “*The Silence of Amor*” section from editions of *From the Hills of Dream* published after 1900. In 1902, Thomas Mosher of Portland Maine printed *The Silence of Amor | Prose Rhythms by Fiona Macleod* in a beautifully designed book on Van Gelder paper limited to 400 copies. Sharp wrote as Fiona a “Foreword” asserting his preference for calling the contents of the volume “prose rhythms” rather than “prose poems” and described the form as he conceived it. He also dropped the dedication to Esclarmoundo without replacing it but retained the dedicatory statement, slightly revised, which he prefaced with the following quotation from Fiona Macleod’s *The Distant Country*: “Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions.” In this edition the passion of the first is less intense. It is still Sharp disguised as Fiona laying the prose rhythms before his “Dear.” In 1896 he laid them “as a worshiper, wrought to incommunicable pain, lays white flowers before the alter, which is his Sanctuary and the Ivory Gate of his Joy.” In the 1902 iteration he does so calmly “as a wind, that has lifted the blossoms of a secret orchard, stoops, and lays milk-white drift and honeyed odors at the open window of one who within sleeps and dreams.”

Despite the perceived success of Sharp’s New York trip and the publication of two Fiona Macleod books in his absence, matters soon took a turn for the worse. He fell ill again, this time with influenza, and needed money to recuperate in a warmer climate. Herbert Stone, acting for the firm, had promised Sharp £300 for a yachting romance called *Wives in Exile* (£100 on the submission of the manuscript and £200 upon publication). Kimball claimed ignorance of this commitment, and

he could not afford to honor it. The book was submitted for copyright under the Stone and Kimball imprint in September 1896, but not issued. When they met in New York, Kimball agreed to relinquish all rights to the book, whereupon Sharp arranged for a young Boston publishing firm, Lamson, Wolfe & Company, to buy the loose sheets and plates, and they published it in January 1897 with a new title page. The Boston firm gave Sharp a promissory note due in January for £150, which he carried home only to discover it was not negotiable in Britain. He had hoped to borrow against it but was forced to send it to Stedman and ask him to advance the money until the note could be redeemed in January. While in New York, Sharp also met Melville Stone, Herbert's father, in an effort to recover the remaining £150 due for *Wives in Exile*. The elder Stone agreed his son was morally, if not legally, obliged to pay Sharp some of the missing £150. He suggested E. C. Stedman arbitrate the matter, and Sharp accepted his suggestion. In his December 5 letter to Stedman, Sharp presented the history of the affair in a manner designed to convince Stedman, as arbiter, to award him the compensation he thought due from the Stone family.

After recovering from influenza, Sharp began to exhibit in early December "disquieting symptoms of nervous collapse" which were brought on, Elizabeth said, by "the prolonged strain of the heavy dual work added to by an eager experimentation with certain psychic phenomena with which he had long been familiar but wished further to investigate, efforts in which at times he and Mr. W. B. Yeats collaborated" (*Memoir*, 282). Sharp had engaged in various attempts to communicate with the spirit world, augmented by drugs, while living at Phenice Croft in 1891–1892. That was one reason Elizabeth disliked the place and insisted they give it up and return to the city. After returning from America, he resumed those investigations. Suffering both physically and mentally in late November and early December, he needed a respite from damp and depressing London.

Stedman's efforts to recover money from the Stone family had not produced results, but he loaned Sharp — against Lamson's promissory note — enough money to leave England. In a letter of December 16, Sharp thanked him profusely for his generosity and said he was leaving the next day for the South of France. He stopped for a few days in Tarascon and then went on to St. Remy where the Janviers were living.

From there he wrote to Elizabeth: St. Remy, with its “hill-air and beauty,” was a most welcome change from Tarascon. He realized he “must give up everything to getting back” his “old buoyancy and nervous strength. [...] Prolonged rest and open air were paramount needs.” Catherine Janvier recalled Sharp’s visit in a 1907 *North American Review* article:

In December of 1896 — preceded by the announcement that he was old and gray-haired — William Sharp superb as a young Viking, burst in on us in quiet Saint-Remy. After the excitement of the first joyous meeting was over, it was plain to see that this magnificent presence gave false promise. He was exhausted by the long strain of double work and had been ordered away from the smoke and fog of London to the sunshine of the Riviera, there to seek the rest he nowhere had found. While with us strange moods possessed him; and, perhaps, because of these strange things happened. At times it was as though he struggled against an evil influence; was forcing back a dark tide ever threatening to overwhelm his soul. Warring presences were about him, he thought; and he believed that these must be conquered, even at the risk of life. The culminating struggle came, and through one winter night my husband watched over him as he battled against unseen but not unfelt influence. The fight was won, the dark tide stemmed, but at great cost of vitality, his victory leaving him faint and exhausted. “Nevermore,” he told us, “would he tamper with certain forces, for such tampering might mean destruction.”

Having passed through the dark night, according to Mrs. Janvier, Sharp recovered from his severe psychic episode and enjoyed the Christmas celebrations in the village. After Christmas he left for the warmer Riviera where, according to Mrs. Janvier, “he wandered restlessly from place to place” before returning to the Janviers in St. Remy shortly after the start of 1897. As it turned out, the New Year brought another entanglement that, despite his “Nevermore,” involved his return to spiritualist experiments.

