

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All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at 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

1903

Sharp began a diary at that start of the New Year and, as was his habit, abandoned it a few days later. On New Year's Day, the Sharps had dinner with the novelist Robert Hichens at the Hotel Timeo just down the hill from the Greek Theater in Taormina. Hichens (1864–1950) was a frequent visitor to Taormina and a friend of Alexander Nelson Hood. He was also an established writer, having published ten novels between 1886 and 1904. One of those, *The Green Carnation*, was published pseudonymously in 1894 and withdrawn from publication in 1895. By defining, satirizing, and barely disguising the relationship between his friends, Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, the novel contributed to Wilde's public humiliation and imprisonment. Despite its abrupt disappearance it was widely circulated, and many knew Hichens was its author. Following the Wilde debacle, Hichens, himself a recognized and unapologetic homosexual, spent most of his time away from England — in Switzerland, Egypt, Northern Africa, and Taormina where he found a group of men who shared his temperament and inclinations. Sharp formed a bond with Hichens, as he had with Murray Gilchrist and Alex Hood, but their short-lived friendship ended abruptly with Sharp's death in 1905.

On January 3, the Sharps lunched with Hichens at the Timeo, and, after walking around the theater, called on Maude Valérie White, a member of Taormina's British community admired for her musical settings of poems and ballads. Also, on the third, according to Sharp's diary, he finished the Fiona Macleod story about Flora Macdonald and sent it off to Edinburgh for Mary to type. The Fiona letter sending the story to George Halkett for inclusion in the *Pall Mall Magazine* is dated May 9, 1903. The delay suggests Sharp tried unsuccessfully to have



Fig. 69 Robert Smythe Hichens (1864–1950). Photograph by unknown photographer (1912), in Frederic Taber Cooper, *Some English Story Tellers* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1912). Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Hichens_001.jpg#/media/File:Robert_Hichens_001.jpg, Public Domain.

the story accepted elsewhere before sending it to the *Pall Mall*. Halkett accepted the story, and it appeared a year later in the May/June 1904 issue of the magazine. On January 4, Sharp began an account of the rugged land and the hardy people who occupied the vast Nelson estate which he called "Through Nelson's Duchy." He finished it four days later, and it appeared as the work of William Sharp with photographs selected by Alexander Nelson Hood in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in October 1903.

The Sharps continued to enjoy the beautiful weather and active social life of Taormina while Sharp worked sporadically on his writing and correspondence. In late January, he set off by himself on a trip to Greece to gather material for a book he planned to call *Greek Backgrounds*. After crossing from Messina in Sicily to Reggio di Calabria, at the western point of the toe of Italy's boot, Sharp took a train to Crotona on the east side of the toe. There he boarded a ferry which took him to the

port city of Taranto on the west side of the boot's heel. A train called the *Agamemnon* took him from Taranto to Brindisi, a port city on the east of the heel, where he boarded a ship bound for Greece. Appropriately named the *Poseidon*, the ship crossed the Aegean, and as it approached the coast of Turkish Albania the shaft of its main screw broke. In a January 23 letter to his wife written aboard the stranded ship, he described the beauty of the mountainous shoreline and the joy he felt in being on his own amidst scenery that reminded him of his native Highlands. He was rescued by another steamer that took him to Kerkyra on Corfu where he boarded yet another ship which sailed for Athens. Upon arriving he was delighted by the ancient sites familiar from years of reading. "It is a marvelous home-coming feeling I have here," he wrote to Elizabeth on January 29, "and I know a strange stirring, a kind of spiritual rebirth." On February first, he wrote again:

Yesterday, a wonderful day at Eleusis. Towards sundown drove through the lovely hill-valley of Daphne, with its beautifully situated isolated ruin of the Temple of Aphrodite, a little to the north of the Sacred Way of the Dionysiac and other Processions from Aonai (Athenai) to the Great Fane of Eleusis. I have never anywhere seen such a marvelous splendour of living light as the sundown light, especially at the Temple of Aphrodite and later as we approached Athens and saw it lying between Lycabettos and the Acropolis, with Hymottos to the left and the sea to the far right and snowy Pentelicos behind. The most radiant wonder of light I have ever seen.

Not since 1892 when he reveled in the beauty of the Roman countryside and its ruins had Sharp experienced such joy in exploring the landscape and its monuments.

Sharp returned to Taormina in early February where he found a letter Robert Hichens wrote after returning from Taormina to England. He urged Sharp to winter with him in Africa the following year. They would stay in a first-rate hotel in Biskra, Algeria, and they would be very happy. Hichens continued:

We must often go out on donkey-back into the dunes and spend our day there far out in the desert. I know no physical pleasure, — apart from all the accompanying mental pleasure, — to be compared with that which comes from the sun and air of the Sahara and the enormous spaces. This year I was more enchanted than ever before. Even exquisite Taormina is humdrum in comparison. Do try to come then as November is a magnificent month (*Memoir*, 365).



Fig. 70 View over the excavation site towards Eleusis, the site of the Eleusinian Mysteries, or the Mysteries of Demeter and Kore, which became popular in the Greek-speaking world as early as 600 BC and attracted initiates during the Roman Empire before declining in the fourth century AD. Photograph by Carole Raddato (2005), Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_view_of_sanctuary_of_Demeter_and_Kore_and_the_Telesterion_\(Initiation_Hall\),_center_for_the_Eleusinian_Mysteries,_Eleusis_\(8191841684\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_view_of_sanctuary_of_Demeter_and_Kore_and_the_Telesterion_(Initiation_Hall),_center_for_the_Eleusinian_Mysteries,_Eleusis_(8191841684).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0.

Sharp must have shared with Hichens his newly formed fascination with Greece and his intention to spend the next winter there since Hichens closed his letter by writing, "I can't help being rather sorry that you won't go to Sicily again for a long while. I always feel as if we all had a sort of home there." After reproducing this letter in her *Memoir*, Elizabeth added that Hichens wrote to her: "I still think Taormina the most exquisite place in Europe. On a fine morning it is ineffably lovely." In the fall of 1905, according to Elizabeth, it was planned that "after the New Year Mr. Hood, Mr. Hichens, my husband, and I should go together to Biskra. But as the autumn waned, we realized the unwisdom of any such plans" (*Memoir*, 365–366, 413).

In a February 18 letter to Catherine Janvier, Sharp complained: "with this foreign life in a place like this, with so many people I know, it is almost impossible to get anything like adequate time for essential work — and still less for the imaginative leisure I need [for] dreaming out my work — to say nothing of reading, etc." He described the strains of his double life:

As you know, too, I have continually to put into each day the life of two persons — each with his or her own interests, preoccupations, work, thoughts, and correspondence. I have really, in a word, quite apart from my own temperament, to live at exactly double the rate in each day of the most active and preoccupied persons. No wonder, then, that I find the continuous correspondence of “two persons” not only a growing weariness, but a terrible strain and indeed perilous handicap on time and energy for work.

A March 17 Fiona letter to Benjamin Burgess Moore, who was about to move to Paris, assured him the city had a “manifold fascination,” though it lacked “the glow and colour of life in Italy and Spain and Greece.” Fiona thanked him for his concern about her health and continued:

I am much better for being in the south, but it has not been a really good winter anywhere, and I feel that I would like a year of nothing but sunshine and serene life. One tires of everything except illusions and dreams: and longs often for nothing but warm sunshine and rest.

Burgess must have written to Fiona in care of Sharp in Sicily for she concluded by bringing him up short: “Mr. Sharp is still in Sicily, but will be leaving any day: but apart from that please do not address to me again c/o him, as he does not like it, nor do I. My correspondence-address is Miss Macleod, | c/o Mrs. Wingate Rinder, | 21. Woronzow Road, | London. N. W.” When Sharp suspected a correspondent might be approaching the truth, Fiona responded forcefully.

In early April, the Sharps were back in London where Sharp composed on the 25th a Fiona letter to Mosher describing plans for her writings and detailing how he planned to keep her out of the way should Mosher decide to visit Scotland and England anytime soon.

There seems little doubt that I cannot expect to regain assured health unless I remain in the South from the early autumn till May for a year or two to come at any rate and, indeed, I am strongly advised to remain in the South (or, if not, in the Summer, on Scandinavian waters) all this year unbrokenly. Nothing is yet definitely decided: except that I shall not be staying in London or Edinburgh this season, and if in Scotland at all will only be for a flying visit to the West in September, or else much sooner instead. Later, I’ll be better able to give you an idea of my whereabouts during the summer and autumn. By October, this year, at least, I hope and expect to get south again. It is extraordinary the difference in health it makes, though I fear it makes one lazy, and far more inclined to read

and dream, than to write and revise and be continually exercised by the forces of the mind and the spirit.

The travel plans are an interesting amalgam. Sharp had been advised to go south each fall for his health and stay as long as he could. The Scandinavian waters were only a means of keeping Fiona hidden, but the Sharps did go south in October with Fiona trailing behind.

The Fiona letters from mid-May to mid-June have her visiting the Lake District, going on to the Inner Hebrides (the Isles of Bute, Mull, and Iona), and then heading south again to the Lake District. Whether or not Sharp followed that itinerary, a June 6 Fiona letter to Yeats has him tracing "sculptured symbols of the Centaur and the Salmon" on "ancient Pagan stones" in the Hebrides. When he returns to London on June 14, Sharp will show Yeats "all the tracings and memda he has made." Of special interest is a tracing of a "horse-headed salmon, which Fiona supposed unique. In this section of the letter, Sharp lapsed into writing as himself.

From these Fiona letters we also know Sharp was revising and writing prefatory material for three Fiona Macleod books Thomas Mosher would publish in the fall: *Deirdrê and the Sons of Usna*, *The Divine Adventure*, and *The House of Usna: A Drama*. The first of these received special attention in a June 3 Fiona letter to Mosher: "Herewith I send you the MS of my dedicatory foreword to *Deirdrê*. Please take great care in comparison of the text in proof with this MS." As described in Chapter 21, the dedicatory foreword of *Deirdrê* was addressed to Esther Mona Rinder, Edith's daughter. The June 3 Fiona letter asked Mosher to send three unbound proof sets of the book for "birthday use." Esther would be two years old on June 26, 1903. Since the book would not be bound before that date, Sharp wanted Edith to have a copy of the book for her daughter's birthday. Esther Mona (Rinder) Harvey grew to adulthood without seeing the proofs, the book, or the dedication, and she was surprised and moved upon reading the dedication many years later.

When he returned to London, Sharp joined his wife in "temporary lodgings" at 9 St. Mary's Terrace in Paddington. Robert Farquharson Sharp, Elizabeth's brother (and William's cousin), lived nearby at 56 St. Mary's Mansions. Their mother, Agnes Farquharson Sharp, lived with Robert, and she was quite ill. Elizabeth wanted to be nearby to help as she could.

On June 22, Sharp made a day trip to Box Hill to see George Meredith. He described the visit in a letter to someone Elizabeth named only as a friend. Both men, Sharp wrote, felt this would be their last meeting; Meredith's death would mark "the passing of the last of the great Victorians." Sharp wished Meredith could know "a certain secret: but it is better not, and now is in every way as undesirable as indeed impossible." Since Sharp had taken Edith Rinder, pretending to be Fiona, to Box Hill to meet Meredith in June 1897, Sharp feared Meredith would be upset if told the truth.

If there is in truth, as I believe, and as he believes, a life for us after this, he will know that his long-loving and admiring younger comrade has also striven towards the hard way that few can reach. What I did tell him before has absolutely passed from his mind: had, indeed, never taken root, and perhaps I had nurtured rather than denied what had taken root. If in some ways a little sad, I am glad otherwise. And I had one great reward, for at the end he spoke in a way he might not otherwise have done, and in words I shall never forget. I had risen and was about to lean forward and take his hands in farewell, to prevent his half-rising, when suddenly he exclaimed "Tell me something of her — of Fiona. I call her so always, and think of her so, to myself. Is she well? Is she at work? Is she true to her work and her ideal? No, that I know!"

Given Meredith's questions and elaborate praise, Sharp wondered if he suspected Sharp had some role in producing the Fiona writings. Meredith's final words alleviated that concern:

It was then he said the following words, which two minutes later, in the garden, I jotted down in pencil at once lest I should forget even a single word or a single change in the sequence of the words. "She is a woman of genius. That is rare ... so rare anywhere, anytime, in women or in men. Some few women 'have genius,' but she is more than that. Yes, she is a woman of genius: the genius too, that is rarest, that drives deep thoughts before it. Tell her I think often of her, and of the deep thought in all she has written of late. Tell her I hope great things of her yet. And now ... we'll go, since it must be so. Goodbye, my dear fellow, and God bless you." Outside, the great green slope of Box Hill rose against a cloudless sky, filled with a flowing south wind. The swifts and swallows were flying high. In the beech courts thrush and blackbird called continually, along the hedgerows the wild roses hung. But an infinite sadness was in it all. A prince among men had fallen into the lonely and dark way.

Sharp relished Meredith's praise and feared his death was eminent. Elizabeth noted the irony: "Goodbye it was in truth; but it was the older poet who recovered hold on life and outlived the younger by four years" (*Memoir*, 368).

In a letter dated simply "Sunday Evg.," but written on July 5, Sharp thanked Richard Garnett for a copy of a new and augmented edition of his *Twilight of the Gods* which Grant Richards recently published. He was looking forward to seeing Garnett and hopefully his wife the next day — Monday, July 6 — when he and Elizabeth were hosting an "At Home" not at their St. Mary's Terrace lodgings, but at Sharp's club, the Grosvenor at the northeast corner of Dover Street and Piccadilly in central London. Amidst their social obligations, the Sharps were dealing with the illness of Elizabeth's mother who died sometime between the July 6 "At Home" and July 13, the date of a Sharp letter to Grant Richards written on black-bordered mourning stationery. In that letter, he said he meant to speak to Richards the other night during their "At Home," but the opportunity vanished in the "rapid dispersal" of their company after the "speechifying." A July 15 typed and unsigned Fiona letter to Mosher apologized for a "hurried line" as she was just returning to Edinburgh from London where she had been "on a matter of sudden urgency and illness." That Sharp had Fiona come to London from Scotland to mark his mother-in-law's final illness and death signals his affection for the woman who welcomed him to London in 1877, paved the way for his marriage to Elizabeth, and opened her Inverness Terrace house to him whenever he needed a place to stay in the city.

In a July 14 letter to Theodore Watts-Dunton, Sharp said it was difficult "to snatch a moment at this season, when there seems a mysterious social conspiracy against every hour of day and night," but he could free himself on Thursday July 16 if Watts-Dunton could manage to have tea with him in the late afternoon at his club. The July 15 Fiona letter to Mosher expressed her disappointment that he might not publish *The House of Usna, A Drama* in the fall as she had spent so much time preparing it and had taken such care over its lengthy introduction. It was the thing she cared most for. In response to this appeal, Mosher proceeded with a 1903 publication of the volume in a beautiful edition of 500 copies, 450 on handmade Van Gelder paper and 50 on Japanese vellum. It was dedicated "To Mona" (Caird) and signed by the publisher.

A June 23 Fiona letter to Mosher conveyed plans for the summer so he would know where to send correspondence and payments. Any letters directed to Edith Rinder's London address must reach her by the end of July since she and her family would be spending August and September in the Lake Tarbert area west and south of Glasgow. Sharp's mother and sisters would be near the Rinders in Kilcreggan for the month of August and return to their Edinburgh home where Mary would receive any Fiona correspondence. The Sharps would also go to Scotland in late July. After stopping near Falkirk to visit friends, they would join his family in Kilcreggan for August.



Fig. 71 The Firth of Clyde at Kilcreggan (on the right), with PS *Waverley* approaching across Loch Long. Photograph by Dave Souza (2018), Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73771868>, CCBY-SA-4.0.

During August Sharp continued to revise and write introductions for the three Macleod books Mosher had agreed to publish. Since the content of those books had already appeared in England, the revisions and introductions were a means of avoiding copyright problems. On August 4, he sent Bliss Perry, Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, an article on the remoter regions of Sicily called "The Sicilian Highlands" which appeared in the April 1904 issue of the magazine. In an August 25 letter he told Henry Alden his articles on the places nineteenth-century British writers lived and worked would be published by the Pall Mall Press as a book called *Literary Geography*. His "projected Greek book," would include "Magna Grecia as well, i.e., Hellenic Calabria and Sicily, etc." He intended to call it "Greek Backgrounds." As in the *Literary Geography*

articles he would associate famous Greek writers with the places they lived and worked.

When Sharp's mother and sister left their rented Kilcreggan house at the end of August, Elizabeth and William went northeast to Perthshire to stay with Mrs. Glassford Bell, formerly Marion Sandeman, a childhood friend of Sharp's. While there, according to Elizabeth, her husband, having suffered through a wet spring and a still damper summer, "became so ill we went to Llandrindod Wells for him to be under special treatment." On September 13, the day after his forty-eighth birthday, Sharp thanked Isabella

Gilchrist, Murray Gilchrist's mother, for sending him birthday greetings. The letter projects Sharp coming to terms with the seriousness of his illness and the likelihood of his early death.

But as one grows older, one the more recognizes that "climate" and "country" belong to the geography of the soul rather than to that secondary physical geography of which we hear so much. The winds of heaven, the dreary blast of wilderness, the airs of hope and peace, the tragic storms and cold inclemencies these are not the property of our North or South or East, but are of the climes self-made or inherited or in some strange way become our "atmosphere."

Like Mrs. Gilchrist who was sixty-three years old, Sharp will soon need to forsake physical travel for what he calls the "geography of the soul." Whether he wrote the letter in Perthshire or after he reached Llandrindod Wells, his illness influenced its content. Since Sharp could not stay long in one place, inability to travel raised thoughts of the afterlife: "The country we dream of, that we long for," he told Mrs. Gilchrist, "is not yet reached by Cook nor even chartered by Baedeker."

The journey from Perthshire to the spa town in the middle of Wales was long and difficult, but it had a desirable result. From Llandrindod Wells in late September, he described his condition to Ernest Rhys: "things have not gone well with me. All this summer I have been feeling vaguely unwell and, latterly, losing strength steadily." After arriving in Llandrindod Wells, "the rigorous treatment, the potent Saline and Sulphur waters and baths, the not less potent and marvelously pure and regenerative Llandrindod air — and my own exceptional vitality and recuperative powers — have combined to work a wonderful change for the better." It might prove to be no more than "a splendid rally," and he

must not be “too sanguine.” The end might be nearing, but he was not troubled: “I have lived, and am content, and it is only for what I don’t want to leave undone that the sound of ‘Farewell’ has anything deeply perturbing.”



Fig. 72 Ye Wells Hotel, Llandrindod where William Sharp received treatment for diabetes in September 1903: “the rigorous treatment, the potent Saline and Sulphur waters and baths, the not less potent and marvelously pure and regenerative Llandrindod air ... have combined to work a wonderful change for the better.” Photograph by Percy Benzie Aberly (193–?), Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ye_Wells_Hotel,_Llandrindod_\(1293703\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ye_Wells_Hotel,_Llandrindod_(1293703).jpg), CC0.

In his annual birthday letter to E. C. Stedman following his return to London, Sharp described his illness as “a subtle malady” which had claimed him for a comrade. “His name is Diabetes, but he’s no enemy, & refrains as much as he can, & even promises to disappear for a time, & be content with psychical Marconigrams [messages sent by radiotelegraphy].” A month previously, a specialist thought he had “got well into Chapter Last,” but he surprised his friends and even himself by “an apparent complete recovery.” It is only a “splendid rally,” he continued, but ““I take it smiling,’ as the lady said when she saw she ‘couldn’t help it,’ when the amorous Brigand wooed her.” Writing to Catherine Janvier on the September 30 he claimed to be “cheerful as a lark — let us say as a lark with a rheumatic wheeze in its little song-box, or gout in its little off-claw.” He knew the combination of illnesses would soon claim him, but he was determined to “laugh and be glad

and take life as I find it, till the end. The best prayer for me is that I may live vividly till 'Finis,' and work up to the last hour."

Shortly after writing and posting these letters, Sharp received a long letter from Stedman which raised his spirits. "It has been a true medicine," he wrote again to Stedman on October 2, "for, as I told you, I've been gravely ill. And it came just at the right moment and warmed my heart with its true affection." Sharp was also pleased by a recent visit to his doctor who had sanctioned his trip to Sicily and then to Greece for the winter. "When I'm once more in the land of Theocritus (and oh how entrancing it is)," he wrote to Stedman, "I'll be quite strong and well again... Indeed, I'm already 'a live miracle!'" Sharp then described in detail the itinerary he and Elizabeth intended to follow:

We sail by the Orient liner "Orizaba" on the 23rd [of October]; reach Naples (via Gibraltar and Marseilles) 9 to 10 days later; and leave by the local mail-boat same evening for Messina — arrive there about 8 on Monday morning — catch the Syracuse mail about 10, change at 12 at Giarre, and ascend Mt. Etna by the little circular line to Maletto about 3,000 ft. high, and thence drive to the wonderful old Castle of Maniace to stay with our dear friend there, the Duke of Bronte — our third or fourth visit now. We'll be there about a fortnight: then a week with friends at lovely and unique Taormina: and then sail once more, either from Messina or Naples direct to the Piraeus, for Athens, where we hope to spend the winter and spring.

Sharp was glad to know there would be a loving friend waiting should another trip to America be possible.

As planned, the Sharps boarded the *Orizaba* on October 23, but the trip south was unpleasant. The weather was bad, the sea rough, and, according to a letter Sharp wrote to Catherine Janvier during the voyage, he suffered a heart attack soon after leaving Plymouth. After they passed Gibraltar and entered the Mediterranean, they encountered a "wild gale" in the Gulf of Lyon, "one of the wildest we had ever known," according to Elizabeth. They planned to visit briefly with the Janviers when the ship docked in Marseilles, but the storm by then had become "almost a hurricane." After taking shelter in a cove, they sailed directly to Naples. Elizabeth reproduced in the *Memoir* a short unrhymed poem, called "Invocation," her husband wrote during the storm. "It was his way of mental escape from a physical condition which induced great nervous strain or fatigue, to create imaginatively a contrary condition

and environment, and so to identify himself with it, that he could become oblivious to surrounding actualities" (*Memoir*, 374–375).

A November 6 letter to Mosher in Mary's Fiona script, which she claimed to have written near Gibraltar, thanked him for sending newly printed copies of *The House of Usna* to Edinburgh where Mary forwarded at least one copy to Fiona. In fact, Sharp received this book when he reached Hood's Castle Maniace in the first week of November, where he drafted the Fiona letter and sent it for Mary to copy and mail from Edinburgh. He was establishing the fiction that Fiona was a week or so behind him in her travels. After spending a few days in Algeria, she would sail to Athens for a month or so with the Sharps. By shadowing his own travels with the imagined travels of Fiona, Sharp was able to describe the same people and places in both sides of the double correspondence. He could also keep Fiona on the move, carefully track her travels, and avoid the possibility of anyone asking to meet her. In the same vein, Fiona's various ailments shadowed his own with one important exception. He did not suffer the neurology in his writing hand that made it difficult for Fiona to write and thus explained the typed letters that were sometimes necessary.

In a November 11 letter to Mrs. Philpot from Castle Maniace, Sharp described how the location did not appeal to him at that time of year. It was "too high between 2,000 and 3,000 feet." And it was "too much under the domination of Etna, who swings vast electric current, and tosses thunder charged cloud-masses to and fro like a Titan acolyte swinging mighty censers at the feet of the Sun." Nonetheless, he looked forward to an excursion planned for the next day which he described in vivid detail:

Tomorrow if fine and radiant we start for that absolutely unsurpassable expedition to the great orange gardens a thousand feet lower at the S. W. end of the Duchy. We first drive some eight miles or so through wild mountain land till we come to the gorges of the Simeto and there we mount our horses and mules and with ample escort before and behind ride in single file for about an hour and a half. Suddenly we come upon one of the greatest orange groves in Europe — 26,000 trees in full fruit, an estimated crop of 3,000,000! stretching between the rushing Simeto and great cliffs. Then once more to the saddle and back a different way to

barbaric Bronte and thence a ten-mile drive back along the ancient Greek highway from Naxos to sacred Enna.



Fig. 73 Valle del Simeto, Catania. Photograph by Davide Restivo (2007), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valle_del_Simeto_3.jpg#/media/File:Valle_del_Simeto_3.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Sharp also looked forward to the following Tuesday when they would go down to Taormina and its

divine beauty and not less divinely balmy and regenerative climate sitting as she does like the beautiful goddess Falcone worshipped there of old, perched on her orange and olive-clad plateau, hundreds of feet above the peacock-hued Ionian Sea, with one hand as it were reaching back to Italy (Calabria ever like opal or amethyst to the North-east), with the other embracing all the lands of Etna to Syracuse and the Hyblaean Mount, the lands of Empedocles and Theocritus, of Aeschylus and Pindar, of Stesichorus and Simonides, and so many other great names — and with her face ever turned across the Ionian Sea to that ancient Motherland of Hellas, where once your soul and mine surely sojourned.

This may be the most elaborate and geographically correct description Taormina has received.

After stopping there for ten days or so, the Sharps left for Athens. When they arrived at the end of November, the weather turned cold, and Sharp suffered a relapse. In a late December letter, he told Mrs. Philpot, in whom he had found a kindred spirit and confidant, "I've come out of my severe feverish attack with erect (if dragged) colors

and hope to march 'cock-a-hoopishly' into 1904 and even further if the smiling enigmatical gods permit!" He described his pleasure in reading the works of the ancient Greek dramatists in the theatre where they were first performed. There he could imagine hearing "upon the wind the rise and fall of the ancient lives, serene thought-tranced in deathless music." He was trying to remain focused on material for the book he was planning which had expanded in scope. It would be a close "study of the literature and philosophy and ethical concepts and ideals of ancient Hellas and of mythology in relation thereto." It would address other aspects of the life and culture of ancient Greece, 'from sculpture to vase paintings, from Doric and Ionic architecture to the beauty and complex interest of the almost inexhaustible field of ancient Greek coins.' Finally, he wanted to describe in his book, or in succeeding books, Graecia Magna, the remnants of the extensive Greek settlements in southern Italy and Sicily.

On December 29, he sent New Year's greetings to Richard Garnett and told him he and Elizabeth were comfortably settled in a "pleasant large house' within walking distance of the Temple of Olympian Zeus and "the banks of the river Ilissos (alas, usually as void of original matter as an Essay by Sir John Lubbock or a poem by Sir Lewis Morris)," two British writers whose work he thought derivative. They had met members of the British community and several Greek friends, "(one of whom, named Embiricos, claims unbroken descent from a friend & a pupil of Plato!)." He ended his letter to Garnett by referencing two lines from Pindar's "Nemean Ode" which can be translated as: "Respite is sweet in every deed. Even honey may cloy, and the delightful flowers of Aphrodite." Echoing his time with Edith Rinder in Rome a decade earlier, Sharp had met a young woman in Athens whose love warmed the landscape and lifted temporarily the weight of his physical condition.

