

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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Appendix 2

Catherine Ann Janvier and Roselle Shields

The letter transcribed below casts light on the final two years of William Sharp's life. It was written by Catherine Ann (Drinker) Janvier — an American painter, writer, and close friend of Sharp — to Roselle Lathrop Shields, a young American working in Greece as an assistant to an archaeologist when Sharp met her during a two-week visit to Greece in the winter of 1903 and came to know her well during the four months the Sharps spent in Greece the following year (December 1903–March 1904).

Born in 1841, Catherine Ann Drinker of Philadelphia married Thomas Janvier in 1878. Originally from New Orleans, he was a short story writer and journalist. They lived a peripatetic life alternating between New York's Greenwich Village, Mexico, England, and the south of France. Sharp was introduced to the Janviers during his first visit to New York in 1889, and a close friendship developed in the 1890s as they and the Sharps visited back and forth in England and France. Fourteen years older than William Sharp, Catherine became particularly fond of him, and he shared with her some of his deepest thoughts and feelings. The Janviers were childless, and the relationship she developed with Sharp resembled that between a mother and son.

Sharp sent her a copy of the first Fiona Macleod book, *Pharais, A Romance of the Isles* when it was published in 1894 and claimed it was the work of a friend. She recalled Sharp mentioning in 1893 he was working on a novel called *Pharais*, and she confronted him with the fact that he was Fiona. He prevailed upon her to keep his secret, and the confidence they shared cemented their relationship. Following his death, which affected her greatly, she delivered a paper about Sharp's life and work to the Aberdeen Branch of the Franco-Scottish Society on June 8, 1906. She refined and expanded that paper into an article titled "Fiona Macleod

and Her Creator William Sharp," which appeared in the *North American Review* of April 5, 1907 (Volume 184, 718–732). For the article, she depended on letters she had received from Sharp, their conversations, and her careful and sympathetic reading of the work Sharp published under the female pseudonym.

Two months after Sharp died, Catherine wrote a letter to Roselle Lathrop Shields which shines a light on the last two years of his life. Roselle Lathrop was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1877. As a young woman she made her way to England where, in 1900, she married James Van Allen Shields. Born in Washington, D.C. in 1871, he worked in London for the Columbia Record Company. Twenty-two years younger than Sharp, Roselle was much taken by him, and they maintained contact through the year. They met again in December 1903 when the Sharps arrived in Greece. In her *Memoir* (378), Elizabeth said her husband became ill upon their arrival, but his health improved after the turn of the year: "With Spring sunshine and warmth my husband regained a degree of strength, and it was his chief pleasure to take long rambles on the neighboring hills alone, or with the young American archaeologist, Mrs. Roselle L. Shields, a tireless walker." Elizabeth printed in the *Memoir* (413–416) parts of two letters Sharp wrote to an unnamed friend during the last two weeks of his life. It has been speculated these letters were written to Edith Rinder, but they were two of the four letters mentioned in the letter below Sharp wrote to Roselle Shields in the waning days of his life. Having met in Greece, Roselle and Elizabeth Sharp, both Londoners, became friends, and Roselle shared at least these two letters with Elizabeth to use in the *Memoir*. They also cooperated in preparing *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts*, from the writings of Fiona Macleod, selected by Mrs. William Sharp and Roselle Shields, with a foreword by R. L. S. (Roselle Lathrop Shields), which Thomas Mosher published in 1908 and for which he paid Elizabeth £50.

Catherine Janvier wrote a nicely illustrated book called *London Mews* containing rhymes about cats which was published on January 1, 1904 by Harper & Brother in New York. She sent a copy of that book to Roselle Shields as a Christmas gift in 1905. Her letter to Shields was in that copy when it recently appeared for sale. The cat book was on its way across the ocean to Shields which explains the letter's reference to cats in its second paragraph. Here is a transcription of the letter Roselle saved in the cat book.

*Catherine Ann Janvier to Roselle Lathrop Shields,
February 8, 1906*

8 February 1906

My dearie

I have been putting off writing to you hoping to be able to get a long hour to give you. It was a mistake, and in future I shall send you short letters when I cannot have time for long ones.

The cats are crossing the ocean and I hope will reach you safely. "The Mews" really is not a book exclusively for children, though generally it seems so to be considered.

Thank you for your letter. My dearie, I am beginning to think that it is you and I who best know and understand our dear boy. Do not be influenced by others or their opinions. How I wish you could have been with him. It always will be a bitter pain to me that he put off writing to me, so that I have nothing of any account after he went to Maniace. On the other hand, I have a treasury of letters dating back to 1889 — what I have is but a small part, too, because many letters were destroyed. Otherwise he would not have written with the freedom he did. I do not know what he did with my letters. Should E. have them, if he kept them, she will be greatly puzzled.

What you say about P. and Mary and E. not knowing coincides with what I thought. In the letter that never was written he promised full details of P. and directions as to some matters. I never can know now. How I wish I were near, there is so much to ask, so much for us — you and I — to talk of.

How I envy you your four last letters — had I had but one! Well, I feel I know how he longed for his wee "Roseen." How weary he was of many things. It breaks my heart to think of him there — alone — I know that the best of care was taken of him, that every comfort was his, but I know that he was "alone," he knew too, I am sure, that it had to be.

Do not forget to tell me the full story of the seal — I mean what he told you to do about it, and how, as far as you know, he came to think of it. He wrote me the meaning of the device. That — at least — I have, but if I could have had my letter!

Tell me what you can about that last week's letters when you can.

I told Elizabeth ~~yesterday~~ I think in my last letter to her that I was writing a little article in appreciation of him, but went into no details, so you need know nothing as yet.

I have had to stop short in the middle to do some translating for T. A. J., but hope to start fresh and keep on by the end of this week.

How I wish you were here to go over the old letters with me. You are the only person in the world to whom I would show them. I know he would be willing. The whole evolution of Fiona Macleod practically is in those that I have kept, although much is lost by the destruction of letters too personal to keep.

You must understand that this collection — that is three or four letters absolutely proving him to be Fiona — was put away to keep with his approbation. The last time we were together here, he entirely approved of what I had arranged as to their disposition in case of my sudden death.

He gave me the ms. of the dedication to me of "The Washer of the Ford" — the long Prologue to Kathia. Also some ms. (all this in his own handwriting) of various other articles of Fiona's and some poems. He hoped against hope — the dear one — that the secret might be kept for years — but if not, and he had small hope of it then, that it was well for me to keep and use, if needful, or if I pleased these incontrovertible proofs. You will see by my little article how interesting his confession in 1894 is, as to being F. M.

I have not mentioned these letters to anyone, as yet, and wish to finish and send off my article before they are known. What a life! could I write it out! What a wonderful life!

As soon as I can, I will hunt up all he said of you. Unfortunately much is destroyed.

Your Kathie

Sunday Oct. 22 Venice-1905 (In reference to our, your and mine, first meeting) "Remember that her all surrounding love saved me, I am sure, in far away Greece, and what it has meant ever since to me."

I cannot get at the earlier ones yet —

Autograph signed letter, Private collection