

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All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at 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 Twenty-One

1901

When they reached Taormina, the Sharps checked into the Hotel Naumachia which was famous for its spectacular views of the bay of Naxos and Mount Etna. In a January 25 letter to Catherine Janvier, Sharp described the joy he felt in the warmth and beauty of Taormina:

Today it was too warm to work contentedly indoors even upon our little terrace with its superb views over Etna and the Ionian Sea — so at 9 a.m. Elizabeth and I, with a young painter-friend, came up here to a divine spot on the slopes of the steep and grand-shouldered Hill of Venus, bringing with us our writing and sketching materials and also fruit and wine and light luncheon. It is now about 3 p.m. and we have lain here for hours in the glorious warmth and cloudless sunglow — undisturbed by any sounds save the soft sighing of the sea far below, the fluting of a young goatherd with his black flock on a steep across a near ravine, and the occasional passing of a muleteer or of a mountaineer with his wine-panier'd donkeys. A vast sweep of sea is before us and beneath. To the left, under the almond boughs, are the broad straits which divide Sicily from Calabria — in front, the limitless reach of the Greek sea — to the right, below, the craggy heights and Monte Acropolis of Taormina — and, beyond, the vast slope of snow-clad Etna.

In addition to the warm weather and beauty of Taormina, Sharp took special pleasure in the area's association with Greek literature, especially the pastoral poet Theocritus who was born in Sicily c. 300 B. C.

I have just been reading (for the hundredth time) in Theocritus. How doubly lovely he is, read on the spot. That young shepherd fluting away to his goats at this moment might be Daphnis himself. Three books are never far from here: Theocritus, the Greek Anthology, and the Homeric Hymns. I loved them before: now they are in my blood.

While picnicking on Monte Venere above Taormina, Sharp continued his letter to Mrs. Janvier:

Legend has it that near this very spot Pythagoras used to come and dream. How strange to think that one can thus come in touch with two of the greatest men of antiquity [...] Perhaps it was here that Pythagoras learned the secret of that music (for here both the sea-wind and the hill-wind can be heard in magic meeting) by which one day — as told in Iamblichus — he cured a young man of Taormina (Tauromenion) who had become mad as a wild beast, with love. Pythagoras, it is said, played an antique air upon his flute, and the madness went from the youth.

In the Sicilian sun, the illness and depression that beset both Sharps in the rain and cold of London disappeared as if by magic.



Fig. 56 Taormina on the east Coast of Sicily with Mt. Etna in the distance. Photograph by Miguel Torres (2011), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17133090#/media/File:Taormina_and_Mt_Etna.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.

When word reached Taormina of Queen Victoria's death on January 22, Albert Henry Stopford (1860–1939), a British antiques and art dealer with connections to the royal family, arranged a memorial service in the English Chapel of Saint Caterina. After the service, the Sharps met Alexander Nelson Hood who accompanied his father — the Viscount Bridport in England and the Duke of Bronte in Italy — to the service from his estate on the western slope of Mount Etna. In 1799, King Ferdinand IV of Southern Italy and Sicily gave the estate to Lord Nelson

in appreciation for his interception of the French fleet which saved his kingdom from Napoleon. Along with the estate, Ferdinand made Nelson the Duke of Bronte, the name of the area's largest town. Nelson was proud of the title, but he did not survive to visit his Duchy which passed, along with the title, through the marriage of his niece to the Hood family which was headed by a succession of Baron Bridports and, as of 1874, the Viscount Bridport who attended the memorial service in Taormina. The service had a special meaning for Bridport who served for forty years as Queen Victoria's Lord in Waiting.

His younger son, the Honorable Alexander Nelson Hood, was attached to the household of the Duchess of York who later became Queen Mary, but he lived at least six months each year on the Bronte estate where he renovated the residence and introduced farming methods that improved the condition of the people who depended on the estate for their livelihood. Since he had given the Duchy new life and restored it to profitability, Hood inherited both the estate and the Italian title when his father died in 1904. Over the years, he entertained many British artists and aristocrats at the estate's residence, the Castello Maniace. He also constructed a large villa in Taormina where he spent part of the time mingling with artists and enjoying the social life of the English community. Since he never married and had no direct heirs, the title and the estate reverted to his British relatives following his death in 1937. Over the years, they sold most of the estate's land to local farmers, and in 1981 they sold the Castle and 15 hectares of surrounding land to the regional government which presented it to the town of Bronte. The town, in turn, opened the house as a museum in 1982 and renamed it the Castello Nelson. Over the last forty years, the estate's buildings and grounds have been gradually repaired and improved, and the main house, now open to the public, displays a wealth of fine furniture and Nelson memorabilia donated by the Hood family. Many of Lord Nelson's possessions have found a permanent home in the museum which has become one of the main tourist attractions of the Province of Catania in eastern Sicily.

Following the memorial service in Taormina, Alex Hood invited the Sharps to visit Castello Maniace. Several days later they left Taormina for what Elizabeth described as their first trip "to that strange, beautiful Duchy on Etna, that was to mean so much to us" (*Memoir*, 331). This



Fig. 57 Bust and portrait of the 5th Duke of Bronté, Alexander Nelson Hood (1854–1937), on display in the Castello Nelson (formerly the Castello Maniace). Photographs by Warwick Gould (2014), reproduced with permission.

was the first of five winters in which the Sharps spent time with Hood at Maniace. Sharp died and was buried there in December 1905. His grave in the estate's English cemetery was marked with an imposing Celtic cross commissioned by Hood, which still towers over its lesser neighbors.



Fig. 58 The Greek Theater in Syracuse, Sicily. Built about 470 B. C., it is the largest surviving theater of the ancient world. Photograph by Michele Ponzio (2006), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teatro_greco_di_Siracusa_-_aerea.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0.

After several days with Hood, the Sharps traveled south to Syracuse where, on February 7, William wrote again to Catherine Janvier who shared his interest in Greek history and literature. For Sharp it was the

Syracuse of Theocritus you love so well — the Syracuse where Pindar heard some of his noblest odes sung, where Plato discoursed with his disciples of New Hellas, where (long before) the Argonauts had passed after hearing the Sirens singing by this fatal shore, and near where Ulysses derided Polyphemus — and where Aeschylus lived so long and died.

They were fortunate to be there for a “special choral performance” in “the beautiful hillside Greek Theatre in honor of the visit of Prince Tommaso, the Duke of Genoa, the late King’s brother, and Admiral of the Fleet.”

Imagine our delight! And what a day it has been — the ancient Aeschylean theater crammed once more on all tiers with thousands of Syracusans so that not a spare seat was left — while three hundred young voices sang a version of one of the choral sections of “The Supplicants” of Aeschylus — with it il Principe on a scarlet dais where once the tyrant Dionysius sat! Over head the deep blue sky, and beyond, the deep blue Ionian Sea. It was all too wonderful.

From Syracuse the Sharps returned to Taormina where they were pleased to be accepted among the British elite who wintered there. With their health restored and with some misgivings, they left Sicily on the first of March to spend a month in Florence where they rented rooms and were introduced to the English community by Elizabeth’s aunt who lived there. They also spent some time at the Villa Il Palmerino in the hills below Fiesole, as guests of Sharp’s friend Eugene Lee-Hamilton, his new American wife, and his half-sister Violet Paget, the well-known English feminist who published under the pseudonym, Vernon Lee.

Coincidentally, on the day the Sharps left Sicily, March 1, Mary Beatrice Sharp, who provided the Fiona Macleod handwriting, gave birth to a baby boy in London. Her oldest sister, Agnes, was with her in a nursing home in Hammersmith, when she gave birth. Mary named her baby Douglas and gave him up for adoption. He was raised by a family in the Midlands, and it was only when he decided as a young man to immigrate to Canada and needed his birth certificate that he learned the identity of his birth mother whereupon he changed his surname to



Fig. 59 A recent photograph of the beautifully restored Villa Il Palmerino in Settignano, north-east of Florence, where Eugene Lee-Hamilton and Vernon Lee lived for many years. Photograph by Sailko (2016), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Il_palmerino,_esterno_04.jpg, CC BY 3.0.

Sharpe, adding a final “e” that may have come from a mistake on the certificate. In 2004, Douglas Sharpe’s son, Derek Michael Sharpe, shared with me this information and his supporting documents. He was living in Canada, and he hoped to learn more about his grandmother who played a critical role in the production of the Fiona correspondence. William and Elizabeth must have been concerned about the progress of Mary’s pregnancy and relieved to learn she delivered a healthy baby and survived the birth in good health. Sharp’s early poem, “Motherhood,” was only the first of many Sharp and Fiona writings about the agonies and dangers of childbirth. Sharp’s advanced feminism and focus on the travails of womanhood had its origins in the eight children (six girls and two boys) born to his mother in the twelve years following his birth in 1855. Mary’s pregnancy and the birth of her baby were reminders of the complications awaiting the Sharps at home (see Chapter 11 for a photograph of Mary Sharp).

An October 20 letter to Grant Richards may have been the last Fiona letter Mary copied before she gave birth on March first. The next

surviving Fiona letter in Mary's script — to David Munro, the Assistant Editor of the *North American Review* — is dated March 15, 1901, two weeks after her baby was born. It was mailed from London, and Fiona explained she had been delayed there by her health on her way to Scotland from Italy. The next surviving Fiona letter — to Mrs. Gertrude Page — is only a draft by Sharp for Mary to copy. The date March 16 is crossed out and "18th Mar" in the Fiona hand is substituted on Sharp's draft. Since Fiona claims in the letter to be writing from Florence, Sharp must have sent the draft to London for Mary to copy and return to him in Florence where he mailed it. The letters to Munro and Page placed Fiona simultaneously in London and Florence, but Munro in New York and Mrs. Page in Bedfordshire would not be comparing dates and locations.

These two letters indicate Mary was sufficiently recovered in mid-March to copy and send the Fiona letters. Meantime, Sharp was making plans to conduct the Fiona correspondence from London after Mary returned to Edinburgh. In the letter to Mrs. Page, Fiona said her "most convenient letter address" was "c/o Mrs. Rinder | 11 Woronzow Road | St. John's Wood N.W." Sometime between October and March, Lillian Rea left the country, and Edith Rinder stepped in as the London transfer agent for the Fiona correspondence. The next Fiona letter, dated June 1, is entirely typed, and its font differs from that of the letters Mary occasionally typed in Edinburgh; even its signature is typed. Edith Rinder, whose return address it contains, must have typed it from Sharp's draft. Meanwhile, Mary transcribed in the Fiona script a card to the American publisher Thomas Mosher dated June 10 and mailed it from Edinburgh. In a lengthy typed letter to Mosher dated July 8 (which included a note and signature in the Fiona script and carried Edith's return address), Fiona referred to Mrs. Rinder as her "friend and literary-correspondence agent." It is somehow fitting that Edith Rinder, who was so intimately involved in Sharp's production of the Fiona writings, became for at least a time the London manager of the Fiona correspondence.

On February 1, while visiting Alex Hood, Sharp wrote to ask Theodore Watts-Dunton to persuade his housemate, Algernon Swinburne, to consent to his editing a selection of his poems for publication by Baron Tauchnitz, whose firm in Leipzig was publishing inexpensive paperback editions of English authors. In a March 19 letter

to Watts-Dunton, Sharp said Baron Tauchnitz accepted his terms for the Swinburne volume (£30) and added this message: "Pray give my best regards to Mr. Watts-Dunton as well as to Mr. Swinburne, and tell them that I am proud now to be able to put the name of the greatest living English poet on our list of publications. Sharp received Swinburne's permission, conveyed through Watts-Dunton, but he was concerned that he lacked Swinburne's written consent. He asked Watts-Dunton: "Do you think you could in any case prevail upon Mr. Swinburne to write the briefest line — or to sign one written to you, saying simply 'I consent to the preparation of a Tauchnitz vol. of selections from my poetical writings.'" Whether or not Sharp received that line, Tauchnitz published *Selected Poems by A. C. Swinburne*, selected and arranged and with an introduction by William Sharp, in October 1901. Sharp was under the impression he had complete freedom to select and arrange the poems, but when the volume appeared he received a letter from Swinburne (*Memoir*, 336–337) with several complaints about selection and arrangement.

On or around July 9, the Sharps left London and settled for a month at the Spa House in Cowley within walking distance of R. Murray Gilchrist near the village of Holmesfield. While they were in rural Derbyshire, Edith Rinder gave birth on July 26 to Esther Mona Rinder. The child's middle name recognized the crucial role Mona Caird played in the lives of her parents. As Frank Rinder's cousin and soon to be Esther's godmother, Mona continued to provide material and emotional support for Edith and Frank long after she facilitated their move to London in the late 1880s and their marriage in 1890. Occasionally in his decade-long relationship with Edith Rinder, Sharp lamented, in private notes and in the Fiona Macleod stories, their inability to have a child. Occasionally, he cast Fiona, the product of their collaboration, as their child. Given the interdependence of the relationship between the Sharps and the Rinders and the fact that neither marriage had produced a child, it is not surprising the Rinder's baby girl meant a great deal to both couples.

Since Sharp often referred to Edith as Fiona's very close friend, it was not surprising that Fiona's retelling of the story of *Deirdr  and the Sons of Usna*, published by Mosher in 1903, was dedicated "To Esther Mona." Writing as Fiona, Sharp left a beautiful, loving message for the child which reads in part

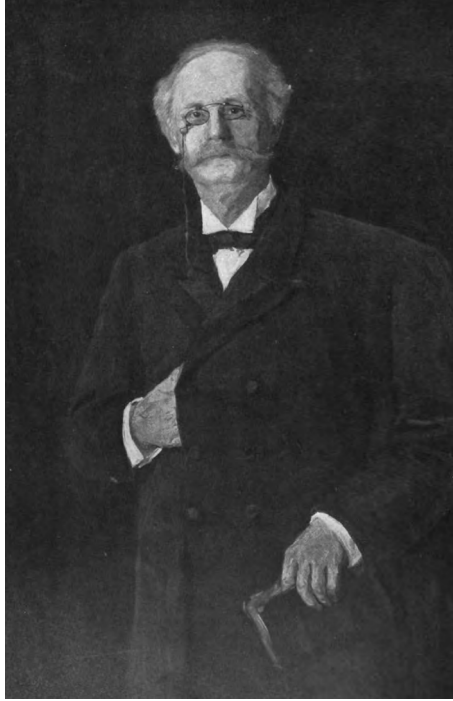


Fig. 60 Baron Christian Karl Bernard Tauchnitz (1841–1921). Portrait by Vilma Lwoff-Parlaghy (1901). Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tauchnitz_Christian_Karl_001.jpg#/media/File:Tauchnitz_Christian_Karl_001.jpg, Public Domain

I shall have bent above the fading warmth, and have risen at last, cold, and gone away, when that little wandering heart of yours shall have become a woman's heart; and so I do not know whether, if I were to look in it, I should see beyond the shaken reeds of the mind the depth-held star of the old passion of beauty, the old longing, the old enchantment. But I hope so. Are you not the child of her, that friend to whom I inscribed my first book; of whom, in its prefatory words, I wrote "we have loved the same things and in the same way [...] take, then, out of my heart, this book of vision and dream." [...] So, little one, come in time to love these things of beauty. Lay your child's heart, that is made of morning joy and evening longing, to that Mother-heart; and when you gather years, as now you gather the little white clan of the grass, it shall be well with you. And you, too, when your time is come, and you in turn pass on the mystery of life to another who will look up from your breast with eyes of still wonder and slowly shaping thought, forget not to tell that other to lay its child's heart of morning joy and evening longing against a more

ancient and dream-filled heart than that of any woman, that mother-heart of which I speak to you, the Heart of Beauty (x-xii).

It is one woman speaking to another, but more profoundly it is a man who loved the child's mother expressing his hope the child will come to love the same things they loved, including the Gaelic myth of the beautiful Deirdr  he recounted for the child in "this book of dream and vision." Had Sharp lived longer, he would have been pleased as the hope expressed in Fiona's dedication was realized. Esther Mona (Rinder) Harvey was a woman of many accomplishments as a linguist, artist, wife, and mother. He would have been equally pleased by the accomplishments of the family she left behind when she died in 1993 at the age of ninety-one.

During his visit to New York in the fall of 1896, Sharp spent a few days with Henry Mills Alden, the Editor of *Harper's Magazine*, at his home across the Hudson in Metuchen, New Jersey. One night after dinner he told Alden, who was twenty years his senior and had recently lost his wife, about his relationship with Edith Rinder. In a letter to Alden dated October 22, 1901, Sharp expressed his hope that "all goes well with you in your new life" — Alden had recently remarried — and continued: "I wish too I could tell you of a strange, of a fantastically strange, and to me deeply moving development of that old romance of boyhood which I confided to you one evening before the fire at Metuchen." At a time when the relationship between Sharp and Edith had begun to cool — as he explained directly to Yeats and indirectly in the Fiona writings — Edith gave birth to a daughter. That must have been the "deeply moving development" he wished he could describe to Alden. The Fiona dedication to Esther Mona and Sharp's guarded statement in this letter appear to be his only surviving references to Esther; and her only remembrance of William Sharp was the oranges he sent to the Rinder family from Sicily when she was a child of three and four.

After spending most of July and early August in Derbyshire, the Sharps went to Kilcreggan in Argyll and remained there until mid-October. During the summer, Sharp as Fiona corresponded frequently with the publisher Thomas Mosher in Portland, Maine. Over the course of a lengthy career, Mosher oversaw the design and publication of hundreds of books, mostly reprints of works by British authors. Sharp's enthusiastic praise of Mosher's books in many Fiona letters was genuine

and well-deserved. Unsurprisingly, there was also a financial motive. Since the demise of Stone and Kimball five years earlier, Sharp had no outlet for the Fiona books in the United States. Sensing Mosher's publishing firm might fill that void, he moved full steam ahead.

The December 1900 issue of Mosher's *Bibelot, A Reprint of Poetry and Prose for Book Lovers* featured "Lyrics From the Hills of Dream," a selection from the book of Fiona poems published in Edinburgh in 1896 by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues. The response to Fiona's poems in the *Bibelot* suggested she might be a reliable source of income for Mosher. When he visited Edinburgh in the spring of 1901, he sought and received permission from Geddes to publish more of the poems. In May 1901 he wrote directly to Fiona proposing an American edition whereupon Sharp accepted the proposal and began to remove some of the poems in the Geddes edition of 1896 and add new ones. *From the Hills of Dream: Threnodies, Songs, and Other Poems* was published in September 1901, in Mosher's *Old World Series*. Mosher published nine more Fiona Macleod books during the four remaining years of Sharp's life — a total of ten — and six more after he died. It was principally through the Mosher publications that Fiona Macleod gained a modest but devoted American readership in the early twentieth century.

A source of concern for Sharp during the summer and fall of 1901 was his involvement with W. B. Yeats in planning the Celtic Mystical Order. As described in Chapter Sixteen, Yeats, in 1897, became convinced Sharp and the woman he called Fiona Macleod were accomplished visionaries, and he invited them to join him and a few close friends in the effort to produce the Order's rituals. Yeats borrowed his model for the Celtic Order from the Order of the Golden Dawn. He was active in the London branch of the Order, while Sharp, though a member, was less so. Sharp had begun to experiment with spiritualism at least as early as 1892. After joining forces with Yeats in 1897, his efforts to contact spirits, sometimes aided by drugs, became more frequent and intense.

With a late May letter from London, Yeats sent Sharp a draft he had "done in a very perfunctory way" of the first, Neophyte, ritual for his Celtic Mystical Order (*Collected Letters IV*, 967–968). He asked Sharp "to try to get a vision of the coming of the seven races," the races that invaded Ireland in ancient times, and to send the rite back with notes "as soon as possible." He also asked Sharp to "try to get Miss Macleod to try

her hand at any point that may seem weak." His goal was to "start" the Order with this first Rite when he returned to London from Ireland in the fall, "and then go on Rite by Rite till the whole fabric is finished." A few days later, having received no word from Sharp, Yeats wrote directly to Fiona from Rosses Point near Sligo where he was staying with George Pollexfen, his uncle and a fellow member of the Golden Dawn. By this time Yeats knew Sharp was writing the works attributed to Fiona, but Sharp had convinced him she was a second personality inspired by a real woman he loved who possessed great psychic abilities. He had that woman in mind in his letter to Sharp and the subsequent letter to Fiona. He assumed Sharp had sent her the draft initiation ritual. He thought the structure was right, but it needed to be better written. Could she help with the writing? He went on to describe what he thought the material to be mastered should be in the remaining six Rites. He had worked out the symbolism, the proposed content, and the purpose of all seven Rites, but "the great problem is structure, just as the great problem in a play is structure." Since Fiona's clairvoyant powers were greater than his own and Sharp's, he hoped she would comment on his draft.

Sharp constructed a brief Fiona reply to Yeats which is now lost, but the substantive reply is in a Fiona letter dated July 26, coincidentally the very day of Esther Mona Rinder's birth. Fiona wondered if Yeats would object to a complete reconstruction of the Rite since it seemed to present "insuperable difficulty." "In other words," she continued, "has your Rite finality to you?" She then warned Yeats to be very careful in November: "It is always a month of suffering and mischance for some of us and especially about the 21st (the seven days before or after)." Her friend — Sharp — was feeling especially vulnerable. He had recently had "five very singular visions, each unsought and abrupt." They were followed by a sixth which, she thought, was a warning from the realm of spirits: "Put the four cups of light about you in the seven and seven dark days of the month of the curlew (... i.e., November)." Sharp's vulnerability is understandable. He had other matters on his mind and was trying to cover his inattention to Yeats' Celtic project with language borrowed from the Golden Dawn.

Yeats, on the other hand, was deadly serious. He responded in a brief note to Sharp on August 4 (*Collected Letters IV*, 980). He could not delay much longer the implementation of the first Rite. Once it is finalized and

accepted, Sharp will find he is “much less attacked.” The ceremonies will be his

protection — that is indeed part of their purpose. A Rite woven into other Rites is a ceaseless invocation of strong protectors. Make a circle of light about the room before you begin & if you think well — this I got once studying Maud Gonne — set the 4 hosts of the Feann to guard the cardinal points.

For the time being, Yeats concluded, Sharp should simply do whatever he could about the Rite and protect himself from evil forces.

With his August 4 letter to Sharp, Yeats enclosed a much longer letter to Fiona. He dismissed her proposal to recast the first Rite and suggested she start working on the second Rite, which would be “The Mystery of the Cauldron” (*Collected Letters IV*, 974–978). He had been “instructed to work on the six initiations in order,” but a plan for the second Rite, the “initiates of the cauldron,” had floated before him. The officers, or those conducting the initiation, would speak “as the prow, stern, rudder etc. of a symbolic ship, which is taking the candidate on his way.” The initiation would then change to

a purifying ceremony (the candidate standing symbolically in the stone vessel one sees in New Grange). I got the ship from a ship in “The Book of the Dead” & from a certain Irish peasant ceremony, said to have been obscene by the priests who put it down.

Since Fiona, according to Yeats, was “beyond comparison a greater clairvoyant,” he would gladly have her complete reworking of the first Rite, “The Mystery of the Obligation,” but that would take time. He wanted to move quickly so he could “initiate certain people who I have in my mind into the Mystery of the Obligation this autumn.”

Yeats concluded his letter to Fiona by stating his goal in creating the Celtic Mystical Order and the need for fast action: “I believe that there is a great contest going to come on here in a few years between the Church and the mystics. There have been some premonitory mutterings already. It is absolutely necessary to begin our organization at once.” He was creating a spiritualist movement that would rival and eventually replace Christianity, including of course the Catholic Church, which exercised great power over the minds and bodies of the Irish. Though Sharp was certainly interested in contacting the spirit world and maintaining his

friendship with Yeats, the obsolescence of Christianity did not figure prominently among his goals.

In the face of Yeats' sense of urgency, Sharp continued to procrastinate. He was losing interest in Yeats' Celtic Mystical Order and shifting his spiritualist interests toward those of his new friend, Doctor John Goodchild, whose geographical locus for spiritualist renewal was not the West of Ireland, but the West of England — specifically Glastonbury and the surrounding area. On October 31, Sharp, as Fiona, told Yeats she wished she could write on magical matters, but regretted it was not possible yet.

I have never known such continuity of hostile will, of which I am persuaded: and though, owing to the visionary power of our common friend [Sharp], much has been seen and overcome, and much seen and avoided, there is still something to avoid, something to overcome; and something to see. But very soon now, possibly in this very month of November where the dark powers prevail (and if so, a double victory indeed!) that which has been impossible may become possible. Even yet, however, there is much to work against: and not only here: for you, too, move often into the Red and Black, or so at least it seem.

All she could do now was send Yeats a copy of the new edition of her poetry published by Thomas Mosher in Maine. She described in some detail how this edition differed from that published by the Geddes firm in 1896. In addition to the new array of poems, one section of the volume entitled "Foam of the Past" contained a lengthy dedication to Yeats. That dedication will appear, she told him, at the very front of a projected new English edition of her poems, a project that failed to see the light of day until 1907 when William Heinemann published a posthumous edition of *From the Hills of Dream*. She wanted Yeats' advice among three titles she was considering for that English edition. Having brushed quickly past the Celtic order, Sharp sought Yeats' approval of the new poems in the new edition. It must have been clear to Yeats that Sharp's interest in his Order had waned.

On November 23, Sharp sent Yeats a Fiona note accompanying the November issue of Thomas Mosher's *Bibelot* which featured a reprint of her "Celtic" essay, the essay *Æ* had attacked in his review of *The Divine Adventure* in the July 21, 1900 issue of the *All Ireland Review*. She had expanded its title to "Celtic: A Study in Spiritual History" and written

a prologue intended to address some of Æ's concerns which she would like Yeats to read. She hoped he had found "something to care for" in Mosher's *From the Hills of Dream*, and in its dedication of one section to him.

The reminder caused Yeats to respond quickly with apologies for having waited so long to thank her for the book (*Collected Letters IV*, 982–984). He took time to write frankly and perceptively. He liked her prose better than her poetry, but "here and always you are a wonderful maker of myths. They seem your natural mode of expression. They are to you what mere words are to others." He encouraged her to strive for simplicity of language so "the myths stand out clearly, as something objective, as something well born & independent." When she used elaborate words, she invented "with less conviction, with less precision, with less delicacy." He continued:

I have an advantage over you in having a very fierce nation to write for. I have to make everything very hard & clear, as it were. ... You have in the proper sense far more imagination than I have & that makes your work correspondingly more difficult. It is fairly easy for me who do so much of my work by the critical, rather than the imaginative faculty to be precise & simple, but it is hard for you in whose mind images form themselves without ceasing & are gone as quickly perhaps.

When Fiona spoke in an obviously personal voice, Yeats wrote, she was "not that Fiona who has invented a new thing, a new literary method. You are that Fiona when the great myths speak through you." Yeats made no mention of the volume's dedicatory note to him or to the new prologue to the controversial "Celtic" essay in Mosher's November *Bibelot*. Rather, he concluded by returning to his principal interest. He asked Fiona to send him any notes she had on the Celtic Rite because "there are places where I need the qualities of a different mind from mine."

This carefully crafted letter blends perceptive criticism with generous praise. Yeats shared Æ's displeasure with the heightened rhetoric and imprecision of some of the writings of Fiona Macleod. Yet he believed many of Fiona's works were valuable, indeed that Sharp as Fiona had "invented a new thing, a new literary method." In some of her prose, "myth" was her "language," and the myth spoke directly through her. Although Æ had warned Yeats directly and then through Lady Gregory

in August 1900 that Sharp/Fiona should not be trusted with the secrets of the Celtic Mystical Order (*Collected Letters II*, 552 and *Collected Letters IV*, 978), Yeats ignored the warning. Even though Sharp was using some of the symbols and constructs of the incipient Order in Fiona's poems and plays, Yeats continued to seek his assistance because he believed Fiona, or the woman who enabled Fiona, had clairvoyant powers more insightful than his own.

In early 1901, Sharp's proposal for an article on the poetry and prose of Theodore Watts-Dunton was accepted by the weekly magazine *Literature* whose editor wanted "an account and sympathetic appreciation." Sharp submitted the article in June and wrote to Watts-Dunton in early July: "I hope that what I have written will be just such a pronouncement as you would like. Fortunately, *Literature* now carries great weight with its large circulation." In fact, *Literature* was in dire straits, having descended into confusion in February 1900 following the unexpected death of its powerful editor, Henry Duff Traill. It soon combined with the *Academy* and survived for a time as the *Academy and Literature*. Sharp's article never appeared, and Sharp told Watts-Dunton in February 1902 that he had heard nothing from the journal: "neither returned MS [manuscript], nor payment, nor even acknowledgment of my letter." In the meantime, Sharp's friend George L. Halkett, Editor of the *Pall Mall Magazine*, accepted his proposal for an article on Watts-Dunton and his housemate at the Pines, Algernon Swinburne. He finished this article, sent it to Watts-Dunton for review, and put it in final form for Halkett. Entitled "A Literary friendship: Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Watts-Dunton at the Pines," it appeared in the December 1901 number of the *Pall Mall*.

After returning from Argyll to London in mid-October, the Sharps made plans to spend December in Florence and then go south for another extended stay in Sicily. From January to mid-February, they would be in Taormina followed by a fortnight or so with Alexander Nelson Hood at his Castle Maniace. Through Hood, Sharp had met the popular American novelist Marion Crawford who lived with his wife in Italy, near Sorrento. Sharp wrote to say they would be happy to visit the Crawford's in Sorrento on their way to Sicily. Subsequently, the Sharps' December plans were canceled due to illness, their own and, more seriously, that of Elizabeth's mother who required Elizabeth's presence at her bedside at 72 Inverness Terrace in Bayswater.

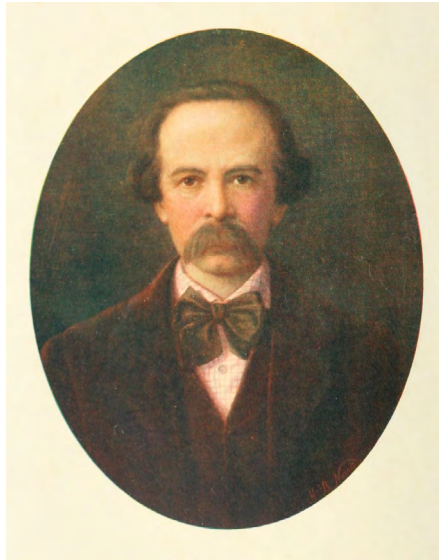


Fig. 61 Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832–1914). Portrait by H. B. Norris (1902).
Public Domain. Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theodore.watts-dunton.jpeg>

While still in London in mid-December, Sharp drafted a letter for Mary to copy and send to Thomas Mosher. In response to his request for a photograph of Fiona, Sharp had sent him a picture of Edith Rinder. Mosher asked Fiona to allow him to publish it for her fans in America. Like others who had seen the picture, he was struck by the woman's beauty. The Fiona letter to Mosher of December 15 is an artful response to a reasonable request from someone whose favor she wanted to maintain. Asking him not to think her ungracious, she continued, "I am sure you know me well enough to be sure that neither a foolish 'fad,' nor still less any ungraciousness towards a request so natural and from one whose friendship I value, is responsible for my asking you not to press the point of my photograph." Were she to accept his request, she would be under "continual subsequent nervous apprehension, in itself very bad for work and well-being." In fact, her recent illness was due to the "serious nervous drain" that affected her after she sent the picture to Mosher on loan. She hated to refuse him just as she had hated to refuse a similar request from George Meredith. She promised Mosher he would surely have a photo when she died, or even earlier were she to decide

later that the distance between Scotland and Portland was far enough to avoid "peril." Sharp did not tell Mosher the nature of the feared peril, that the woman in the photograph might be recognized as Edith Rinder. Fiona Macleod, Sharp's greatest invention, required frequent fabrication and occasioned near constant anxiety.

While Elizabeth was confined to London with her mother, Sharp went to Hastings in mid-December to "convalesce." On the 19th, he spent a day with Henry James in Rye and described the visit in a letter to Mrs. Philpot:

I had a most delightful day at Rye with Henry James who now lives there for many months in the year. I went over early, lunched, and then we went all over that wonderfully picturesque old Cinque Port. A lovely walk in a frost-bound still country, and then back by the sombre old Land Gate, over the misty marshes down below, and the flame red Cypress Tower against a plum coloured sunset, to Henry James' quaint and picturesque old house to tea. It was in every way a memorable and delightful day, and not least the great pleasure of intercourse with that vivid brilliant and alive mind.

Mrs. Philpot was the author of *The Sacred Tree in Religion and Myth* and other popular books and pamphlets about spiritualist associations with trees. Little is known about Sharp's relationship with her though he may have met her through Dr. John Goodchild since the three shared the conviction that spirits inhabited the natural world and communicated frequently with those attuned to their messages. She was among the company of women with whom Sharp developed special relationships. In a December 26 letter to another of those women, Louise Chandler Moulton, he said he would leave for Sicily in a week going first to Bordighera on the Italian Riviera, then to Genoa where he hoped to meet Elizabeth, and then to Sicily for January and February. Despite the illnesses and the financial problems, 1901 was redeemed by days like those with Henry James and by the discovery of Thomas Mosher in Maine and Alexander Nelson Hood in Sicily.