

# William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



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

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# Chapter Sixteen

1897

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On New Year's Day, Sharp wrote to the Janviers from Saint-Maxime to say he felt lonely and "craved help and companionship in a way foreign to his self-sufficing nature." After sending the Janviers several telegrams, he reappeared in St. Remy, saying "he wished to be looked after and to be made much of." In her *North American Review* article, Catherine Janvier recalled,

During this second stay with us, he was utterly unlike the mystery-surrounded, dual-natured dreamer of his previous visit: he was William Sharp, and William Sharp in his blithest mood. Though Fiona might smile, it is impossible to imagine her as bursting into a hearty laugh; while her creator could be the gayest of companions, full of fun and frolic, displaying at times a Pucklike impishness worthy of a twelve-year-old boy. He left our town in this joyous trim, waving his blue beret from the carriage window until the train was out of sight.

Initially Sharp planned to spend the entire month of January in southern France, but the warm weather and the hospitality of the Janviers worked their magic. In late December, Yeats wrote a lengthy letter to Fiona Macleod which Mary received in Edinburgh and forwarded to St. Remy where it awaited Sharp's return. It described his intent to incorporate occult materials in his writings and hinted at plans to create a Celtic Mystical Order. He was working on a play, the *Shadowy Waters*, which was "more magical and mystical" than anything he had written. Mr. Sharp had heard some of it "in its first very monotonous form." He hoped Sharp would come to Paris before mid-January on his way back to England, for he had "much to talk over with him." This invitation contributed to Sharp's "joyous trim" as he boarded a train to Paris on January 4 or 5.

The references to Sharp in Yeats' letter indicate he considered Fiona a separate person closely associated with Sharp. Since they met in 1887, the two men moved in some of the same London circles, and they may have experimented together in drug-induced (hashish and mescal) spiritualist experiments. They were not close friends, but Yeats' interest in Sharp quickened with the advent of Fiona Macleod. Ten years younger than Sharp, he was attracting notice for the quality of his poetry and for his efforts to promote Celticism in Ireland and beyond. Having invented Fiona and positioned himself as her friend or relative, Sharp hoped to be drawn more closely into the Celtic Revival that was centered in Ireland. A conversation with Yeats in Paris might offer the entrée he sought.

When he arrived in Paris, Sharp discovered Yeats was offering a closer relationship than anticipated. The ruse he perpetrated the previous August involving the Archer vision assured Yeats of Fiona's visionary powers. Now he wanted to know if Sharp had similar powers. Years later, he recalled Sharp visiting him in his hotel in the Boulevard Raspail:

When he stood up to go, he said, "What is that?" pointing to a geometrical form painted upon a little piece of cardboard that lay upon my windowsill. And then before I could answer, he looked out of the window, saying, "There is a funeral passing." I said, "That is curious, as the Death symbol is painted on the card." I did not look, but I am sure there was no funeral. A few days later he came back and said, "I have been very ill; you must never allow me to see that symbol again" (*Autobiographies*, 339-340).

Although Sharp may have known the geometrical form was a death symbol, Yeats assumed he did not and that reassured him of Sharp's powers of clairvoyance. In his *Autobiographies* Yeats recounted an astonishing demonstration of Sharp's effort to prove his psychic abilities. He told Yeats a phantom woman visited his hotel suite. Appearing and disappearing, she finally escaped down a flight of stairs into the street. Sharp followed her around many corners constantly seeing and losing her, until he came to the Seine. She stood at an opening in the wall looking down into the river, and then she vanished. Yeats recalled Sharp's words:

I cannot tell why, but I went to the opening in the wall and stood there, just as she had stood, taking just the same attitude. Then I thought I was

in Scotland, and that I heard a sheep-bell. After that I must have lost consciousness, for I knew nothing till I found myself lying on my back, dripping wet, and people standing all around. I had thrown myself into the Seine.

Yeats continued:

I did not believe him, and not because I thought the story impossible, for I knew he had a susceptibility beyond any one I had ever known to symbolic or telepathic influence, but because he never told anything that was true; the facts of life disturbed him and were forgotten.

When Yeats recounted this incident, he had succumbed to the general opinion that Sharp was a hopeless prevaricator, an oddity who pretended for years to be a woman. His opinion of Sharp was quite different when he heard the story in 1897.

Having proved his visionary powers, Sharp was elated to receive Yeats's invitation to join him and Maud Gonne in evoking visions to obtain the talismans and rituals of a Celtic Mystical Order that would "unite the radical truths of Christianity to those of a more ancient world" and gradually transform first Ireland and then the world. The Order's design, as planned by Yeats, resembled that of the Order of the Golden Dawn. He was an active and Sharp a less active member of that Order's London branch. Yeats' Order would be centered not in London, but in the abandoned Castle of the Rock in Loch Key in western Ireland. Young men and women would be invited to the castle to learn the order's rites and then go out into the world to spread the word and recruit others. Members would also use the castle for "occasional retirement from the world."

To begin this difficult project, Yeats needed "mystical rites — a ritual system of evocation and meditation — to reunite the perceptions of the spirit of the divine, with natural beauty." He was deeply in love with Maud Gonne and thought she exceeded him in "seership." She shared his ideas, and he hoped to "entirely win her" for himself as they engaged in the evocations together.

I could therefore use her clairvoyance to produce forms that would arise from both minds, though mainly seen by one, and escape therefore from what is merely personal. There would be, as it were, a spiritual birth from the soul of a man and a woman. I knew the incomprehensible life could select from our memories and, I believed, from the memory of the

race itself; could realize of ourselves, beyond personal predilection, all it required of symbol and of myth. I believed we were about to attain a revelation.

Sharp was to engage in evoking visions only in the company of and in partnership with Fiona Macleod. Since Sharp and Fiona had clairvoyant powers and were in love, Yeats thought their relationship paralleled his with Maud Gonne. The two couples would augment each other's visionary capacities in the secret and laborious work of finding the symbols and rituals of the Order. [The quotations in this and the preceding paragraphs are from the first draft of Yeats's autobiography in *Memoirs*, 123–125.]

During the ten days he spent in Paris with Yeats and his friends — Maud Gonne, and Moina and Macgregor Mathers who were busy setting up a Paris branch of the Order of the Golden Dawn — Sharp was in a heightened state of mind. The invitation to join the inner sanctum of a revolutionary movement whose ultimate purpose was to prepare the world for the apocalypse produced a state of euphoria. There was one missing part; he had to enlist Fiona Macleod in the undertaking. He left Paris on or about January 15, stopped briefly in London, and went on to Edinburgh where he crossed the Forth to the Pettycur Inn. He told Stedman in a January 25 letter he was "staying with a friend, F. M." at a "remote place among the hills." He had led Stedman to believe he was having an affair with Fiona, but it was Edith Rinder who was with him at the Pettycur Inn. It was she he had to convince to play the role of Fiona in the spiritualist work. It was she who must play Maud Gonne to his W. B. Yeats. Edith must have been astonished by and skeptical of Sharp's proposal, but he succeeded in convincing her to play at least a passive role. By 1897, their original passionate commitment had begun to fade. The search for talismans and rituals gave their relationship a new and serious purpose. Sharp continued to write as Fiona for the rest of his life, but his experience in Paris in January 1897 was a critical turning point. The occult and its psychic experiments influenced the prose he wrote as Fiona during the last three years of the century and published in *The Dominion of Dreams* (1899) and *The Divine Adventure* (1900). He turned to philosophic, symbolic, and ritualistic stories and essays, and wrote fewer about the people who lived amid tragedies and in close touch with spirits and with ancient myths in Gaelic Scotland. Though Edith

may not have been enthusiastic about the psychic investigations, she was a significant enabler of Sharp's participation in the Celtic Mystical project and the concurrent shift of emphasis in his Fiona writings.

In a January 25 letter, Sharp thanked for a check which was about half what he was due from E. R. Lamson for *Wives in Exile*. He deposited it right away, to the relief of his "wife and his bank manager," since his "worldly fortune" had sunk to "about £3." After signing the typed letter, Sharp added a handwritten note:

The time on the Riviera did me a lot of good and still more this unexpected and wild flight straight from France to the Scottish hills. And now I am going back to settle down to hard work till the end of July — and at the same time manage to give both my wife and myself a good time — and be a good boy — and always endorse my cheques — and love you and Mrs. Stedman and Miss McKinney — and "Generally" be your loving and grateful W. S.

This handwritten note was intended to inform Stedman he had spent the last couple of weeks in "a remote place among the Scottish hills" with the woman he loved. He did not want to share that information with Lillian Rea who typed the letter. .

Financial problems continued to plague Sharp through the winter and spring, aggravating his physical and mental illnesses. He wrote as Fiona to ask the Geddes firm's accountant for an advance of twenty-five pounds against the royalties of a three-volume edition of her short stories that would be published in March. If twenty-five pounds was too much, she hoped for at least ten. Another Fiona letter went to Hannibal Kimball in New York asking if he would like to undertake the American publication of the three-volume edition or, if not, a single volume edition of her stories. In mid-February, he asked Murray Gilchrist whether he would like to contribute a serial romance to *My Social World*, a periodical Frank Rinder, his "intimate friend," was editing. He also offered Gilchrist a glimpse of his current state of mind:

Alas, my dear boy, I can tell you neither that I am well nor happy. I am content, at present, to tell you that I am not actively unhappy, and that I am, I hope, slowly gaining ground physically. I have not done a stroke of original work for weeks past but am eagerly hoping to be able to begin again soon.

In a late February letter, he invited Richard Le Gallienne to be his guest at an Omar Khayyam Banquet at Frascati's, an elegant and expensive restaurant on Oxford Street. Shortage of money seemed not to limit his expenditures. Another Fiona letter went to Kimball, who was considering a trip to England and hoped to meet Fiona. She informed him it would be "unpractical" for her to see him because she was "going to Italy immediately, and when I return in the late spring or early summer it will be direct to Glasgow or rather Greenock, to sail thence to my relatives in the Hebrides."



Fig. 44 Fiona Macleod stories reissued in paperbacks by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues in 1896. Photograph by William F. Halloran (2019).

Though Sharp told Stedman he was going to work hard until July, give his wife a good time, and be a "good boy," he wrote again in early March to thank him for a twenty-pound advance from Lamson and added a personal note:

Pour moi, my brief spell of reform (three weeks and three days) convinced me that systematic reform would never suit me in mind or body. I have very happily relapsed into my Pagan ship, and the Sunbeam flies again at the Peak. My mate in this delectable craft smiled at my attempt, and now laughs joyously that I am myself once again.

He asked Stedman to destroy a postscript that identified his mate: "Two days ago I was by the sea, with F. M. In mind and body, I am ten years younger, with that joy and delight." The improvement in his mental and



physical state did not last long. A March 10 letter informed Catherine Janvier he “had an unpleasant mental and physical set-back the last three days.” He hoped he was “steadily gaining ground,” but he had not been able to regain the “health and spirits” he was in during his visit to St. Remy, though even then he was “far more worn in mind and body” than she had guessed.

In mid March, Sharp thanked his friend, the popular novelist Coulson Kernahan for generously promising “to do what he could for the Reissue of Miss Macleod’s shorter tales.” He would be “personally indebted” for any helpful word Kernahan might say “for the reasons I hinted to you.” We can only wonder what Sharp had hinted. If it was not Sharp’s authorship of the Fiona tales, it must have been his close relationship with her. Sharp was sorry to hear the painter Harvey Moore had been ill, but it was kind of Kernahan to go sit with him. He asked Kernahan to thank his wife for her kind letter thanking him for a copy of *Vistas*. Elizabeth was “hors-de-combat” as she had been in bed for several days and was likely to be there for several more days “with an attack of rheumatism. Next and surprisingly, Sharp casually mentioned a “conflagration.” The other night, just after Murray Gilchrist left him, his study caught fire, and it was with difficulty that the conflagration was extinguished. Fortunately, he continued, no harm was done to his books or pictures, and the insurance would cover the rest. A house fire, no doubt caused by a misplaced cigarette, and Elizabeth sick in bed unable to work must have been upsetting, but Sharp was only “distracted,” and he continued asking friends to help boost the sale of the Fiona stories. That Murray Gilchrist made it to London and visited him must have warmed his heart. He was not producing much writing, but he was quick to escape into Yeats-inspired millennialism.

Energized by the beginning of Spring, he proclaimed to Catherine Janvier on March 22:

It is the season of sap, of the young life, of green fire. Heart-pulses are throbbing to the full: brains are effervescing under the strong ferment of the wine of life: the spiral flames of the spirit and the red flower of the flesh are fanned and consumed and re-created and fanned anew every hour of every day... . This is going to be a strange year in many ways: a year of spiritual flames moving to and fro, of wild vicissitudes for many souls and for the forces that move through the minds of men. The West will redden in a new light — the “west” of the forlorn peoples who

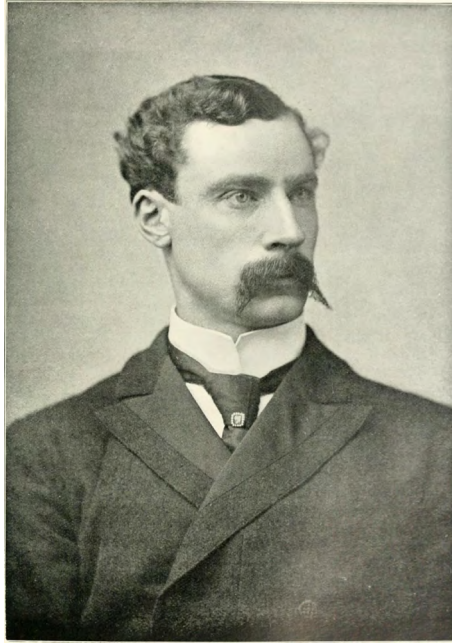


Fig. 45 Coulson Kernahan (1853–1943). Photography by Elliot and Fry (1903). Public Domain. Wikipedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coulson\\_Kernahan\\_by\\_Elliott\\_%26\\_Fry.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coulson_Kernahan_by_Elliott_%26_Fry.jpg)

congregate among our isles in Ireland — “the West” of the dispeopled mind. The common Soul is open — one can see certain shadows and lights as though in a mirror.

Printing this passage in the *Memoir* (284), Elizabeth noted “The letter ends abruptly.” Its rhetoric implies a manic state of mind, and the “red new light in the West” ties it to his participation in the work of Yeats’ Order. We recall Elizabeth writing: “During the most active years of the Fiona Macleod writings, the author was usually in a highly wrought condition of mental and emotional tension,” and, later: “The prolonged strain of the heavy dual work added to by 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 — began to tell heavily on him and to produce very disquieting symptoms of nervous collapse” (*Memoir* 266, 282). Periodic escapes with Edith enabled him to engage in psychic experiments in search of Yeats’ rituals, but they evoked manic episodes that often collapsed into depressions.

The Irish writer Katharine Tynan Hinkson, after favorably noticing Fiona's *From the Hills of Dream* in the *Speaker*, wrote to ask for more information about her personal life for an article she proposed to write for the *English Illustrated Magazine*. Sharp composed in late March a long Fiona reply designed to project her as the preeminent female contributor to the Celtic revival in Scotland just as Hinkson was the preeminent female Celtic revivalist in Ireland. He responded first to Hinkson's mention of the questions about Fiona's identity.

Oh yes, dear Mrs. Hinkson, I am now well aware of much of the mystery that has grown up about my unfortunate self. I have even heard that Fleet Street journalist rumor to which you allude — with the addition that the said unhappy scribe was bald and old and addicted to drink. Heaven knows who and what I am according to some wiseacres! A recent cutting said I was Irish, a Mr. Chas. O'Connor, whom I know not. A friend of a friend told that friend that I was Miss Nora Hopper and Mr. Yeats in union — at which I felt flattered but amused. For some time, a year or so ago, there was a rumor that "Fiona Macleod" was my good friend and relative, William Sharp. Then, when this was disproved, I was said to be Mrs. Sharp. Latterly I became the daughter of the late Dr. Norman Macleod [a distinguished minister of the Scottish Church]. The latest is that I am Miss Maud Gonne — which the paragraphist "knows as a fact." Do you know her? She is Irish, and lives in Paris, and is, I hear, very beautiful — so I prefer to be Miss Gonne rather than the Fleet Street journalist!

Writing as Fiona to another woman, Sharp projected his most feminine voice and employed irony to counter the "wiseacres." He also stressed Fiona's need for privacy: "I do most urgently wish not to have my privacy made public, partly because I am so "built" and partly for other reasons. Next, he revealed just a bit:

But this much I will confide to you, and gladly: I am *not* an unmarried girl, as commonly supposed, but am married. The name I write under is my maiden name. Perhaps I have suffered, as well as known much joy, in my brief mature life: but what then — all women whose heart is in their brain must inevitably suffer. And so, you will, I know, at once excuse me and forgive my inability to give you any material particulars. This past week I have had no fewer than four editorial applications for my photograph for reproduction — but now, as ever, I have had to decline. Two friends in London have my photograph, and perhaps you may see it someday: but now I do not even let friends have a photograph, since one allowed someone to take a sketch of it for an American paper. I can't

well explain why I am so exigent. I must leave you to divine from what I have told you.

And a bit more: "I don't object to its being known that I come of an old Catholic family, that I am a Macleod, that I was born in the southern Hebrides, and that my heart still lies where the cradle rocked. If, perchance, I should be in London this autumn or early winter — on my way to the Riviera (for I am not strong) — I hope to be able to make your acquaintance in person." Several friends had drawn Fiona's attention to Mrs. Hinkson, among them Mr. William Sharp who "is a great admirer of your writings, both in prose and verse." Carefully structured, the letter is one of Sharp's most revealing and extensive efforts to construct the personality of his invention.

The possibility of a London meeting suggests Sharp thought he could convince Edith to impersonate Fiona. Two days later he broached the idea in a Fiona letter to George Meredith: "There is a chance I may be south this Spring or early Summer. If so, I look with keen pleasure to the often-anticipated visit to you." Sharp succeeded in convincing Edith to play the role in a visit to Meredith at Box Hill on June 10, 1897. Meredith described her in a letter to Alice Meynell dated June 13 as "a handsome woman, who would not give me her eyes for awhile." In a letter to Maud Gonine dated January 14, 1907, Yeats recalled Meredith saying, "she was the most beautiful woman he ever saw." It is not surprising Edith, a woman of great beauty, appeared shy and almost voiceless. Neither is it surprising this was the only time she agreed to meet one of Sharp's friends as Fiona. The ruse was successful because Meredith lived in relative isolation in Surrey, far removed from London literary society where he might have come upon Edith.

In late March, Sharp sent his latest "phiz" to Louise Chandler Moulton for her birthday, told her he was leaving England for three weeks or so, and he hoped to find her in London when he returned. He sent the same message to Stanley Little. If he planned to go abroad, he changed plans and opted for a hotel in St. Margaret's Bay, near Dover. Without the pressures of life in London and, for part of the time at least, with Edith Rinder, he hoped to regenerate his writing as Fiona and renew efforts to find talismans and rituals for Yeats. In the *Memoir*, Elizabeth recalled: "Towards the end of April I went to Paris to write upon the two 'Salons,' and my husband, still very unwell, went to St. Margaret's Bay" (*Memoir*,



Fig. 46 An etching of William Sharp, dated about 1897, by William Strang (1859–1921). Printed by David Strang (1887–1967), the artist's son. Photograph by William F. Halloran of his copy (2019).

285). Since the "Old Salon" opened on April 14 and the "New Salon" on April 20, Elizabeth must have been in Paris for the "Press Preview" of the "Old Salon" on April 13.

On Sunday April 18, Sharp wrote to Elizabeth from St. Margaret's Bay. He was "on the shore by the sea and in the sunshine," and he felt very near to her in spirit, as he always did when he was "reading, hearing, seeing any beautiful thing." Filled with "a passion of dream and work," he felt he would soon be able to write again. "More and more absolutely," he wrote, W. S. and F. M. were "becoming two persons — often married in mind and one nature, but often absolutely distinct." Omitting passages of the letter, Elizabeth added a final sentence: "Friendship, deepening into serene and beautiful flame, is one of the most ennobling and lovely influences the world has." She wanted to imply the sentence referred to her, but Sharp was using the flame metaphor to describe his relationship with Edith. Here it increases the likelihood she was with him in St. Margaret's Bay. How neatly it coalesces with the splitting of selves since she was often the embodiment of the second person. The letter is signed "Wilfion," a name Elizabeth described in the *Memoir*:

In surveying the dual life as a whole I have seen how, from the early partially realized twin-ship, "W. S." was the first to go adventuring and find himself, while his twin, "F. M.," remained passive, or a separate self. When "she" awoke to active consciousness "she" became the deeper, the more impelling, the more essential factor. By reason of this severance, and of the acute conflict that at times resulted therefrom, the flaming of the dual life became so fierce that "Wilfion" — as I named the inner and third Self that lay behind that dual expression — realized the imperativeness of gaining control over his two separated selves and of bringing them into some kind of conscious harmony (*Memoir*, 423).

Having postulated yet a third self trying to gain control over her husband's two separated selves, Elizabeth described one characteristic of the unifying self. "The psychic quality of seership," she thought, "linked the dual nature together" for both as F. M. and W. S., Sharp "dreamed dreams" and "saw visions." She said little about her husband's psychic experiments because she was worried about their effects, but a few friends, she wrote, knew him only as a "psychic and mystic." From time to time, "he interested himself in definite psychic experimentation, occasionally in collaboration with Mr. W. B. Yeats; experimentation that sometimes resulted in such serious physical disturbance that he desisted from it in later years" (*Memoir*, 424). That brings us back to William and Edith in St. Margaret's Bay and the likelihood — recalling Yeats's opinion that visions come more readily when a man and woman who love each other evoke such visions together — they were engaged in the work Yeats set for them.

Before Sharp left for St. Margaret's Bay, he dictated a Fiona letter which Mary copied and dated April 9, to Benjamin Burgess Moore, an undergraduate at Yale University who had written an article about her in the *Yale Literary Magazine*. She thanked him for his "profoundly sympathetic" and "most welcome appreciation" of her work. She had seen nothing in any American paper or magazine which "can be compared with it — either in knowledge of the writings, sympathetic understanding, and general insight — and this, I may add, not merely because you honor me with such cordial praise." As in the letter to Katharine Hinkson, Sharp, writing as Fiona, fleshed out her approach to human life:

I believe in one intensity of emotion above all others, namely the intensity of this brief flame of life in the heart and the brain, an intensity no one

can have who does not account the hours of every day as the vanishing pawns in that tragic game of chess for ever being played between Time and Eternity. [...] I live truly only when I am in the remote Isles or among the mountains of Argyll — a solace and inspiration which come to me much attenuated through the human medium. [...] though young in years, I have a capacity for sorrow and regret which has come to me through my Celtic ancestry out of a remote lost world.

Despite her sorrow, Fiona was not a melancholy person: “I am young, and life has given me some of her rarest gifts, and I am grateful.” Having lived, she will be ready when her hour comes. She is “ever aware of the menace of the perpetual fugitive shadow of Destiny.” While lying among the dunes on Iona, she had a dream that summed up her approach to life. She “heard a voice saying in Gaelic that the three Dominions or Powers were ‘The Living God, the Dying World, and the mysterious Race of Man,’ and that behind each gleamed the shadowy eyes of Destiny.” Fiona’s confidences indicate Sharp thought Moore might shore up Fiona’s reputation in the United States. To further that aim, he sent him a copy of Fiona’s *Washer of the Ford*, a copy of *From the Hills of Dream*, and a sympathetic review of the latter. Later, when Moore decided to seek out Fiona in Scotland in the hope of a Celtic romance, Sharp had cause to regret Fiona’s openness in this letter.



Fig. 47 Cartledge Hall, Holmesfield, Derbyshire. Home of R. Murray Gilchrist and family. Photograph by Dave Hobson (2014). Courtesy of Vale of Belvoir Ramblers, [https://vbramblers.blogspot.com/2014\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](https://vbramblers.blogspot.com/2014_04_01_archive.html)

In early May, Sharp was back in London, and Elizabeth, in poor health, had gone to St. Remy in the south of France where the Janviers lived in the winter months. On May 3 she wrote to thank Murray Gilchrist for his photograph which she had requested to become better acquainted with "Will's firm friend." She was gathering strength, resting, and enjoying herself in a lovely sunny spot where she had been taken to the heart of a "wonderful literary movement" — the Provençal poets, led by Frederick Mistral, who she hoped to meet soon. Sharp went north to spend the night with Murray Gilchrist on Saturday, May 8, and returned to London the next afternoon. In a letter of thanks, he reminded Gilchrist to include his photograph when he wrote to Mrs. Wingate Rinder, whose address was 11 Woronsow Road, in St John's Wood, a fashionable area of northwest London. Despite his worries about finances, Sharp, restless as ever, decided to visit his wife in St. Remy on her birthday. He left London on Friday, May 14, arrived in Tarascon on Saturday, made his way to St. Remy, and surprised Elizabeth the next morning, Sunday May 16. After resting that day and celebrating her birthday on Monday May 17, he left that evening, and was back in London late Wednesday.

Elizabeth described the occasion: Early in the morning, the waiter brought my coffee and "told me gravely that a large packet had arrived for me, during the night, with orders that it should not be delivered to me till the morning. Should it be brought upstairs? The next moment the door was pushed open and in came the radiant smiling unexpected apparition of my Poet!" (*Memoir*, 286). The "interlude" seemed "strange and dreamlike," he wrote to Elizabeth, on Friday the 21<sup>st</sup>, the "hurried journey, the long afternoon and night journey from Paris, the long afternoon and night to Tarascon — the drive at dawn and sunrise through beautiful Provence — the meeting you — the seeing our dear friends there again. And then that restful Sunday, that lovely birthday!" After returning to London, he left again to spend the weekend with his mother and sister in Edinburgh. When he returned the following Monday, May 24, he told Little he could not go down to Sussex to visit him until Elizabeth returned from St. Remy on June 14 or 15. He was busy all week and planned to leave again on the weekend. He went on to say:

What with the autumn in Scotland, the early winter in America, Jany in the Riviera, Provence, Scotland, & France three times, I've not been much



here since last summer! I'm as nearly bankrupt as I've ever been in my life — but I've lived up to the hilt, and it's Spring, and Summer's still to come, and heads or tails it's still good to be alive, and may the Dispenser of Laughter & Tears smile benignly on both of us, cher ami!

In that spirit he left at the end of May to spend the first week of June with Murray Gilchrist and his family at Cartledge Hall in Derbyshire. Following his stay in St. Margaret's Bay, his trip to St. Remy, his visits to Gilchrist, and the advent of Spring, his spirits were high, but the constant movement — reflecting his efforts to stave off loneliness and depression — prevented him from writing much as W. S. or F. M.

For most of June, Sharp was in London. As the summer progressed, he worked on several Fiona tales which would appear in 1899 in *The Dominion of Dreams*. He also wrote, as Fiona, *The Laughter of Peterkin* — a collection of Celtic stories for children, which Archibald Constable and Co. published in November. In mid-August, he and Elizabeth spent two weeks in Southwold, Sussex with the Janviers, who were visiting England. They returned to London for two days on August 28 and then left for Parkstone in Dorset, where they stayed until September 12, Sharp's forty-second birthday.

While in Dorset, Sharp constructed a birthday letter from Fiona to Will which is in Sharp's hand. It reflects the splitting defined by Elizabeth and his belief Fiona was becoming a separate personality distinct from that of W. S. It provides a glimpse of how Sharp viewed his life in the fall of 1897:

Now, dear Billy, forgive me if I say that I am very much disappointed with you this past year. You have not been well, it is true: but you have also been idle to a painful degree, and your lack of method makes me seriously anxious. I will not dwell upon your minor and to me irritating faults: you know well to what I allude, and I think too you are often greedy, for it is not necessary always to have both marmalade and butter at breakfast. That is a small thing, but it is significant: I can only hope that you will control your appetites better in 1897–8.

But do for heaven's sake put your shoulder to the wheel and get soon in good working trim at something worth doing. You ever put pleasure first and think so much of youth that you don't like billiards merely because the balls are bald. This is sad, Billy.

I shall keep all the rest till we meet. What an uncomfortable half hour you will have!

Still, you're a dear, and I like you with all your faults. Be a good boy and I'll love you.

Your loving twin, | Fiona

It is Sharp's view of himself, but it also that of a sister or mother figure, who expresses her displeasure with Sharp's putting pleasure first and failing to control his appetites.

On September 14, Sharp sent the typed manuscript of Mona Caird's "The Pathway of the Gods," to William Meredith, George Meredith's son, who was an editor of the Edinburgh publishing firm, Archibald Constable and Co. The firm was about to publish Fiona Macleod's *Laughter of Peterkin*, and Sharp recommended they publish Caird's manuscript. He was back in London when he wrote to Edward Martyn on September 22. Yeats had encouraged Martyn, a well-off member of the Irish landed gentry, to invite Sharp and others to his home, Tillyra Castle in County Galway, to discuss the kind of plays Yeats wanted for his projected Irish Theater. With the dates for the theater discussion set for early October, Sharp told Martyn he was leaving the next day (Thursday, September 23) for Dublin, where he would see George Russell (Æ) on Friday and, on Saturday morning, go on to the Royal Hotel in Greenore, a port village on the coast north of Dublin. Here, he could be contacted on Sunday and Monday morning (September 26 and 27). His plans after that, he told Martyn, would be "guided by weather and other circumstances." He implied he would be travelling in Ireland until Saturday October 2, when he would take the train to Ardahan in Galway. Letters that follow show he made his way on September 27 back across the Irish Channel to the Isle of Arran off the west coast of Scotland, where he stayed four nights, before returning to Ireland and boarding the train to visit Martyn.

Sharp's annual birthday letter to E. C. Stedman, dated September 28 from The Corrie, Isle of Arran, began: "I send you a line from this beautiful island (more beautiful than ever to me because of a beautiful friend and comrade who is here too)." He went on to name that comrade as F. M. The brief Arran interlude seems to have been preplanned to enable him to be alone for a few days with Edith Rinder, who was spending September, as usual, on the mainland near Tarbert just north of Arran. After leaving Arran, he told Stedman, he would be going "to

the West of Ireland (Connemara) to stay at an old castle with a strange and delightful host — with a fellow guest, my friend W. B. Yeats.” In a September 29 letter from Arran, he asked John Macleay to see that the *Highland News* “for this and the next two weeks” be sent to him at Tillyra Castle.

After arriving at Tillyra, he wrote a long letter to Elizabeth on October 4 which described his arrival two days earlier and Martyn’s plans to take him to see the Cliffs of Moher and other West Country sights before Yeats arrived on Thursday. He was delighted to have finally made it into the heart of the Irish literary revival, a distinguished group that included, besides Martyn and Yeats, Lady Gregory (whose Coole Park was nearby), Douglas Hyde, and Martin Morris, a neighbor who would become, in 1901, Baron Morris of Killanin. As the days went by, he was less than well-received by the group. Lady Gregory memorably described him (*Diaries*, 153–154) as

an absurd object, in velvet coat, curled hair, wonderful ties — a good natured creature — a sort of professional patron of poets — but making himself ridiculous by stories to the men of his love affairs & entanglements, & seeing visions (instigated by Yeats) — one apparition clasped him to an elm tree from which he had to be released.

I have described Sharp’s strange and amusing visit to Tillyra for what Lady Gregory called a “Celtic party” at some length in a section called “The Soul of the Tree and the Hermaphrodite” in *Yeats Annual*, No. 14, 184–199. Lady Gregory recalled having suspected Sharp was Fiona Macleod. That may have been only hindsight, but Yeats knew Sharp was the key to Fiona Macleod, and he wanted Fiona, not Sharp, to contribute plays for the theater. Throughout the visit Sharp played a double role, and portraits taken in a Dublin studio on his way to or from Tillyra confirm Lady Gregory’s description. With two large blond curls on his forehead and the velvet coat, he seems to have decided his appearance at Tillyra should offer at least a hint of his feminine self.

Writing to the Grant Allens from London on November 5, Sharp reported he had returned a few days earlier from the west of Ireland, where he had a delightful time. Having left Tillyra in mid-October, he spent some time in Dublin and Scotland. But he was not long in London. “Owing to the excitable condition of his brain,” according to Elizabeth (*Memoir*, 290), “London proved impossible, and “he took rooms in



Fig. 48 This photograph of William Sharp was taken in Dublin in late September 1897, and sent to Henry Mills Alden, editor of *Harper's Magazine* and Sharp's friend, at Christmas, 1897. Courtesy of the University of Delaware Library (The Henry Mills Alden Papers), Public Domain.

Hastings." That decision recalls his residence in Phenice Croft in 1893, when he was alone and experimenting with drugs to evoke visions. One reason for the "excitable condition of his brain" which Elizabeth did not mention was the need for a place where he could be alone — and at times with Edith Rinder — to conduct psychic experiments for Yeats. The fragment of a letter he sent Elizabeth from Hastings which she included in the *Memoir* reflects the state of his mind as 1897 ended:

I am so glad to be here, in this sunlight by the sea. Light and motion — what a joy these are. The eyes become devitalized in the pall of London gloom... There is a glorious amplitude of light. The mind bathes in these illimitable vistas. Wind and Wave and Sun: how regenerative these elder brothers are. Solomon says there is no delight like wisdom, and that wisdom is the heritage of age: but there is a divine unwisdom which is the heritage of youth — and I would rather be young for a year than wise for a cycle. There are some who live without the pulse of youth in the mind: on the day, in the hour, I no longer feel that quick pulse, I

will go out like a blown flame. To be young; to keep young; that is the story and despair of life.

Sharp fixated on “flame” as the image of youth and desire he desperately wanted to preserve. The desire to “keep young” is central to the story of Sharp’s life. The increased difficulty of sustaining his youth was one cause of the despair he suffered in 1897 and, periodically, for the rest of his life.

On December 4 he was back in London briefly to attend a meeting of The Irish Literary Society, where Yeats read an important lecture on “The Celtic Movement.” Without Yeats’s approval, the Society officials had asked Sharp to chair the meeting. Influenced no doubt by Sharp’s behavior at Tillyra Castle, but also because it was an Irish society, Yeats asked him to withdraw. He refused, whereupon Lady Gregory, ever ready to come to Yeats’ aid, intervened and charmed Sharp into acceding to Yeats’s request. She arranged what she called “a little festa” after the lecture at the Metropole restaurant for a group that included the Sharps, Yeats, Yeats’s father and sisters, and Arthur Symons. She said: “It went off very pleasantly.” The rest of December seems to have passed uneventfully, though at the end of the month, Elizabeth, who Lady Gregory came to know and like, contacted the flu, whereupon her husband took her to his flat in Hastings to recuperate. 1897 was a full year for the Sharps, with many highs and many lows.

