

LIFE: 1855-1881

William Sharp was born on September 12, 1855, at 4 Garthland Place in Paisley, Scotland.¹ He was the oldest in a family of five daughters and three sons. His father, David Galbreath Sharp, was a partner in a mercantile house, and his mother, Katherine Brooks, was the daughter of the Swedish Vice Consul at Glasgow. Sharp spent the summers of his childhood in the West country — on the shores of the Clyde, the sea coast, and the Isle of Arran. He swam, rowed, sailed, and cultivated the passionate love of nature he inherited from his father. His Highland nurse, Barbara, told him tales of fairies, Celtic heroes, and Highland chieftains. These stories and the old Gaelic songs seeded his imagination with materials that came to fruition years later when he began writing the tales and poems he published under the pseudonym “Fiona Macleod.” Fanciful as a child, Sharp often imagined himself a marauding Viking or an adventurous warrior. He developed early the sense of an invisible world and communicated freely with imagined gods who lived in the woods and the sea and spoke through the winds. When he was six, he built an altar of stones in a remote wood and offered flowers to a Divine Presence who ruled and revealed herself in the natural world.

In 1863, when Sharp was seven, his aunt, the wife of his father’s brother, brought her three children from London to spend some time with the Paisley Sharps who had rented a house for the summer at Blairmore on the Gare-loch. One of those children was Elizabeth Sharp. Years later she recalled her cousin William, who would eventually be her husband, as “a merry, mischievous little boy . . . with bright brown curly hair, blue gray eyes, and a laughing face . . . eager, active in his endless invention of games and occupations” (*Memoir* 8). Until he was eight, that little boy had been educated at home under a governess. In the fall of 1863, he was sent to Blair Lodge, a boarding school in Polmont Woods between Falkirk and Linlithgow. Four years later, the Sharps moved from Paisley to Glasgow and enrolled William as a day student at Glasgow Academy. He entered Glasgow University at age sixteen in 1871 and dropped out after two academic years. An eager and perceptive student, Sharp excelled in English literature which he studied under Professor John Nichol who became a close friend. Though he did not continue toward a degree, he was found “worthy of special commendation” at the end of his second year. Taking full advantage of the University’s library, he read deeply in literature, philosophy, mythology, mysticism, occultism, poetry and folklore. These studies precipitated a radical shift from the Presbyterian faith in which he was raised toward a belief in the unity of the truths

¹ Most of what is known about William Sharp’s early life is contained in *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod) A Memoir*, compiled by his wife Elizabeth A. Sharp (London and New York, 1910).

underlying all religions.

In the summer of 1872, between his first and second years of university study, Sharp developed a severe case of typhoid fever and was sent to the West Highlands to recover. There he formed a friendship with Seumas Macleod, an elderly fisherman, whose Gaelic language and tales of the old ways enlarged the store of materials upon which he drew when he began in the mid-1890s to produce stories and poems under the pseudonym “Fiona Macleod.” His most memorable summer was his eighteenth when, wandering near the Gare-loch close to Ardentinny, he came upon a band of gypsies. Without explaining his absence or communicating his whereabouts, he joined the gypsies, roamed with them for many weeks, and became their “star-brother” and “sun-brother.” From them he learned the patterns of the stars and the winds, bird-lore, and wood-lore. This magical experience, free and unconventional, later inspired works he published under his own name, especially *Children of Tomorrow*, *Green Fire*, and *The Gypsy Christ*.

Sharp’s parents were understandably distressed upon learning their son had gone with gypsies. When they located him, he relented and returned in the fall of 1873 to his classes at Glasgow University. Within a few months, however, his father, worried about his son’s dreaming nature and literary interests, placed him in the Glasgow law office of Messrs. Maclure and Hanney with the hope he might take to the legal profession. For two years, 1874 and 1875, Sharp spent his days as a legal apprentice. At night, “he read omnivorously,” according to Elizabeth, in “literature, philosophy, poetry, mysticism, occultism, magic, mythology, folklore” and developed “a sense of brotherhood with the acknowledged psychics and seers of other lands and days” (*Memoir*, 21).

Sharp’s second meeting with Elizabeth took place when he spent a week with his cousins at Dunoon on the Clyde in August, 1875. Of that occasion, she wrote, “I remember vividly the impression he made on me when I saw the tall, thin figure pass through our garden gateway at sunset — he had come down by the evening steamer from Glasgow — and stride swiftly up the path. He was six feet one inch in height, very thin, with slightly sloping shoulders. He was good looking, with a fair complexion and high coloring; gray-blue eyes, brown hair closely cut, a sensitive mouth, and a winning smile. He looked delicate, but full of vitality. He spoke very rapidly, and when excited his words seemed to tumble one over the other, so that it was not always easy to understand him” (*Memoir* 17).

When they met again in Glasgow the next month, William and Elizabeth became engaged. There he confided to her that “his true ambition lay not in being a scientific man, as was supposed, but a poet, that his desire was to write about Mother Nature and her inner mysteries” (*Memoir* 17). After returning to London in the fall, Elizabeth received some of her fiancé’s early poems, among them “In Dean Cemetery,” a poem of fifty-seven stanzas addressed to Elizabeth. It was a pantheistic dream intended to commemorate a day they spent together, sharing their hopes and dreams, in the peace and quiet of Edinburgh’s Dean Cemetery.

Sharp’s health was not up to the demands of his work and studies. Shortly after the unexpected death of his father in August, 1876, he suffered a physical breakdown that raised the danger of consumption. Hoping a complete change of environment might improve his health and spirits, his family arranged passage for him on a ship bound for Australia. He relished the experiences of the voyage and the new country, where he stayed with family friends and spent many days exploring Gippsland and the desert region of lower New South Wales. He decided to settle in Australia and began looking for suitable work. When that search failed, he changed course and booked passage on the *Loch Tay* which reached England in June, 1877.

Before returning to Scotland, Sharp stayed for a time with Elizabeth and her parents at their house in Inverness Terrace just north of the Bayswater Road and Kensington Gardens. This was Sharp’s first experience of London. Elizabeth showed him the city and introduced him to her friends, among them Adelaide Elder — her brother, John, whom Sharp met the following year, was in New Zealand — and Mona Alison, who later married Henry Caird and remained a life-long friend of William and Elizabeth. Elizabeth’s mother enlisted the help and influence of friends to find work for Sharp, but there was no immediate success. At summer’s end, he returned to Scotland, joining his mother at Moffat where she had taken a house, and devoted himself through a lonely fall and winter to writing. Several poems composed during these months were included in his first volume of poetry, *The Human Inheritance*, in 1882.

Less than a year after returning from Australia, in the spring of 1878 when he was twenty-two, Sharp returned to London and began work at the London branch of the Melbourne Bank, a position secured for him by Alexander Elder, the father of Adelaide and John. He rented a room at 19 Albert’s Street in Regent’s Park and spent weekends with Elizabeth and her family at 72 Inverness Terrace, but the engagement remained secret for several months. Despite an earlier decision to refrain from publishing “until he could do it properly,” Sharp became increasingly anxious to appear in print. He submitted a poem, “A Nocturne to Chopin,” to *Good*

Words. It was accepted and published in July 1878. Late that summer, Elizabeth convinced him to end the secrecy, which he thoroughly enjoyed, and tell her mother they were engaged. When she realized her daughter was determined, she gave her reluctant approval, but warned others would disapprove because they were first cousins. "From that moment," Elizabeth said, her mother "treated her nephew as her son" (*Memoir*, 28).

1879 brought increased literary activities and more publications. Another poem appeared in *Good Words*, and three in the *Examiner*. A prose essay, "On Reverence," was printed in the May issue of the *Secular Review*. A travel piece on Australia, "Through the Fern," appeared in *Chambers' Journal*. Having obtained an introduction from Sir Noel Paton, Sharp appeared at the door of Dante Gabriel Rossetti one day in early September and quickly gained acceptance into the circle of admiring friends, mainly aspiring young writers, who lightened the darkness of Rossetti's final years. Through Rossetti, Sharp came to know Philip Bourke Marston (the blind poet), Hall Caine, Algernon Swinburne, Theodore Watts (later Watts-Dunton) and, of course, the painter/poet's brother and sister, William Michael Rossetti and Christina Rossetti.

The frequency of Sharp's visits to 16 Cheyne Walk increased in 1880, and Rossetti became not only a close friend, but a critic of his literary efforts. As they became closer, Rossetti introduced Sharp to Robert Francillon, Julian Hawthorne, and D. Christie Murray. In the summer of 1880, Mrs. George Lillie Craik, author of *John Halifax, Gentleman* and godmother of Philip Marston, entertained Sharp and Marston at her home in Kent. During one of these visits he was drenched in a thunderstorm and became ill. Weakened by the incident, he fell ill with rheumatic fever during a visit with Elizabeth and her mother to Portmadoc in South Wales in late summer. The illness lasted through the fall and winter and permanently damaged his heart. Elizabeth proceeded with plans to accompany her mother on a visit to Italy during the winter months. Despite his bad health, Sharp continued to write and publish. A poem and article appeared in *Modern Thought*, and another poem in *Good Words*.

In 1881 Sharp published several more articles in *Modern Thought*, and increased his contacts with the Rossetti circle. One consequence of his deeper literary involvement was an abrupt end to his banking career. In late August, the Principal of the City of Melbourne bank offered him the alternative of employment in a remote branch in Australia or resignation. Sharp chose the latter and went to Scotland for two months to visit relatives and friends, among them William Bell Scott and Sir Noel Paton. When he returned to London he spent several weeks looking for another position and finally obtained a post with the Fine Arts Society's Gallery in

Bond Street. The Society had decided to establish a section on German and English etchings and engravings and hired Sharp, through the good offices of Mrs. Craik, to study the subject for six months and then become the section's director. Shortly after he began work with society it reversed course and withdrew from the project. By the end of the year, Sharp was again out of work.

All of these events of Sharp's apprentice years -- his relationship with the woman who would become his wife, his expanding circle of literary friends, and his early ideas and goals -- are recorded and reflected in the letters reproduced in this Chapter. They form an interesting and useful record of an aspiring and determined young Scottish writer making his way into the literary life of London where he would flourish and attain a position of prominence and some power during the 1880s.

LETTERS: 1877-1881

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, August 21, [1877]

Braemar | August 21

. . . I feel another self within me now more than ever; it is as if I were possessed by a spirit who must speak out. . . .² I am in no hurry to rush into print; I do not wish to write publicly until I can do so properly. It would be a great mistake to embody my message in such a poem as 'Uplands',³ although a fifty times better poem than that is. People won't be preached to. Truth can be inculcated far better by inference, by suggestion. . . . I am glad to see by your note you are in good spirits. I also now look on things in a different light; but, unfortunately, Lill, we poor mortals are more apt to be swayed by mood than by circumstances, and look on things through the mist of these moods. . . .

Memoir 25-6

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, Fall, [1877]

. . . I am too worried about various things to settle to any kind of literary work in the meantime. The weather has been wretchedly wet, and the cold is intense. I do trust I shall get away from Scotland before the winter sets in, as I am much less able to stand it than I thought I was. Even with the strong air up here I can't walk any distance without being much the worse for it. . . .

Memoir 26

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, August 26, 1878

26:8:78

. . . Thanks for your welcome note which I received a little ago. I, too, like you, was sitting at my open window last night (or rather this morning) with the stars for my companions: and I, too, took comfort from them and felt the peace hidden in their silent depths. I know of nothing that soothes the spirit more than looking on those awful skies at midnight. Some of our aspirations seem to have burnt into life there, and, tangled in some glory of starlight, to shine down upon us with beckoning hands. . . . I have told you before how that music, a beautiful line of poetry, and other cherished things of art so often bring you into close communion with myself. But there is one thing that does it infallibly and more than anything else: trees on a horizon,

² The first two letters, the earliest that survive and both only fragments, were written to EAS after Sharp returned from Australia and before he settled in London in the spring of 1878. The ellipses indicate deletions by EAS in printing the letters in the *Memoir*.

³ This early poem has not survived.

whether plain or upland, standing against a cloudless blue sky — more especially when there is a soft blue haze dimly palpitating between. Strange, is it not? I only half indefinitely myself know the cause of it. *One* cause certainly is the sense of music there is in that aspect — possibly also the fairness of an association so sympathetic with some gracious memory of the past.

P.S. By-the-bye, have you noticed that my “Nocturne” is in the July number of *Good Words*?

Memoir 28-9

*To John Elder, [August, 1879]*⁴

I am glad you like my short paper in the *Sectarian Review*⁵ and I think that you understand my motive in writing it. It is no unreasoning reverence that I advocate, no “countenancing beliefs in worn-out superstitions,” as you say; no mercy to the erring, but much mercy to and sympathy with the deceived. I do not reverence the Bible or the Christian Theology in themselves, but for the beautiful spirituality which faintly but ever and again breathes through them, like a vague wind blowing through intricate forests; and so far I reverence the recognition of this spiritual breath in the worship of those whose views are so very different from my own . . .

I have been writing a good deal lately — chiefly verse. There is one thing which I am sure will interest you: some time ago I wrote a sonnet called “Religion,” the drift of which was to show the futility of any of the great creeds *as* creeds, and two or three weeks ago showed it to my friend Mr. Belfore Bax.⁶ It seems to have made considerable impression upon him, for, after what he calls “having absorbed,” he has set it to very beautiful recitative music. There are some fine chords in the composition, precluding the pathetic melody of the finale; and altogether it has given me great pleasure. But what specially interests me is that it is the first time (as far as I am aware) of a sonnet in any language having been set to music. The form of this kind of verse is of

⁴ John Elder (-1883) was the brother of Adelaide Elder, one of EAS’s closest friends. Their father, Alexander Elder, found an opening for Sharp as a clerk in the the London office of the City of Melbourne Bank in Spring, 1878, thus enabling him to move to London (*Memoir*, 27). Sharp met Adelaide Elder upon his return from Australia in the summer of 1877. Since John Elder was then in New Zealand for his health, he and Sharp first met in the summer of 1878 and soon became close friends. “John was a graduate of Cambridge, a thinker and man of fine tastes, and his new friend (Sharp) found a great stimulus in the keen mind of the older man. (*Memoir*, 29). Adelaide gave William Sharp his first copy of Rossetti’s poems, and they led to Sharp’s first visit to Rossetti in Cheyne Walk in September 1879. Although this fragment of a letter is dated October 23, 1880 in the *Memoir* (p. 31), it was written just prior to the publication of Sharp’s sonnet entitled “Religion” in the *Examiner* in September, 1879.

⁵ Probably “On Reverence,” which, according to EAS’s bibliography in the *Memoir*, was published in *The Secular Review* on May 17, 1879. There was no *Sectarian Review*.

⁶ Ernest Belford Bax (1854-1926) was a barrister, author, musician, and philosopher. One of the founders of the English socialist movement, he, along with William Morris, started the Socialist League. His principal works include; *Jean-Paul Marat* (1878), *Kant’s Prolegomena, etc., with Biography and Introduction* (1882), *Religion of Socialism* (1886), *The Roots of Reality* (1907).

course antagonistic to song-music, and could only be rendered by recitative. Do you know of any instance having occurred? The sonnet in question will appear in *The Examiner* in a week or two,⁷

Lo, in a dream, I saw a vast dim sea
Whose sad waves broke upon a barren shore;
The name of this wan sea was *Nevermore*,
The land *The Past*, the shore *Futility*:
Thereon I spied three mighty Shadows; three
Weary and desolate Shades, of whom each wore
A crown whereon was writ *Despair*. To me
One spoke, and said, "Lo, I am He
In whom the countless millions of the East
Live, move, and hope. And all is vanity!" —
And I knew Buddha. Then the next: "The least
Am I, but once God's mightiest Prophet-Priest" —
So spoke Mahomet. And then pitifully
The third Shade moaned, "I am of Galilee!"

I also enclose the record of a vision I had lately:

Lo, in that Shadowy place wherein is found
The fruitage of the spirit men call dreams,
I wander'd. Ever underneath pale gleams
Of misty moonlight quivering all around
And ever by the banks of sedgy streams
Swishing thro' fallen rushes with slow sound
A spirit walked beside me. From a mound,
Rustling from poplar-leaves from top to base,
Some bird I knew not shrilled a cry of dole,
So bitter, I cried out to God for grace.
Whereat he by me slackened from his pace,
Turning upon me in my cold amaze
And saying, "While the long years onward roll
Thou shalt be haunted by this hateful face —"
And looking up, I looked on my own soul!

Memoir 31-2

To John Elder, October, 1879

19 Albert St., Regent's Park | Oct., 1879

My dear John,

Thanks for your welcome letter of 18th August. My purpose, in my letter of May 7th, if I recollect rightly, was to urge that Reason is sometimes transcended by Emotion — sufficiently often, that is to say, to prevent philosophers from deriding the idea that a truth may be reached emotionally now and again, quicker than by the light of Reason. God may be beyond the veil of mortal life, but I

⁷ "Religion" appeared in *The Examiner: A Sunday Paper on Politics, Literature, and Fine Arts* in September, 1879.

cannot see that he has given us any definite revelation beyond what pure Deism teaches, viz., that there is a Power — certainly beneficent, most probably eternal, possibly (in effect, if not in detail) omnipotent — who, letting the breath of His being blow through all created things, evolves the Ascidian into man, and man into higher manifestations than are possible on earth, and whose message and revelation to man is shown forth in the myriad-paged volume of nature, and the inherent yearning in every human soul for something out of itself and yet of it. Of such belief, I may say that I am.

But my mind is like a troubled sea, whereon the winds of doubt blow continually, with waves of dead hopes and religious beliefs washing far away behind, and nothing before but the weary seeming of phantasmal shores. At times this faith that I cherish comes down upon me like the hushful fall of snow-flakes, calming and soothing all into peace; and again, it may be, it appears as a dark thunder-cloud, full of secret lightnings and portentous mutterings. And, too, sometimes I seem to waken into thought with a start, and to behold nothing but the blind tyranny of pure materialism, and the unutterable sorrow and hopelessness of life, and the bitter blackness of the end, which is annihilation. But such phases are generally transient, and, like a drowning man buffeting the overwhelming waves, I can often rise about them and behold the vastness and the Glory of the Light of Other Life.

And this brings me to a question which is at present troubling many others besides myself. I mean the question of the immortality of the individual. I do not know how you regard it yourself, but you must be aware that the drift of modern thought is antagonistic to personal immortality, and that many of our best and most intelligent thinking men and woman abjure it as unworthy of their high conception of Humanity. . . .

But *is* Humanity all? Has Humanity fashioned itself out of primal elements, arisen and marched down the long, strange ways of time — still marching, with eyes fixed on some self-projected Goal — without ever a spiritual breath blowing upon it, without the faintest guidance of any divine hand, without ever a glance of sorrowful and yearning but yet ineffably hopeful love from some Being altogether beyond and transcending it? Is it, can it be so? But in any case, whether with the Nirvana of the follower of Buddha, the absorption of the soul in the soul of God of the Deist and Theist, or with the loss of the individual in the whole of the Race of the Humanitarian, I cannot altogether agree. It may be the “old Adam” of selfishness; it may be poverty of highest feeling and insufficiency of intellectual grasp; but I cannot embrace the belief in the extinction of the individual. *Memoir 29-31*

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti,⁸ January 31, 1880

19 Albert St., Regent's Park N.W. | 31:1:80.

My dear Sir,

I hope you will not consider me ungrateful for the pleasure you gave me last night because I outwardly showed so little appreciation — but I was really so unwell from cold and headache that it was the utmost I could do to listen coherently. But though, otherwise, I look back gratefully to the whole evening I especially recall with pleasure the few minutes in which now and again you read. I have never heard: such a beautiful reader of verse as yourself, and if I had not felt — well, shy — I should have asked you to go on reading. Voice, and tone, and expression, all were in perfect harmony — and although I have much else to thank you for, allow me to thank you for the pleasure you have given me in this also.

I enclose 4 or 5 poems taken at random from my MSS. Two or three were written two or three years ago. That called the “Dancer” is modelled on your beautiful “Card Dealer.”⁹

I have also to thank you for your kind criticisms: and hope that you do not consider my aspirations and daring hopes as altogether in vain. Despair comes sometimes upon me very heavily, but I have not yet lost heart.

Yours most faithfully, | William Sharp

Memoir 38

To Mona Caird,¹⁰ [Early February, 1880]

Dear Mona,

Was unable after all to resume my letter on Friday night. On Friday morning I had a note from Rossetti wanting me to come again and dine with him — this time alone, I was glad to find.

⁸ Sharp's first meeting with Rossetti probably occurred in September 1879 for, as this letter indicates, he was corresponding with him in familiar terms in January, 1880. In 1899 Sharp thanked Adelaide Elder for introducing him to Rossetti's poetry “two and twenty years ago” (*Memoir* 35). Miscalculating, EAS set the date of Sharp's first acquaintance with Rossetti's work as fall 1879 and of his first meeting with Rossetti as September 1, 1881 (*Memoir* 36). The 1899 letter to Adelaide Elder and Sharp's early letters to Rossetti support fall 1877 as the date of Sharp's discovery of Rossetti's poetry and fall (perhaps September first) 1879 as the date of Sharp's appearance at Rossetti's door in Cheyne Walk to present him with the letter of introduction from Sir Noel Paton, an event that changed the course of Sharp's life by providing entrance to the literary and artistic life of London. For Sharp's own description of the importance of this event, see *Memoir* 35-6.

⁹ “Dance” was not published and has not survived. Rossetti's “The Card Dealer” (1849) appeared in *Poems* (1870).

¹⁰ Alice Mona Henryson Caird (-1932), a novelist, critic, social reformer, girlhood friend of EAS, was married to James Alexander Henryson Caird of Cassenear, Creton, Kirkeudbrightsh on 19 December 1877. They had one son, Major A. H. Caird. Her publications include: *Whom Nature Leadeth* (1883), *The Wings of Azrael* (1889), *Beyond the Pale: An Appeal on Behalf of the Victims of Vivisection* (1897), *The Morality of Marriage, and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (1897). She was widely known for her articles advocating changes in the marriage laws to grant women greater equality and more freedom. EAS dated this letter 23 February 1880, but it clearly refers to Sharp's memorable private dinner with Rossetti on Friday, 30 January which prevented Sharp from continuing a letter (perhaps part of this letter) he had begun prior to Friday 30 January. The letter describes that visit to Rossetti.

I spent a most memorable evening, and enjoyed myself more than I can tell. We dined together in free and easy manner in his studio, surrounded by his beautiful paintings and studies. Then, and immediately after dinner he told me things of himself, personal reminiscences, with other conversation about the leading living painters and poets. Then he talked to me about myself, and my manuscripts — a few of which he had seen. Then personal and other matters again, followed, to my great delight (as Rossetti is a most beautiful reader) by his reading to me a great part of the as yet unpublished sonnets which go to form “The House of Life”.¹¹ Some of them were splendid, and seemed to me finer than those published — more markedly intellectual, I thought. This took up a long time, which passed most luxuriously for me. . . .

He has been so kind to me every way: and this time he gave me two most valuable and welcome introductions — one to Philip Bourke Marston, the man whose genius is so wonderful, considering he has been blind from his birth — and the other to his brother Mr. Michael Rossetti, to whom, however, he had already kindly spoken about me. I am to go when I wish to the latter’s literary re-unions, where I shall make the acquaintance of some of our leading authors and authoresses. Did I tell you that the last time I dined at Rossetti’s house he gave me a copy of his poems, with something from himself written on the fly-leaf? On that occasion I also met Theodore Watts,¹² the well-known critic of *The Athenaeum*. It is so strange to be on intimate terms with a man whom a short time ago I looked on as so far off. Perhaps, dear friend, when you come to stay with Elizabeth and myself in the happy days which I hope are in store for us all, you will “pop” into quite a literary circle! . . . I was sure, also, you would enjoy the Life of Clifford in “Mod: Thought”.¹³ What a splendid man he was: a true genius, yet full of the joy of life, sociable, fun-loving, genial, and in every way a gentleman. I was reading one of his books

¹¹ The completed “House of Life” was published in *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis and White, 1881). Sharp said of the sequence: “But the impression, nevertheless, remains that the series is, in the main, a record of individual emotions suggested by the presence and absence of embodied love and what such absence and presence individually entail, a record of such and little further — a House, not of Life, but of Love. . . . These sonnets are the record of what a poet-soul has felt, and we see that love meant with him a dream of happiness while present, a dream of regret and a sense of frustration when passed away, but not that it inspired him to action or made his ideals more impersonal, or gave his aspirations wings to escape from the desolate haunts of sorrow and despondency and vague half-real hopes. Therefore it is not so much that Love was the soul of his genius, as that his genius lived and had its being in the shadow of Love” (*Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study*, 408-10).

Theodore Watts [after 1897, Watts-Dunton] (1832-1914), a poet, critic, and novelist, was a close friend of Rossetti. In 1879, he and Swinburne took up residence at The Pines, Putney, where they lived until Swinburne’s death in 1909. Watts-Dunton’s publications include: *The Coming of Love* (1898), *Aylwin* (1899), *Rossetti and Charles Wells* (1908), *The Poetry of the Renaissance of Wonder* (1916), *Vesprie Towers* (1916), and *Old Familiar Faces* (1916).

¹³ Moncure D. Conway’s “William Kingdon Clifford” was tenth in the “Leaders of Modern Thought” series in *Modern Thought*, II (Feb. 1, 1880), 293-299. William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879) was a mathematician, philosopher, and expert in classical and literary studies. His interest in Christian scholastic dogma was dispelled by his study of Darwin and Herbert Spencer. He was a follower of Berkeley and Hume and radically opposed the Hegelians. His posthumously published works include: *Lectures and Essays*, ed. F. Pollock and L. Stephen (1879), *Common Sense of the Exact Sciences*, ed. & partly written by Karl Pearson (1885), and several mathematical studies.

lately, and was struck with the sympathetic spirit he showed toward what to him meant nothing — Christianity. I wish we had more men like him. There is another man for whom I think I have an equal admiration though of a different order in one sense — Dr. Martineau.¹⁴ Have you read anything of his?

On Wednesday evening next I am going to a Spiritual Seance, by the best mediums — which I am looking forward to with great curiosity. . . .

Besides verse, I am writing a Paper just now on “Climate in Relation to the Influences of Art”, and going on with one or two other minor things. There now, I have told you all about myself.

Your friend and comrade, | Will

Memoir 38-40

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [March 1880]¹⁵

19, Albert Street| Regent’s Park, N.W. | Sunday

Dear Mr Rossetti

I sent off the sonnets yesterday in such tremendous haste, & I did not remember till today that the one entitled “The Redeemer’s Voice” had two similar terminations — & found that I had sent you a copy from the unrevised original. I now enclose a corrected one. Also one adapted from an “hexameter” sonnet I once showed you, entitled “The Two Realities” — & which Philip¹⁶ admires very much: and lastly two other not over cheerful effusions. As Marston is with me today, I have no time to select or copy others as we have something to do together.

I told him that you had said that you intended asking me to bring him down to see you some evening — & he was delighted beyond measure. I read him the Sonnet on the Sonnet, which he thought exceedingly fine.

Ever, in great haste,

Your most faithfully | William Sharp

ALS Lilly Library, Indiana University

¹⁴ Dr. James Martineau (1805-1900), a respected theologian, Unitarian minister, and professor of philosophy, was the younger brother of Harriet Martineau, the essayist and novelist. His principal works are: *Religion as Affected by Modern Materialism* (1874), *Modern Materialism* (1876), *Hours of Thought on Sacred Things* (last series, 1876; 2nd series, 1879), *Ideal Substitutes for God Considered* (1879).

¹⁵ This letter precedes an undated letter to Rossetti in the *Memoir(40-1)* which responds to a letter from Rossetti which criticized the sonnets Sharp had sent to him.

¹⁶ Philip Bourke Marston (1850-1887), known as “the Blind Poet,” was another close of Rossetti. He became a close friend of Sharp, who, after Marston’s death, edited and wrote introductory memoirs to Marston’s *For a Song’s Sake and Other Stories* (London: Walter Scott, 1887) and *Song Tide* (London: Walter Scott, 1888).

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [March, 1880]

Saturday

Dear Mr. Rossetti,

Thanks for your kind invitation to Philip and myself for Monday night — which we are both glad to accept. I found him in bed this morning on my way to the city — but had no scruple in waking him as I knew what pleasure your message would give. We both thank you also for promising to put us up at night.

I infer from your letter that you do not think “The Two Realities” good enough to send to Caine¹⁷: and though of course sorry, I acquiesce in your judgment. I know that none of my best work is in sonnet-form, and that I have less mastery over the latter than any other form of verse. But I will try to improve my deficiencies in this way by acting up to your suggestions. You see, I have never had the advantage of such a severe critic as you before. For instance, I have received praise from many on account of a sonnet you once saw (one of a series on “Womanhood”) called “Approaching Womanhood” — which I enclose herewith — wishing you to tell me *how* it is poor and what I might have made of it instead. As I am writing from the city I have no others by me (but indeed you have been bothered sufficiently already) but will try and give one from memory — which I hastily dashed down one day in the office.

Looking forward to Monday night,

Yours ever sincerely, | William Sharp

Memoir 40-1

To William Michael Rossetti,¹⁸ March 2, 1880

2 March/80

Do not let me disturb you if you are engaged. I am not able to get away in time to call on you at Somerset House, so excuse this liberty.

W.S.

ACS University of British Columbia

¹⁷ Thomas Henry Hall Caine (1853-1931), who later became a popular novelist, was a close companion of Rossetti in 1881 and 1882. Rossetti had suggested Sharp submit one or two sonnets for publication in Caine’s *Sonnets of Three Centuries* (1882). Although Rossetti found fault in Sharp’s first effort, two sonnets eventually passed muster and were included in the volume. Caine’s *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* and Sharp’s *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* both appeared in late 1882, after Rossetti’s death in April. Richard Le Gallienne (*Romantic Nineties*, 1951, p. 20) recalled Oscar Wilde saying: “Whenever a great man dies, Hall Caine and William Sharp go in with the undertakers.” To be sure, both writers were anxious to capitalize on their close relationship with Rossetti, but both books contain useful information.

¹⁸ William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), the painter/poet’s brother. His wife, Emma Lucy (1843-1894), was the daughter of the painter Ford Madox Brown, and she also was a painter. William Michael was educated at King’s College School, London, and entered the Excise Office in 1845. His publications include *Lives of Famous Poets* (1878), *The Life of Keats* (1887), *Dante G. Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (1895), *Memoir of Dante G. Rossetti* (1895), and *Some Reminiscences* (1906). He edited works of the Pre-Raphaelites, the romantic poets, and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Cryseyde*.

To Algernon Charles Swinburne, April 22, 1880

19 Albert St. | Regent's Park. N.W. | 22 April/80

My dear Sir,

It is only because I have the earnest hope of meeting you someday — if only for a few minutes — that I write you this letter and send you the accompanying verses. I would not have cared to send you them at all — they seem very poor indeed in my own eyes — but that my friend Philip Marston urged me to do so, saying he was sure you would be pleased. *I* cannot feel sure about this, but if you will not look to the verses *as* verses but for the meaning that gave them being I shall be content. It was because of the ever growing wonder and admiration which I had for your genius that I wrote them, and I wish that they could convey to you a tenth part of what I feel towards “our greatest lyric poet since Shelley”. You are known and unknown to me. I have heard Rossetti speak of you, and Marston frequently, till I felt as if I also knew you personally; but after leaving them I had only the wish, and the knowledge that I did *not* know you. But then in the “Poems”, in the “Songs”, in “Atalanta”, in “Erechtheus”, in “Bothwell” — ah, I found you there. I think the feelings of all young poets towards you must be those of intense gratitude: you have so enriched the glorious garden of English verse, and left such strong and beautiful seeding-fruits.

It is needless to say that I am looking forward eagerly to your forthcoming volume. Someday it may be my good fortune to meet you; but in any case I shall never regret having written to you, for I know that you will take it as it is meant. The fledgling cannot be blamed if it yearns to the full-throated lark far above it.

Ever yours sincerely — (have I not a right to conclude thus, though I do not know you personally!)

William Sharp

ALS British Museum

To John Elder, November 20, 1880

Nov. 20, 1880

If this note does not reach you by New Year's Day it will soon after — so let me wish you most heartily and sincerely all good wishes for the coming year. May the White Wings of Happiness and Peace and Health brush from your path all evil things. There is something selfish in the latter wish, for I hope so much to see you before long again. Don't despise me when I say that in some things I am more a woman than a man — and when my heart is touched strongly I lavish more love upon the one who does so than I have perhaps any right to expect returned; and then I have so few friends that when I do find one I am ever jealous of his or her absence.

P.S. — I wonder if this Kentish violet will retain its delicious scent till it looks at you in New Zealand. It is probably the last of its race.

Memoir 33

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, December 13, 1880

. . . I spent such a pleasant evening on Saturday. I went round to Francillon's¹⁹ house about 8 o'clock, and spent about an hour there with him and Julian Hawthorne.²⁰ Then we walked down to Covent Garden, and joined the "Oasis" Club — where we met about 30 or so other literary men and artists, including the D. Christie Murray²¹ I so much wished to meet, and whom I like very much. We spent a very pleasant while a decidedly "Bohemian" night, and after we broke up I walked home with Francillon, Julian Hawthorne, and Murray. Hawthorne and myself are to be admitted members at the next meeting.

Memoir 42

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [December, 1880]

Dear Mr. Rossetti,

. . . I wished very much to show you two poems I had written in the earlier half of this year, and now send them by the same post. The one entitled "Motherhood"²² I think the better on the whole. It was written to give expression to the feeling I had so strongly of the beauty and sacredness of Motherhood in itself, and how this is the same, in degree, all through creation, the poem is accordingly in three parts — the first dealing with an example of Motherhood in the brute creation, the second with a savage of the lowest order, and the third with a civilised girl-woman of the highest type.

¹⁹ Robert Edward Francillon (1851-1919), a novelist and journalist, married Rosamund, the daughter of John Barnett, the musical composer. Between 1872 and 1894 he was on the staff of the *Globe*. He belonged to a Pre-Raphaelite group which met at the home of Dr. Westland Marston, the dramatist and the father of Philip B. Marston, where Rossetti and Swinburne, as well as Richard Garnett, William Morris, and Arthur O'Shaughnessy were often entertained. His works include: *Earl's Dene* (1870), *Olympia* (1874), *A Dog and His Shadow* (1876), *Queen Cophetua* (1880), *Gods and Heroes, or The Kingdom of Jupiter* (1892), *Jack Doyle's Daughter* (1894), and *Mid-Victorian Memories* (1914).

²⁰ Julian Hawthorne (1846-1934), son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, was a novelist, journalist, historical writer, and biographer. He lived in London between 1874 and 1881. His publications include: *Saxon Studies* (1874), *Gath* (1875), *Archibald Malmaison* (1878), *Sebastian Strome* (1879), *Dust* (1882), *Fortune's Fool* (1883), *Biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1885), *History of Oregon* (1888), and *Shapes That Pass: Memories and Meditations* (1928).

²¹ David Christie Murray (1847-1907), a novelist and journalist, wrote some thirty loosely plotted novels, many drawn from his experience as a reporter. His works include: *A Life's Atonement* (1879), *Joseph's Coat* (1881), *Val Strange* (1882), *By the Gate of the Sea* (1883), *Rainbow Gold* (1885), *Aunt Rachel* (1886), *Autobiography: A Novelist's Notebook* (1887), and *Recollections* (1908).

²² Published in *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope; Motherhood* (1882). This poem is the subject of an exchange of correspondence with Violet Paget ("Vernon Lee") on the appropriate subject matter of poetry (see letters to Violet Paget).

The other — “The Dead Bridegroom”²³ — is more purely an “art” poem. After reading it, you will doubtless recognise the story, which I believe is true. Swinburne (I understand) told it to one or two, and Meredith embodied it in a short ballad.²⁴ Philip Marston told me the story one day, and, it having taken a great hold upon me, the accompanying poem was the result. After I had finished and read it to Philip, it took strong hold of his imagination also — and so he also began a poem on the same subject, treating it differently, however, and employing the *complete* details of the story, instead of, as I have done, stopping short at the lover’s death, and is still unfinished.

It is in great part owing to his generously enthusiastic praise that I now send these for your inspection; but also because much of what may be good in them is owing to your gratefully remembered personal influence and kindness, as well as your own beautiful work.²⁵

Memoir 43-4

To Eugene Lee-Hamilton,²⁶ [mid-December, 1880]

19, Albert Street | Regent’s Park, N.W. | London | Xmas 1880

Lee Hamilton Esq., Florence.

My dear Sir,

I know you will not consider my writing to you a liberty — there is a freemasonry in art which does away with formalities between brother-artists.

I have of course heard of you from my cousin and fiancée, and she has sent me now and again poems or extracts from poems of yours — which she thought I would like — and some of which have afforded me great pleasure. I have not been able to obtain your book²⁷ from Mudie’s, so cannot, as I should like, mention by name the poems or individual lines with which I am specially pleased. For one, I liked exceedingly your sonnet having special reference to my friend Philip Bourke Marston — and, if you have no objection, I should like to read it to him.

My cousin told me she had read one or two verses from a poem of mine called

²³ EAS said the poem was never published (*Memoir 45*).

²⁴ Identify?

²⁵ Rossetti’s written response to these two poems -- “Motherhood” and “The Dead Bridegroom” -- is contained in a letter from Rossetti to Sharp dated January 1881 (*Memoir, 44*).

²⁶ Eugene Jacob Lee-Hamilton (1845-1907) was the poet-novelist half-brother of Violet Paget (“Vernon Lee”). See note to March 17?, 1881 letter to Violet Paget. In 1873 he was incapacitated by a nervous disease which kept him bed-ridden and completely dependent on his mother and half-sister until 1893-94 when he made an unexpected and complete recovery. Later he traveled to America where, in 1898, he married the novelist, Annie E. Holdsworth. In later life, Eugene Lee-Hamilton and Violet Paget were almost entirely estranged. His works include *Poems and Transcripts* (1878), *Gods, Saints, and Men* (1880), and *Dramatic Sonnets, Poems, and Ballads*, edited by William Sharp for the Canterbury Poets series in 1903.

²⁷ Probably *Gods, Saints, and Men*.

“Motherhood” with which you were pleased. Thinking that the complete poem might interest you, I now send a copy of it by the same post as this. I took great care in the working out of it, as the subject was extremely difficult to evolve without on the one hand falling into the Scylla of the Fleshly School” or on the other into the Charybdis of “Mysticism”. It was written from a deep sense of the beauty and sacredness of Motherhood in *itself*, in whatever form and under all circumstances. So I took 3 typical instances: a tigress, as exemplifying the brute creation — an Australian native, as exemplifying the lowest human savage — and a high-souled, pure-hearted girl as exemplifying the highest level of cultured civilisation.

As artistic accompaniments to this three-fold idea I gave to the first, rich colouring: to the second, a somberness of hue: and to the third, what amount of solemnity and dignity I could convey.

So much for explanation. Of course, by-the-by, I will not require the MS. returned — as I have 1 or 2 other copies taken by the same “Multifold Writer” process. I may mention that the second part is drawn in great measure from personal reminiscence of the time I spent 2 or 3 years ago in the Australian bush myself.

I think you will understand how deeply and sincerely I feel with you in the difficulties under which you have to pursue your art. But high aims and the precious inward vision of the artist are greater than physical weakness.

This will reach you on Xmas: let me offer you my sincerest wishes that the day may be a happy one, and that the coming year may be still more so.

Believe me, | Yours Most Sincerely, | William Sharp

ALS Colby College Library

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, December 20, 1880

19, Albert Street, | Regent’s Park. N.W. | 20:12:80

Dear Mr. Rossetti

Many thanks for your generous response to my information about the subscription for Marston — the 3 guineas shall be duly put down for the triple period: & also for the promise of speaking to others likely to join. I hope something practical may be done either with the commencement of the year, or early in January.

Many thanks also for your kind regards as to my recent illness.

In great haste | yours most sincerely | William Sharp

ALS University of British Columbia

To Elizabeth A Sharp, January 24, 1881

24:1:81.

. . . Well, last Friday was a ‘red-letter’ day to me. I went to Rossetti’s at six, dined about 7:30, and stayed there all night. We had a jolly talk before dinner, and then Shields²⁸ the painter came in and stayed till about 11 o’clock: after that Rossetti read me all his unpublished poems, some of which are magnificent — talked, etc. — and we did not go to bed till about three in the morning. I did not go to the Bank next day,²⁹ as I did not feel well: however, I wrote hard at poetry, etc., all day till seven o’clock, managing to keep myself up with tea. I was quite taken aback by the extent of Rossetti’s praise. He said he did not say much in his letter because writing so often looks ‘gushing’ but he considered I was able to take a foremost place among the younger poets of the day — and that many signs in my writings pointed to a first-class poet — that the opening of “The Dead Bridegroom” was worthy of Keats — that “Motherhood” was in every sense of the word a memorable poem — that I must have great productive power, and broad and fine imagination — any many other things which made me very glad and proud. . . .

Memoir 44-5

To John Elder, February, 1881

Feb., 1881.

I may say in reference to the Religion of Humanity that my sympathy with Comtism³⁰ is only limited, and that though I think it is and will yet be an instrument of great good, I see nothing in it of essential savingness. It is even in some of its ceremonial and practical details a decided retrogression — at least so it seems to me — and though I do not believe in a revealed God, I think such a belief higher and more precious and morally as salutary as a belief in abstract Humanity. Concrete humanity appeals more to my sympathy when filled with the breath of “God” than in its relation to its abstract Self. When I write again I will endeavour to answer your question as to whether I believe in a God or not. My friend, we are all in the hollow of some mighty moulding Hand. Every fibre in my body quivers at times with absolute faith and belief, yet I do not say that I believe in “God” when asked such a question by those whom I am

²⁸ Frederic James Shields (1833-1911), a painter and illustrator in the Pre-Raphaelite style, was a friend of the Rossettis, Madox Brown, Ruskin, Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones. His most important work, begun in 1889 and finished a few months before his death, was a pictorial decoration of the walls in the Chapel of the Ascension on Bayswater Road in London.

²⁹ Shortly after William Sharp settled in London in the late spring of 1878, Alexander Elder, the father of Adelaide and John Elder, found him a position in the City of Melbourne Bank where he was bound as a clerk for three years. His banking career ended in August, 1891, when it became clear to him and his employers that he was unsuited to the work (*Memoir 27, 53-4*).

³⁰ Auguste Comte (1789-1857), founder of Positivism, attempted to transform philosophy into religion by substituting the worship of humanity for the worship of God. His principal works include *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42), *Catechisme positiviste* (1852), *Système de politique positive* (1851-54), *Calendrier positiviste* (1849).

conscious misinterpret me. You have some lines of mine called “The Redeemer”³¹; they will hint something to you of that belief which buoys my soul up in the ocean of love that surrounds it. It were well for the soul, if annihilation rounds off the circle of life, to sink to final forgetfulness in the sea of precious human love; but it is far better if the soul can be borne along that sea of wonder and glory to distant ever-expanding goals, transcending in *love, glory, life* all that human imagination ever conceived. . . .

Farewell for the present, dear friend, | W.

Memoir 33-4

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [February 3, 1881]

Thursday Morning

Dear Mr. Rossetti,

Thanks exceedingly: — I shall only be too glad to spend an hour or two with you on Sunday evening, & shall be with you in time for dinner as you suggest.

I shall bring with me one of my best poems (in its way) — [it is a ballad]³² to read to you: it dates since “Motherhood” & “The Dead Bridegroom.”

Marston enjoyed himself immensely the other night — you being what you are to him of course made the event memorable.

Poor O’Shaughnessy³³ is to be buried at 2:15 at Kensal Green.

Ever yrs gratefully & affectionately | William Sharp

ALS University of British Columbia

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, February 4, 1881

4:2:1881

. . . I have written one of my best poems (in its own way) since writing you last. It was on Tuesday night: I did not get back till about seven o’clock, and began at once to write. Your letter came an hour or so afterward but it had to lie waiting till after midnight, when I finished, having written and polished a complete poem of thirty verses in that short time.³⁴ It is a ballad. The story itself is a very tragic one. Perhaps the kind of verse would be clear to you if I were to quote a verse as a specimen:

³¹ Published in Sharp’s first volume of poems, *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope; Motherhood* (1882).

³² Occasionally Sharp employs square brackets in his letters; this is one of those instances. The ballad was probably “The Son of Allen” which Sharp described in his February 4 letter to EAS.

³³ Arthur O’Shaughnessy (1844-1881) was the author of four volumes of poetry. A brother-in-law of Philip Bourke Marston, he was employed in the British Museum’s Department of History. He died on Sunday, January 30, 1881, which dates this letter Thursday, February 3.

³⁴ Published as “The Son of Allan” in *Romantic Ballads and Poems of Phantasy* (London: Walter Scott, 1889).

And I saw thy face was flush'd, then pale,
And thy lips grow blue like black-ice hail,
With eyes on fire with the soul's fierce bale,
 Son of Allan!
I may have been pale, and may be red —
But this night shall one lie white and dead.
 (O Mother of God! whose eyes
Watch men lie dead 'neath midnight skies.)

Both story and verse I invented myself: and I think you will think it equal to anything I have done in power. It was a good lot to do at a sitting, wasn't it? I will read it to you when you come home again. . . . I enjoyed my stay with Rossetti immensely. We did not breakfast till one o'clock on Tuesday — pretty late, wasn't it? (I told you I had a holiday, didn't I?) He told me again that he considered "Motherhood" fit to take the foremost place in recent poetry. He has such a fine house, though much of it is shut up, and full of fine things: he showed me some of it that hardly anyone ever sees. He has asked me to come to him again next Sunday. Isn't it splendid? — and aren't you glad for my sake? He told Philip³⁵ that he thought I "had such a sweet genial happy nature." Isn't it nice to be told of that. My intense delight in little things seems also to be a great charm to him — whether in a stray line of verse, or some new author, or a cloudlet, or patch of blue sky, or chocolate-drops, etc., etc. Have you noticed this in me? I am half gratified and half amused to hear myself so delineated, as I did not know my nature was so palpable to comparative strangers. And now I am going to crown my horrid vanity by telling you that Mrs. Garnet³⁶ met Philip a short time ago, and asked after the health of his friend, the "handsome young poet"! There now, amn't I horridly conceited? (N.B. — I'm pleased all the same, you know!)

I wrote a little lyric yesterday which is one of the most musical I have ever done. To-day, I was "took" by a writing mood in the midst of business hours, and despite all the distracting and unpoetical surroundings, managed to hastily jot down the accompanying lyric. It is the general end of young *unknowing* love. . . .

I had a splendid evening last night, and Rossetti read a lot more of his latest work. Splendid as his published work is, it is surpassed by what has yet to be published. The more I

³⁵ Philip Bourke Marston.

³⁶ Olivia Narney [Singleton] Garnett (d. 1903) was the wife of Richard Garnett (1835-1906), author and Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum where he worked from 1851-1899. Her husband, considered "the ideal librarian," published extensively in both verse and prose and is best known for *Relics of Shelley* (1862) and *The Twilight of the Gods* (1903). She was also the mother of Edward Garnett (1868-1937). Well-known as an author and dramatist he produced such works as *A Censured Play: The Breaking Point* (1907); *Turgenev* (1917); and *Papa's War* (1919); his wife was Constance (Black) Garnett (1862-1946) who was also well known as a translator of major Russian novelists.

look into and hear his poems the more I am struck with the incomparable power and depth of his genius — his almost magical perfection and mastery of language — his magnificent spiritual strength and subtlety. He read some things last night, lines which almost took my breath away. No sonnet-writer in the past has equaled him, and it is almost inconceivable to imagine any one doing so in the future. His influence is already deep and strong, but I believe in time to come he will be looked back to as we now look to Shakespeare, to Milton, and in one sense to Keats. I can find no language to express my admiration of his supreme gifts, and it is with an almost painful ecstasy that I receive from time to time fresh revelation of his intellectual, spiritual, and artistic splendour. I fancy one needs to be an actual poet to feel this to the full, but every one, however dim and stagnant or coldly intellectual his or her soul, must feel more or less the marvelous beauty of this wedding of the spirit of emotional thought and the spirit of language, and the child thereof — divine, perfect expression. Our language in Rossetti's hands is more solemn than Spanish, more majestic than Latin, deeper than German, sweeter than Italian, more divine than Greek. I know of nothing comparable to it. He told me to call him Rossetti and not "Mr. Rossetti", as disparity in age disappears in close friendship, wasn't it nice of him? It makes me both very proud and humble to be so liked and praised by the greatest master in England — proud to have so far satisfied his fastidious critical taste and to have excited such strong belief in my powers, and humble in that I fall so far short of him as to make the gulf seem impassable.

Memoir 46-9

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, [Winter-Spring, 1881]³⁷

You ask me, if I dislike the Old Masters of Poetry as much as I do those of Painting? and I reply certainly not, but at the same time the comparison is not fair. Most of the old poets are not only poets of their time but have special beauties at the present day, and can be read with as much or almost as much pleasure now as centuries ago. Their imagination, their scope, their detail is endless. On the other hand the Old Masters of Painting are (to me, of course, and speaking generally) utterly uninteresting in their subjects, in the way they treat them, and in the meaning that is conveyed. If it were not for the richness and beauty of their colour I would never go into another gallery *from pleasure*, but colour alone could not always satisfy me. But take the 'Old Masters' of Poetry! Homer of Greece, Virgil and Dante of Italy, Theocritus of Sicily, and in England Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Webster, Ford, Massinger, Marlowe, Milton.

The poetry of these men is beautiful in itself apart from the relation they bear to their times. We may not care for Dryden (though I do) or Prior or Cowley, because in the verse of these latter there is nothing to withstand the ages, nothing that rises above their times. In looking

³⁷ This letter was sent to EAS while she was in Italy during the early months of 1881 (*Memoir 49*).

at Rubens, or Leonardo da Vinci, or Fra Angelico, we must school ourselves to admiration by saying “How wonderful for their time, what a near attempt at a perspective, what a near success in drawing nature — external and human!” Would you, or any one, care for a painting of Angelico’s if executed in exactly the same style and in equally soft and harmonious colours at the present day? Could you enjoy and enter into it apart from its relations to such-and-such a period of early Christian Art? It may be possible, but I doubt it. On the other hand take up the Old Masters of Poetry and judge them by the present high standard. Take up Homer — who has his width and space? Dante — who has his fiery repressed intensity? Theocritus, who has sung sweeter of meadows and summer suns and flowers? Chaucer — who is as delicious now as in the latter part of the fourteenth century. Shakespeare — who was, is, and ever shall be the supreme crowned lord of verse! — Take up one of the comparatively speaking minor lights of the Elizabethan era. Does Jonson with his “Every Man in his Humour”, or his “Alchemist”, does Webster with his “Duchess of Malfi”, does Ford with his “Lover’s Melancholy”, does Massinger, with his “Virgin Martyr”, do Beaumont and Fletcher with their “Maid’s Tragedy”, does Marlowe with his “Life and Death of Dr. Faustus”, pall upon us? Have we ever to keep before us the fact that they lived so many generations or centuries ago?

I never tire of that wonderful, tremendous, magnificent epoch in literature — the age of the Elizabethan dramatists.

Despite the frequent beauty of much that followed I think the genius of Poetry was of an altogether inferior power and order (excepting Milton) until once again it flowered forth anew in Byron, in Coleridge, in Keats, and in Shelley! These two last names, what do they not mean! Since then, after a slight lapse, Poetry has soared to serener heights again, and Goethe, Victor Hugo, Tennyson, and Browning have moulded new generations, and men like Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, Marston, Longfellow, and others have helped to make still more exquisitely fair the Temple of Human Imagination. Men like Joaquin Miller³⁸ and Whitman are the south and north winds that soothe or stir the leaves of thought surrounding it.

We are on the verge of another great dramatic epoch — more subtle and spiritual if not grander in dimensions than that of the sixteenth century. I hope to God I live to see the sunrise which must follow the wayward lights of the present troubled dawn. . . .

On Monday evening (from eight till two) I go again as usual to Marston’s. I called at his door on my way here this afternoon and left a huge bouquet of wall-flowers, with a large yellow

³⁸ Joaquin Miller (1841-1913) was the pseudonym of Cincinnatus Hiner Miller, “The Byron of Oregon.” A horse thief, Portland lawyer, pony-express messenger, newspaper editor, and Indian fighter, Miller fascinated the English who considered him “the frontier poet.” His works include: *Specimens* (1868), *Joaquin et al* (1860), *Pacific Poems* (1890), *Songs of the Sierra* (1877), a Mormon play called *The Danites of the Sierras* (1877), an autobiographical *Life Amongst the Modocs* (1873), and *Memorie and Rime* (1884).

heart of daffodils, to cheer him up. He is passionately fond of flowers. . . .

Memoir 49-51

To Eugene Lee-Hamilton, March 10, 1881

19, Albert Street, | Regent's Park, N.W. | 10:3:81

Dear Mr. Hamilton,

I trust you have not misconstrued my silence since receipt of your letter on “Motherhood”³⁹ — my only excuse is that I am so hard pressed for time, and what little time is left over from reviewing and [my] own literary work I am generally eager to occupy with reading: and moreover I have of late endeavoured to write as little as possible, owing to my not being quite so strong as I ought to be, and the physical act of writing being as a rule far from beneficial.

I honestly thank you for your criticism — what you say in praise is very welcome, and what you have to blame is from your honest conviction. The poet or artist who cannot receive and think over adverse criticism seems to me to lack one of the very qualities most essential to the true artist — humility. Besides, even when adverse criticism appears unfounded it seldom fails of doing at least indirect good — i.e. of course when the criticism is honest and kindly meant.

There was one reason also why I did not answer you again at once — and that was that I saw you completely misunderstood my motive — the *raison d'être* of the poem — and not being very well at the time I did not feel up to explanations. You seem to think my object in writing was to describe the actual initial act of motherhood — whereas such acts were only used incidentally to the idea. I entirely agree with you in thinking such a *motif* unfit for poetic treatment — and more, I think it wd. be in very bad taste and wanting in true delicacy. My aim was something very far from this — and what made me see you had not grasped it were the words “Besides, is not your type of civilised woman degraded by being associated with the savage and the wild beast?” Of course, what I was endeavoring to work out was just the opposite of this. “Motherhood” was written from a deep conviction of the beauty in the state of motherhood itself, of the holy strangely similar bond of union it gave to all created things, and how it as it were forged the link whereby the chain of life reached unbroken from the polyp depths we do see to the God whom we do not see. Looking at it as I did, I saw it transfigured to the Seal of Unity: I saw the bestial life touch the savage, and the latter's low existence edge complete nobility of womanhood, as — in the spirit — I see this last again merge into fuller

³⁹ Published in *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope; Motherhood* (1882). Eugene Lee-Hamilton and Violet Paget saw the poem in manuscript. EAS probably showed it to them while she was in Italy.

spiritual periods beyond the present sphere of human life. In embodying this idea I determined to take refuge in no vague transcendentalism, or from any false feeling shirk what I knew to be noble in its mystic wonder and significance: and I came to the conclusion that the philosophic idea could be best embodied and made apparent by moulding it into three typical instances of motherhood, representing the brute, the savage, and the civilised woman. From this point of view, I considered making the choice of the initial act of motherhood (if it can so be called) — of birth — entirely justifiable, and beyond reach of the reproach of impurity, or even unfitness. As to the artistic working out of these typical *motives*, I gave to the first glow and colour, to the second mystery and weirdness, to the third what dignity and solemnity I could.

These were my aims and views, and I have not yet seen anything to make me change them. I told Marston of your objection, and read him the sentence from your letter I have already quoted — and he said he found it difficult to understand your position, but that it was evident you had quite misunderstood my motive. Under the circumstances you will not think it vain of me when I add that Rossetti — who is now (what I and others have long believed) becoming recognized as not only one of the greatest poets of the XIX century but also one of the greatest since Shakespeare, — considers “Motherhood” in the first order of work, both as regards execution (with one or two exceptions) and idea. He told me that this poem alone should enable me to take a foremost place amongst rising poets: and again that the much dreaded Theodore Watts, the chief as well as the most influential critic in England (and between whom and myself there is no intimacy, as in the case of Rossetti) spoke of it (so I was told) in altogether exceptional terms, and even got enthusiastic over it. Both these men, whose judgement I must look to as the best, look on the *raison d’etre* of the poem exactly as I do myself. I know that you will understand I mention these instances not from any false pride, but simply to help to free myself from any implication of self-prejudice.

So much for “Motherhood”. As for the “Dead Bridegroom” (which I am not sure, by-the-by, whether you have seen or not) I quite admit that the advisability of choosing such subjects is a very debatable one. It is the only one of mine (in my opinion) which could incur the charge of doubtful “fitness”. As a poem, moreover, it is inferior in workmanship to “Motherhood”.

Well, that’s enough about myself I think.

I liked some of the “Poems and Transcripts”⁴⁰ exceedingly, but I must say even the mastery of it you show cannot reconcile me to the hexameter in its English garb. Here and there our language seems to adjust itself to hexametrical rhythm — but such instances suggest to one

⁴⁰ Eugene Lee-Hamilton's first book of poems, *Poems and Transcripts* (1878).

the comparison of angel's visits. The pathos of a "Sufferer" and "Elizabeth" struck me most, and there was one beautiful little lyrical piece which gave me great pleasure — the "Ever Young" I think it was called. I think the hexameter-verse almost certain to flag in power and pall the reader after a time. I have never (or at any rate never do now) used it — tho' I have written one or two things in what are called "false hexameters", a useful enough irregular measure in certain cases, but which requires to be used very sparingly. "The Redeemer",⁴¹ which you have seen, is an example of such.

Altho' "Poems and Transcripts" is more interesting in that it is more personal, I on the whole prefer "Gods, Saints, and Men", which I think contains the best things you have done. There are fine things in *The Last Love of Venus*, both in description and in such fine lyrical verses as these two —

"Say, where is the smoke of her altar,
And where the libations of wine,
And the prayers that the stripling wd. falter
And the wreaths that the maidens wd. twine?"

Of the statues once raised in her honour
How many unshatter'd remain?
And the hymns that heaped praises upon her,
Will man ever breath them again?"

The Fiddle and the Slipper I also think particularly good of its kind, and in the *Rhyme of the Reeds* there is real ballad power. Nor must I forget *The Keys of the Convent*, despite my having much more sympathy with natural human love than selfish conventual seclusion. In *The Bell Founder of Augsburg* I notice some particularly fine lines —

"An awful stillness follows sudden crimes.
The furious wave, which has o'erwhelmed and swallowed
Our innocence, by sudden calm is followed,
X X X X X
The wave has passed, and underneath is death."

While the lines in *The Witness*

"But to be cheated of a single nod,
To be denied the pittance of a smile,
To hear him say, and say again, to God,
That he ne'er saw my face, while all the while
I can read recognition in his eyes."

There is marked fitness of expression — (spoilt slightly by the duplication of the word *while*).

I was glad to hear *The Rival of Fallopius* met with the recognition it deserved.

I often think of you, and it does me good to think of your courage under severe illness: and you will not object I know, to my saying how deeply I sympathise with you. Poetic work

⁴¹ Published in *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope; Motherhood* (1882).

must be a great consolation for you, and I hope to hear of your continued success. Are you engaged on anything new just now?

But it is now very late, and I ought to be in bed. Overleaf I send you the last sonnet [I] wrote, and which perhaps you will care for. It is written from the idea that life is sufficient unto itself apart from its destiny, as to which we can only surmise — and that in any case it is not the mere transitory bubble on the face of the stream it is so often compared to, but something infinite and in its essence unchangeable.

With all good wishes, believe me, Dear Mr. Hamilton,

Yours very faithfully, | William Sharp

If at any time you have leisure or desire to write to me I shall be very glad indeed to hear what you are doing in poetry — and also if you still consider “Motherhood” so unworthy. I am looking forward to seeing your sister in the early summer.

Life's Sufficiency⁴²

God rounds our sunlit day with sunless night
And incompleter are of life with death:
But sunrise every sunset followeth
And darkness travails with new birth of light.
Can the soul's fire then be extinguish'd quite,
Seeing it is no less than the sun's breath,
And more than cluster'd star-spheres borroweth
The central essence of God's infinite might?

Whether, as in the old Lucretian dream,
The corporate being incorporate shall be,
One with the wind, the grass, the hill, the stream —
Or the clear-vision'd soul rejoicing flee
Enfranchis'd — life is more than transient gleam
Of desultory light on death's vast sea.

W.S.

ALS Colby College Library, excerpt in *Memoir* (45-6)

To Violet Paget (“Vernon Lee”),⁴³ March [17?], 1881

19 Albert St: Regent's Park N.W. | March, 1881

Dear Miss Paget

⁴² Probably never published.

⁴³ Violet Paget (1856-1937), daughter of Matilda [Adams] Lee-Hamilton Paget and Henry Ferguson Paget and half-sister of Eugene Lee-Hamilton, was a prolific writer of fiction and works of history, philosophy, and sociology. Her choice of the pseudonym “Vernon Lee,” at the start of her career, reflects the influence of her half-brother upon her intellectual development. Her major works include *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), a pioneer work that brought to light the spontaneous national movement which took place in the music and drama of Eighteenth-century Italy; *Euphorion* (1884), its sequel; *Renaissance Fancies and Studies* (1895); *Genius Loci* (1899); and *The Spirit of Rome* (1906).

I have already heard so much of you both from my cousin and Mary Robinson⁴⁴ that I feel I need to make no apology for forestalling our coming acquaintanceship by now writing — especially as I have just received a long letter from you to Elizabeth with reference to some work of mine which you have seen. Before endeavouring to reply to this letter, let me thank you most sincerely for all the trouble you had about the *Figura Mystica* (decidedly *mystica*) of “Chiaro dell Erma”. Rossetti had taken for granted when he gave me his pamphlet *Hand and Soul* that I wd. understand the opening was as artistically incorrect as the main portion was allegorically true: but unfortunately I did not find this out until after my cousin had written to you on the matter.⁴⁵ I see your letter to her is dated 14th February — I wish she had forwarded it to me sooner that I might have been able to thank you before this.

And now as to your letter. I wrote a week or so ago to your brother as to his criticism on “Motherhood”⁴⁶ and also with reference to his own poems — and in that letter I broadly stated, if I remember right, my views on the question.

But in case you have not seen it I will go for you over the same ground again, taking your letter in detail. You begin by saying “I have been thinking a good deal of late of the School to which that poem *Motherhood* belongs, and of the desirability of a young poet like Mr. Sharp joining it.”

In the first place, your thoughts have found an anchoring place where neither myself nor my poetical and critical friends have yet done: in other words, “Motherhood” never seemed to me or them to belong to any school at all. It certainly could not be spoken of as belonging to the *Fleshy School*⁴⁷ nor could it as to the Transcendental, or the Philosophic pure and simple, or the Didactic, or the Narrative, or the Lyric, or the Dramatic, or the Psychologic, or any other “ic”

⁴⁴ Agnes Mary Frances Robinson (1857-1944, a girlhood friend of EAS, was the daughter of George Robinson, a London banker who was well known in the literary world of the eighties and nineties. He frequently entertained such luminaries as Henry James, Oscar Wilde, George Moore, and Thomas Hardy. She married James Darmesteter, a professor at the College de France. After his death in 1900, she married Emile Duclaux, a famous scientist of the Institute Pasteur. Her principal early works were: *A Handfull of Honeysuckle* (1878), *The Crowned Hippolytus of Euripides: With New Poems* (1881), and *An Italian Garden: A Book of Songs* (1886).

⁴⁵ “Hand and Soul,” a prose tale by D. G. Rossetti published in *The Germ* in January, 1849, tells the story of a painting called “Figura Mistica di Chiaro dell ’Erma.” The tale describes a young man obsessed with art who imitates others to win the fame he so passionately desires. The allegory is centered on the figure of a lady who appears in a vision and instructs the young artist to paint her, saying “I am an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee.”

⁴⁶ See March 10, 1881 letter to Eugene Lee-Hamilton.

⁴⁷ This phrase is most often used with reference to a controversy over an article, “The Fleshy School of Poetry,” Robert Buchanan wrote under the pseudonym Thomas Maitland (*Contemporary Review*, Oct., 1871). Exploiting a Victorian taboo on open sexuality, Buchanan launched a prudish attack on the “fleshy” treatment of physical passion in Pre-Raphaelite art, denouncing Swinburne and Rossetti for their degenerative influence on public morals. In a pamphlet called “Under the Microscope,” Swinburne defended himself with an outburst of pornographic invective chiefly expressed in pseudo-Biblical language. Rossetti, in “The Stealthy School of Criticism” (*Athenaeum*, Dec., 1871), answered Buchanan’s charge of “fleshliness” by saying that in his poetry “All the passionate and just delights of the body are declared — somewhat figuratively it is true, but unmistakable — to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times.”

that men may have fashioned unto themselves. It is nearer the Philosophic, or the Natural, than any other — because what really is the poem is the beautiful idea: — the poetic garniture shrouding it is only a necessary incidental, worthy or unworthy as the case may be: for of course artistic expression is what constitutes the difference between the man who *sees* and writes, and the man who only receptively *sees*, and therefore does *not* write. I was spending the evening lately with Francillon, the author of “Olympia”⁴⁸ and other fine works, and, as a critic, a strong opponent of the Fleshly School of verse — and in talking of some of my writing he said “There is one great charm to me in *Motherhood*, and that is that it is so strongly original — there is no trace of its belonging to the so-called Fleshly School which is so prevalent now — nor indeed of its belonging to any school, or showing any trace of indebtedness to any particular master.”

By the subsequent remarks in your letter, however, and by what I have heard, I infer that by the “School to which *Motherhood* belongs” you mean the Fleshly School. As you will see by the above, I consider your adjudication mistaken.

As to the latter part of the sentence — “the desirability of Mr. Sharp’s joining it” (the Fleshly School) I can honestly assure you that it is the last school of Art to which I shall render my efforts, that I have little sympathy with its present phase, and that I believe both it and mock-Aestheticism will, sooner or later, die a twin and heaven-to-be praised death. But where we differ, I expect, is in what poets and in which doctrines we consider the Fleshly School to embrace. To me, a fleshly (what a hideous word this is by the by — why not some such word as natural, or physical) poet is by no means *necessarily* a disciple of the Fleshly School. With all its faults — poetic and artistic — Walt Whitman is a noble and truly great fleshly or natural poet — but I can imagine no great contemporary writer having a greater contempt for what is called the Fleshly School, or more utter repudiation of its habits of expression. Again, Gabriel Rossetti is frequently spoken of as if at the head of this school: no greater mistake could get abroad. He is intensely spiritual and refined, and as far removed both in spirit and work from the crass materialism of such poets as form this School as Milton or Dante. It is materialism that is weighing down an already weary and overburdened nation — materialism everywhere, and most of all alas! in the hearts of the rising generation of young men and woman — not so much materialism that overlooks the soul, as materialism that has practically no soul, that scorned appendage nowadays being so carefully hidden away and shrouded up. And this materialism is often thought of and spoken of as intimately associated with advancing intellect and culture! Good God, as if intellect were comparable to character, and as if a thoroughly true and whole character could be evolved without the spiritual element: — and is culture to unfold her white

⁴⁸ Published in 1874.

wings and unstained hands and walk serenely forward, while the ground underneath is mire and mud and the air overhead is fog and darkening mist? And it is to this materialism — above all this *intellectual* materialism — that the Fleshly School owes its rise. The tree is known by its fruits.

After this sentence I have quoted from your letter comes a series of remarks following on the statement — “I am persuaded that Mr. Sharp, in choosing the subject he did, was labouring under a confusion of ideas on the subject of what I may call ‘The Ethics of Impropriety’ which is extremely common” etc.

Permit me in turn to point out what seems to me an equally common confusion of ideas on the subject of how true poets write. A poet who is really a poet does not as a rule choose his subject at all — his subject chooses him. As Buxton Forman says in his critical work on Contemporary English Poetry⁴⁹ — “an artist whose ideas are cut as it were with a red hot blade on his very heart cannot always pick and choose his subject; he must often *be chosen* by his subject”: and again, speaking of a well-known poem, — “it is easy to see that neither the incidents nor the thread were arrived at by painful reasoning, or by any other process than by that real poetic intention concerning the nature of which critics must be content to remain profoundly nescient.” I am very glad to see such a well-known critic confessing this inability of non-poets to realise the part-intellectual, part-spiritual, part-emotional quality which is called poetic intuition.

In like manner, *Motherhood* chose me, not I it as a subject. The idea took hold of me, enthralled me with its beauty and significance, possessed me till I gave it forth again in artistic expression. It was not till after the idea had seized my mind and imagination that I began to think of writing such a poem — and even then the whole details of it came in one intuitive flash, and I saw the poem from first to last as it now stands — I had no careful reasoning to go through, no judging of fittableness; no fears as to propriety or impropriety; — I simply had something in me — a pure beautiful idea — and to this I had to give expression. I had nothing to think of afterwards except the mere technical details and artistic presentment — such as glow and colour to the first part, weirdness to the second, dignity and moral beauty to the third.

As to the alleged impropriety of the subject of *Motherhood* I am at a loss to conceive upon what ground such a statement is put forward. I hope your brother does not still misunderstand me after my recent letter, but previously I know he had completely done so from one short sentence in his letter to me on this subject, where he says — “Besides, is not your type

⁴⁹ Harry Buxton Forman (1842-1917), chiefly known for his painstaking editions of Keats and Shelley, worked for forty-seven years in the postal service and was an early advocate of a post office library, later becoming its secretary. He knew and supported Rossetti, Morris, and Meredith. His early works include: *Our Living Poets* (1871), the book Sharp refers to here, and *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Her Scarcer Books* (1876).

of civilized woman degraded by being associated with the savage and the wild beast?" This showed me that he, as I now see you have done also, looked at the *poem* and not at what *made* the poem: he looked at the external description, not at the soul-like animating idea. As Emerson says — it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem; — a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing.⁵⁰ Your objection would have been perfectly valid if, say, the 1st part had been put forward by itself as a complete poem — nay more, it wd. be deserving of both artistic and moral censure as a pure Fleshly School production, without any *raison d'être* apparently than pride in technical workmanship, and recklessness as to revelling in details of things much better left undescribed. But in *Motherhood* this first part is only one of the necessary three sides of the triangle of the central idea, and is never meant for a moment to be read by itself. *Motherhood* is not a theme given in *three* expository poems: it is *one* poem.

I see that both you and your brother have fallen into the mistake of thinking that *Motherhood* was a delineation of Passion, and written to sanctify such. Where the sexual feelings are referred to they are introduced as linked to and giving point to the idea, and never for a moment formed original *motifs*. Animal desire in the first, savage longing in the second, and reminiscence of pure passion in the third parts are each introduced incidentally to the inner *motif*. It might just as well be said that the object of the poem was to give a poetical description of travail: and I for one would never so far degrade the art I follow as to write such a poem with such an object.

I entirely agree with what you say as to the difference between the innocent and the holy and between that which may be done and that which may be described: and also, that merely because such and such a phenomenon exists or has existed it is not therefore desirable or defensible for reproduction in verse. I believe the essence of true poetry to be purity: not the hideous and unnatural malformation, Prudery — but Purity. Purity in intellectual, moral, and physical erudition and thought.

For myself, I cannot conceive any man or woman being the worse of reading *Motherhood*: it seems almost a degradation to myself to stoop to imagine such a thing. If any man could comprehend the spirit, the idea, the teaching of the poem and not be the better of it, he wd. hardly be one we could call high-minded or of refined nature: and if any being (I cannot say *man*) should find in it nothing but sensual pleasure that gratified and fed his lowest appetites, then I say such a man makes it a mirror wherein his own foulnesses are focussed, and would of necessity be such an one as would sneer at the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus

⁵⁰Emerson's "The Poet."

Christ, or such an one as to whom the very name of “woman” carries no faintest breath of purification but only an odour, to a pure man as a death-vapour of unutterable vileness. What *Motherhood* makes clear is *not innocence*, but what is altogether holy and sacred. It is above all a poem for men. Pure, intellectual, and refined women like yourself, Miss Paget, do not understand the *necessity of theoretical* as well as practical purity to men: how men have naturally not only more animalism but also how their outer circumstances tend far more to subdue or destroy their sense of spiritual significance, than in the case of women. I know, as you cannot know, how so many men look on passion, marriage, and motherhood; and not all the poets, critics, and philosophers in Christendom could prevent me thinking that it is a noble aim and worthy of any poet — to help men (blinded by upbringing, or other circumstances) to perceive and realise that passion is *not* lust, is not alone physical desire, but is a blended yearning of body and spirit: — that marriage is not sexual union for the propagation of the race alone, but a true complementary union between two natures akin to each other for the purposes of growth in spiritual beauty and nobility: — and that motherhood is not an outcome alone of the two foregoing, not a painful and unpleasant natural act, but a fact full of the most spiritual significance — a link of unguessed and immeasurable value to the man, a sacrifice of divine import to the woman. This, if I fail not, is and will be one of my main aims in life.

It seems to me that *Motherhood* is an effort in furtherance of this: and I have not yet seen the shadow of reason that can make me alter my belief in the rectitude and fittingness of what I have done. As far as personal affirmation goes, I emphatically deny that, to use your own words, I have made “a very dreadful prostitution of my powers”. Insight is everything; and to those who can honestly see no spiritual affinities in *Motherhood*, I am afraid it must just forever remain “the hocos-pocus in words” which you describe it. It is thus with half-amusement and half-comprehension of your meaning that I read your statements to my cousin as to “the sophistication of ideas *under* which I am labouring”. There is sophistication and sophistication. It is from no petty pride or self-opinionativeness (for I am ever open to argument and opposite views) that I say we are not likely ever to agree upon this matter, as far as my accepting the view you uphold is concerned: — nor is it likely, I think, that my cousin ever will either. I hope not. And now enough as to *Motherhood* and its allied questions — and only one word more as to one other of my poems. Mary Robinson tells me you have read “The Satyr”⁵¹: —unfortunately you have not done so, but only a copy of the original draft which my cousin had in her little book, and which she had not my authority for showing you. “The Satyr” as Miss Robinson has seen it is a very different poem from the one you have seen — being clarified by a truer classicalism and

⁵¹ Probably unpublished.

materially modified as to expression and detail. A clay model often looks suggestive of something less than purity and modesty, while the finished marble statue is white in import as the parian itself.

And now, dear Miss Paget (for I seem to have got to know you better since my letter, and “dear” is the first step from conscious aloofness) believe me when I say I thank you most sincerely for the kind interestedness that prompted your writing the critique you did, and the generous terms in which apart from my subjects, you praise my ‘abilities’. It is doubly flattering when from the author of the “Studies”.⁵²

Pray remember me most cordially to your brother, whose acquaintance I feel it a personal loss I cannot make in the flesh. I earnestly hope he is comparatively well, and that the *Poetry* which is so much to him is proving an openhanded goodness.

I am looking forward to seeing you in June,⁵³ and tho’ I am afraid you will not find a convert, I hope at least you may find a friend in

Yours very sincerely | William Sharp

ALS Colby College Library

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, April 5, 1881

5th April/81

Dear Rossetti,

I am very glad to be able to inform you that the assistant at the bookseller’s I frequent confused the paper edition of your work⁵⁴ with some other — apparently partially with your sister’s⁵⁵ and partially with a cheap edition of Lytton’s *Light of Asia*.⁵⁶ The only paper edition he knows of your book is what you spoke of, and the only one that can be procured cheaper — *The Tauchnitz*.⁵⁷

It’s a good thing there turns out to be nothing in it —

In great haste,

⁵² *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880).

⁵³ Sharp did not make his first trip to Italy until 1883 (*Memoir* 78-9). EAS was in Italy in early 1881 (*Memoir* 44, 49).

⁵⁴ Identify.

⁵⁵ Christina G. Rossetti’s *Poems* (1872). Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894), sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, was a poet of great merit and popularity. Her poetic works include *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *A Pageant* (1881). She also wrote prose stories such as *Commonplace* (1870), nursery rhymes like *Sing Song* (1872), and children’s tales such as *Speaking Likenesses* (1874). For the last 20 years of her life she produced mostly works with religious themes. These very popular books include *Called to be Saints* (1881) and *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892).

⁵⁶ *Light of Asia* was written not by Lytton but by Sir Edwin Arnold. The full title is *The Light of Asia; or, The Great Renunciation — Mahabhinishkramana, Being the Life and Teaching of Gautama . . . as told in verse by an Indian Buddhist* (1879).

⁵⁷ Sharp seems to be saying that the Tauchnitz edition [*Poems*, ed. with a memoir of the author by Franz Huffer (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1873)] is cheaper than the paper edition.

No ill effects of the chill while sonneteering.

Two Sonnets⁵⁸

I.

Love's Prayer.

What gain is it to thee I love thee so,
Through this my love surpasses all loves, sweet?
What profits thee the fervour and the heat

Of my soul's worship — What the gifts I throw
Of joy, love, hope, tears, and passionate woe
Before thee, to be trampled by thy feet
Or raised to bliss delicious and complete?
What matters it though all of these ye know?
O thou, that shinest as a moon of love
On wastes of turbulent wild waves that roll
Day and night, night and day, athwart my soul,
Look once on me from thy still height above;
Speak one low word that I at least may hear
From thine own lips the doom I know and fear.

II.

Love's Answer.

Gain beyond measure that thou lovest so,
Gain beyond hope thy love to me is, sweet.
Dear beyond words the fervour and the heat
Of thy soul's worship—and the gifts you throw
Of joy, love, hope, tears, and passionate woe.
I stoop and lift up from before my feet,
And hug them till my bliss is made complete:
The depths of thy delicious love I know.
O thou who hast made sweet my life with love,
And made its silent placid waters roll
In waves of splendour over my glad soul,
Stoop down and kiss me from thy height above!
Kiss me, and let me cling to thee; I hear
Thy low sweet words, and have no longer fear.

William Sharp

ALS Smith College Library

To Violet Paget, May 16, 1881

19 Albert Street | Regents Park N.W. | 16 May/81

⁵⁸ Probably not published.

Dear Miss Paget,

My cousin having kindly made a copy for me of my last long poem⁵⁹ I now send it to you and your brother. It certainly contains some of the best work I have yet attained to. As you will see, it is (as Rossetti calls it) a kind of spiritual *Childe Harold*, comprising in brief review the rise of Humanity — figured as one man — from a far-off unreachable past thro' successive stages and in various lands down to the present epoch of his history. From the time I first carefully chose the form for its expression (a literary essential not obtaining a quarter of the attention it deserves) to the writing of the last verse I gave it every care, striving to let there be no such thing as an unpoetical verse, and above all seeking to condense judiciously from the mass of material ready to hand.

I have written it from a deep and heartfelt motive, and I hope it will bear to you and others the impress of deep earnestness. Up to a certain point, including the portion dealing with Christ, I know that intellectually you will in the main agree with me — but when in the latter stanzas I unfold my personal belief and aspirations as those that seem to me noblest for Man collectively, I suppose we shall disagree. You told me in your letter that what I believe — what is to me an unspeakable spiritual boon, a hope for the glorious destiny of the individual soul as well as for Mankind collectively — is mere nonsense. Nevertheless, I am weak enough to still determine to cleave to those aspirations and hopes which are to me the highest conceivable, and to try to the utmost of my powers to help others whose spiritual ways are dark, whose souls are oppressed with all the world's woes as well as with personal sorrows.

I am very glad that I did not write this poem two or three years ago, when I shared almost *in toto* the views you yourself hold. At that time Hegel, and Comte, and Spencer, and Huxley seemed to me the High Priests of Truth, and I had as blind a faith in their Reason as you now have. In time (and thro' not pleasant seasons to look back to) I grew out of this material phase: but so deep was my suffering in it, so little of *real* hope for Man could it give me, that I am never tempted to speak harshly or scornfully of those who still dwell therein. Charity — the charity that implies the belief others may possibly be right, or at least reaching towards the same ends by diverse ways — is not a common thing, I am afraid. I shall never forget the intellectual debt I owe to those great writers I have mentioned, and especially to Comte, Darwin, and John Stuart Mill, but I now see that each of them were only for me steps leading to the temple. I am not a Christian, in the acceptance of the term implying belief in his divinity, but I owe far more to Christ than to any other man. He was philosopher, social reformer, poet, teacher, and prophet in one. Tho' some of my relations in Scotland will have nothing to say to me because of my heterodox and what they call atheistic and blasphemous views, and tho' some even in London

⁵⁹ "The Wandering Jew" was not published.

consider me as almost hopelessly morally perverted because my creed is simply “I believe in immortality, and in the conscious Will of God” — I think I can still say I love and reverence that noble spirit who suffered for his fellow man 18 centuries ago as deeply perhaps as many Christians. But whether or not the last verse of “The Wandering Jew” conveys to your mind a different impression, whether, instead of my meaning, the “vaster glory” to come is perfected Humanity alone, I yet trust the poem will not seem to you to have been written in vain. It is moreover poetically the best thing I have done yet.

I asked Miss Robinson to tell you how much I liked and admired your paper in the *Contemporary*.⁶⁰ As I told her, I could have written it myself, as far as agreeing with what you say therein is concerned: only, naturally, I could not help feeling annoyed at the (to borrow your own favourite phrase) sophistication of ideas which leads you to judge of me as you do. What Cyril says in the latter half of page 703 corresponds exactly with what I have always believed and urged not only in conversation and correspondence but also in print: — and the succeeding remarks of Baldwin (i.e. *you*) as applied to myself are utterly unjust. I confess I should side with Cyril in thinking such a young *poet* (God save the mark!) should be birched. Not only did I agree so thoroughly with your paper, I also extremely admired its literary setting, its clear concise style and artistic finish, and beauty of natural detail. You certainly feel Nature poetically. I confess also that it gave me a higher opinion of your critical and literary powers than your long letter on the same subjects did — the latter giving me the impression of being very *young* as well as here and there illogical.

You have been very candid with me: shall I be equally candid with you, and tell you that it seems to me you have a very strong tendency to dogmatise upon every subject that turns up, whether you are intimately acquainted with it or only partially so. I know you will not take this unpleasantly, for you are of far too strong mental calibre to be seriously put about by adverse criticism, especially when offered in no unkindly spirit.

By-the-way, I remember being rather amused (in the letter meant for me addressed to my cousin) at what you said as to my taken-for-granted ignorance of the old dramatists, advising me to read and study them carefully so as to see how pure they were at heart and only unclear in the externals owing to the exigencies of the times they lived in: as for nearly 10 years past they have been my continuous delight. In the first place, I am a little older than yourself instead of younger; in the next, I have had exceptional advantages for wide and varied reading; and in the third, have naturally made myself intimately acquainted with the period which is the most

⁶⁰ Vernon Lee, “A Dialogue on Contemporary Morality,” *Contemporary Review*, XXXVIV (1881), 682-707. As Sharp proceeds to indicate, Cyril, in this dialogue, was intended to be Sharp, while Baldwin speaks for Violet Paget.

glorious our literature has seen. Apart from this, I have and always have had the most intense love for and ceaseless delight in such men as Marlow, Webster, Massinger, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Shakespeare — so much so that I do not think there are many who know and appreciate these great writers more than myself. You can understand, therefore, how half-provoked half-amused I was at the complacent arrogance of your remarks.

But now I hope we know each other better: I certainly do, and the more I hear, see, and read of you and yours the more I am glad of the possibility of numbering you among my few friends.

Please read the first (explanatory) part of this letter to your brother, to whom I hope the poem will give pleasure. I shall be glad to hear from him when he has read it, if he has time and disposition to write. Give him my most sincere greetings, both as now expressed and in the accompanying sonnet, which I have just written specially for him. I also send you one on that exquisite spirit-like thing, the Wind of Spring — in return for the great pleasure your natural descriptions in the *Contemporary* gave me.

Looking forward to meeting you before very long, believe me, dear Miss Paget,

Yours very sincerely, | William Sharp

Spring Wind⁶¹

O full-voic'd herald of immaculate Spring
 With clarion gladness striking every tree
 To answering raptures, as a resonant sea
Fills rock-bound shores with thunders echoing:
O thou, each beat of whose tempestuous wing
 Shakest the winter sleep from hill and lea,
 And rousest with loud reckless jubilant glee
The birds that have not dared as yet to sing:

O wind that comest with prophetic cries,
 Hast thou indeed beheld the face that is
 The joy of poets and the glory of birds —
Spring's face itself: — hast thou 'neath bluer skies
 Met the warm lips that are the gales of bliss,
 And heard June's leaf-like murmur of sweet words?

March/81. | W.S.

N.B. The words “clarion gladness” are taken from the accompanying *Wandering Jew*, verse 33, but haven't had time to make an alteration in the sonnet yet.

A Poet's Greeting to a Brother Poet.

(W.S. To E.L.H.)

⁶¹ “Spring Wind” was published in Sharp's first collection of poetry, *The Human Inheritance; The New Hope; Motherhood* (1882) and in T. Hall Caine's *Sonnets of Three Centuries* (1882). “A Poet's Greeting to a Brother Poet” was probably not published.

The month, in whose warm heart is graven deep
The cuckoo's voice, waits smiling behind May,
Her frolic sister who upon the way
Strews blossoms laughing: from their long dark sleep
Daily the blessed roses stir and creep
From fold and bud: and thro' the twilight grey
That dreams about the haunts of vanish'd day
The culver calleth from the wooded steep.
I, in the busy haunts of men, but dream
Of these, as thou upon thy weary bed:
Yet every day we know the blue skies gleam,
And every night the star-lamps shine, o'erhead.
Is it not well with us that we can feel
At least such memoried raptures o'er us steal?

ALS Colby College Library

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [July 25, 1881]

19 Albert Street | Regent's Park | Monday

My dear Rossetti

Sir Noël Paton⁶² is at present in Kent, & though he is only south for a few days in all he intends if at all possible paying you a brief afternoon visit. He spoke very warmly and enthusiastically of you, and seems really anxious to see you again. It is, however, still uncertain whether he will be able to manage a call or not as he is not only pressed for time but far from well. I told him that to the best of my knowledge you would be at home any afternoon this week, and if he is able to do as he hopes he will look you up on either Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. He leaves again on Friday. If he *cannot* manage it, he told me to give you his kindest remembrances and all good wishes. He has not yet got over the shock of the narrow escape he and Lady Paton & one of their sons had from drowning, after being upset from a small sailing boat on a lonely Highland loch, all having to swim a long distance in a very exhausted condition.

It is becoming a serious case of hope deferred in regard to your book.⁶³ When *is* it coming out? I do hope soon now.

Ever yours affectionately | William Sharp

ALS University of British Columbia

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, July 28, 1881

⁶² Sir Joseph Noël Paton (1821-1901) was a painter and poet whose works include *Poems by a Painter* (1862) and *Spendrift* (1866).

⁶³ This refers to either *Poems* or *Ballads and Sonnets*, both published in London by Ellis and White in 1881. With the exception of four new poems in *Poems*, both volumes were comprised of previously printed works.

My dear Rossetti,

You will be glad to hear that there is no unsatisfactory news of Lady Paton or Sir Noel. I was with the Craiks last night, and Mrs. Craik⁶⁴ was telling me of the extreme enthusiasm of Sir Noël after his visit to you. He had not been well or in good spirits for some days previous, but when he returned to Kent that evening he was like another man. He declared the short time he spent at No. 16 was worth coming from Scotland for alone. Deeply and sympathetically as he had always admired your works, the Beatrice he seems to have found a crowning work of genius: and he told the Craiks on his return that it was one of the very few pictures he had ever seen that gave him an absolute sense of spiritual restfulness and complete achievement. The ideal beauty of the colouring & the whole conception while giving him inexpressible pleasure gave also great pain, for it made him feel, he said, the inferiority of his own work. He would talk of almost nothing else, & Mrs. Craik says she had never seen him so wrought upon before. He thinks it one of the greatest paintings that have ever been produced.

What I now write to ask you is if some afternoon during August I may bring Mrs. Craik to see the Beatrice.⁶⁵ Sir Noël was very anxious she should see it, as she is both one of his chief friends & he has great faith in her art appreciation. She is a great admirer of your work. I know your objections to seeing strangers, but if you would kindly consent to acceding to Mrs. Craik's request it would not only be gratifying to her and a personal favour to myself but also to Sir Noël.

I am looking forward to seeing the latter when I go to Scotland in September, and also to paying a visit to the scene of the murder of James I, — which I am particularly anxious to see after hearing your splendid ballad. I hear your sisters book is out — I heard the Craiks speaking very enthusiastically about it.

Hoping you are well

Yours affectionately | William Sharp

P.S. I am sorry to say the Civil List application as to Dr. Marston⁶⁶ has not been entertained.

⁶⁴ Dinah Maria Mulock (1826-1887), who married George Lillie Craik in 1864, was the author of *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1854). She was a friend of Sir Noel Paton, who provided Sharp an introduction to her, and the godmother of Philip Bourke Marston. Elizabeth Sharp says, "She had a house in Kent, at Shortlands, and to it she on several occasions invited the two young poets." EAS describes one such visit in the summer of 1880 during which Sharp contracted a cold that led to rheumatic fever (*Memoir* 41-2).

⁶⁵ Since Rossetti painted many canvases titled Beatrice, it is difficult to determine which Sharp had in mind. Most likely it is *Beata Beatrix* (1864), which, along with *Dante's Dream*, Sharp considered Rossetti's finest painting.

⁶⁶ Dr. Westland Marston (1819-1890), the father of Sharp's friend Philip Bourke Marston, was a poetic dramatist, a member of the Dickens circle, editor of the *National Magazine* in 1837, and a poetry critic for *The Athenaeum* after 1863. His works include *The Patrician's Daughter* (1842), *Strathmore* (1849), *Anne Blake*

It is a great shame. Gladstone declines a thoroughly deserving literary case, yet grants the large sum of £500/annum to Lady Redcliffe!⁶⁷ It seems to me very unfair.

ALS University of British Columbia

To Elizabeth A. Sharp, September, 1881

Lesmahagow⁶⁸ | Sept., 1881

. . . Yesterday I spent some hours in a delicious ramble over the moors and across a river toward a distant fir wood, where I lay down for a time, beside the whispering waters, seeing nothing but a semicircle of pines, a wall of purple moorland, the brown water gurgling and splashing and slowly moving over the mossy stones, and above a deep cloudless blue sky — and hearing nothing but the hum of a dragonfly, the summery sound of innumerable heather-bees, and the occasional distant bleat of a sheep or sudden call of a grouse. I lay there in a kind of trance of enjoyment — half painful from intensity. I drank in not only the beauty of what I have just described, but also every little and minute thing that crossed my vision — a cluster of fir-needles hanging steel-blue against the deeper colour of the sky, a wood-dove swaying on a pine-bough like a soft gray and purple blossom, a white butterfly clinging to a yellow blossom heavy with honey, a ray of sunlight upon a bunch of mountain-ash berries making their scarlet glow with that almost terrible red which is as the blood of God in the sunsets one sometimes sees, a dragonfly poised like a flame arrested in its course, a little beetle stretching its sharded wings on a grey stone, a tiny blue morsel of a floweret between two blades of grass looking up with, I am certain, a *sense* of ecstatic happiness to the similar skies above — all these and much more I drank in with mingled pain and rejoicing. At such times I seem to become a part of nature — the birds seem when they sing to say things in a no longer unfamiliar speech — nor do they seem too shy to approach quite close to me. Even bees and wasps I do not brush away when they light upon my hands or face, and they never sting me, for I think they know that I would not harm them. I feel at these rare and inexpressibly happy times as a flower must feel after morning dew when the sun comes forth in his power, as a pine tree when a rising wind makes its boughs quiver with melodious pain, as a wild wood-bird before it begins to sing, its heart being too full for music. . . . O why weren't you there?

(1853), *A Life's Ransom* (1857), *A Hard Struggle* (1858), *Donna Diana* (1863), *The Favorite of Fortune* (1866), *Life for Life* (1869), and *Broken Spells* (1873).

⁶⁷ Possibly the wife of Viscount Stratford Canning, Stratford de Redcliffe (1786-1880). He was an important diplomat, particularly in his ambassadorship in Constantinople. Lady Stratford (de Redcliffe) was born ca. 1807 and survived her husband's death.

⁶⁸ Lesmahagow is in Lanarkshire. Sharp had gone to Scotland for two months to visit family and friends (*Memoir*, 54).

*To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, September 10, 1881*⁶⁹

Stockbriggs | Lesmahagow | N.B. | Saturday — 10th Sept./81

My dear Rossetti,

How I wish you were here, as I am sure you would enjoy it so much. . . . Stockbriggs is a fine estate of 6 square miles situated amidst the loneliest moors of Lanarkshire, and there is almost everything one needs in order to make the time pass happily: a nice house, and people who are hospitality incarnate — a fruit garden of 2 acres, with strawberries & gooseberries still in full bloom — the river Nethan, a beautiful trout stream, running close to my bedroom window and for 6 miles thro' the grounds — endless rides in all directions — splendid stretching purple moors within easy distance — around, innumerable places of legendary or historical interest, such as Craignethan Castle (the Tillietudlem of *Old Mortality*) Douglas Castle, St. Bride's Chapel (where repose the brave hearts of the good Sir James Douglas who brought home with his own dead body the Bruce's heart, now buried in Dunfurnshire, — and that of the fierce Archibald Bell-the-Cat — the ancient priory of Lesmahagow — Broken Cross Muir — etc. etc. Where most I enjoy myself, however, is along the solitary banks of the Nethan; it is a true mountain stream, now rushing along in broken falls, now rippling over shallows of exquisite golden-brown hues — now skipping with slow perfect grace of motion under the overhanging boughs of willow, pine, or mountain-ash — and ever and again resting in deep dark linns and pools in deliciously dreamful fashion, the only signs of life being a silver flash from its depths as some large trout or grilse stirs from the shelter of the mottled boulders banking the sides, or when a dragonfly like a living flame flashes backwards & forwards after the grey gnats. Indeed, I never saw such a place for dragonflies — I think there must be vast treasures of rubies and emeralds under these lonely moors, and that somehow the precious stones dissolve and become permeated with the spirit of life, and use up living green fires or crimson and purple flames to flash upon the unseen hill-winds instead of upon a woman's bosom or in the Holy of Holies in an Idolater's Temple.

Between the moors themselves and the Nethan my enjoyment is divided. It is delicious to be alone on these lofty plateaux, with nothing to meet the eye but an apparently endless stretch of long purple waves of swelling heather, broken perhaps here & there by the steel-blue of a pine-wood ridging some far off mound, with above and around a semicircle of intense blue sky, thro' which at startled intervals there falls again and again the wail of a curlew or hoarse cry of the

⁶⁹ EAS included a portion of this letter in the *Memoir* (55-7). In it Sharp was practicing his descriptive powers and attempting to impress Rossetti therewith.

moorcock. The wind seems to blow straight from the depths of heaven, so soft is it and yet so invigorating, so fresh and yet so charged with delicious scents from bog-myrtle, heather, and pine. There is a constant underhum of innumerable insects — bees swaying in the bells of mountain flowers, butterflies quivering over orchis and bracken, gnats dancing in ever shifting circles & seeming to draw a maze of thread against the blue background of the sky, wasps droning out their idle life in the golden sunshine, black, brown, and green beetles rasping away with their sharded wings, voracious dragonflies here there & everywhere — and many others all in one harmonious concert. Sometimes the more definite sounds are varied by the cry of a wandering hawk or the distant bleat of a sheep — but as a rule the grouse, the curlews, and the plovers have it to themselves.

After the gloaming has dreamt itself into night the banks and woods along the stream seem to become a part of a weird faeryland. The shadows are simply wonderful. White owls come out and flit about on silent ghostly wings with weird uncanny cries, & bats begin to lead a furiously active existence. The other night I was quite startled by seeing a perfectly white animal slowly approaching me: it looked remarkably like the ghost of a fox or a wild-cat, but I am afraid it was only a white hare.

So much for my surroundings. As for the few people hereabout they are all charmingly of the old time. After dinner, and while the claret, port, & sherry (the latter, oh so brandied!) are in process of consumption, large toddy goblets with silver spoon ladles and smaller tumblers are handed round to ladies & gentlemen alike. Then come the large silver flagon with the hot water, the bowl with the strictly symmetrical lumps of sugar, 3 of which go to the large tumbler, and the cut crystal decanter of pure Glenlivet.

The custom has great advantages, but it certainly does not conduce to the safe driving of the dogcart home again.

Here is a specimen of a purely Scotch Bill of Fare, for some especially noteworthy occasion: —

Bill of Fare
 A wee drappie Talisher.
 Callipee Broth. _____ Hotch Potch.
 Saumon à la Pottit Heed. _____ Pomphlet à la Newhaven.
 Anither Drappie.
 Mince Collops. _____ Doo Tairt
 Haggis.
 An Eek.
 Stuffed Bubbly Jocks an Hawm.
 Gigot of Mutton wi' red curran jellie.
 Sheep's Head an' Trotters.
 Tatties Biled & Champit. Bashed Neeps.

Jist a wee Donal!
Glesky Magistrates. _____ Sma' peas.
Grozet Pies. _____ Aiple Dumplins.
Ice Puddin wi' cookies
A Guid Dram to keep a' doon.

When I have a house of my own I shall give such a dinner some day, and the Sassenach hearts present shall admit there is no dinner like a Scotch one and no whiskey like the heavenly Celtic brew.

At the end of next week (about the 16th) I go to see Sir Noel⁷⁰ — whom I hope to find well.

I hope you are well yourself, though I wish you were in some such place as this instead of rain-haunted London. May I come & see you again when I come back early in October? I always enjoy so much a visit to 16 Cheyne Walk. Philip⁷¹ has been rustivating at Deal.

And now, au Revoir,

Ever yours affectionately, | William Sharp

I should be much obliged if you wd kindly forward the letter to Hall Caine (by the same post as this) as I do not know his address.

ALS University of British Columbia, excerpt in *Memoir* (55-7)

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, September 17, 1881

16 Rosslyn Terrace | Glasgow W. | 17th Sept./81

My dear Rossetti,

Just received your letter of the 14th this morning, & can only reply by a brief note as I am on the point of leaving my mother's house in Glasgow again.

Philip⁷² has returned to 191 Euston Road, but unfortunately does not seem to be very well — some kind of suppressed cold, I think.

I am so glad to hear that *Dante's Dream*⁷³ has become the property of the corporation of Liverpool, thus opening to the public such a masterpiece of beauty and conception: and I am also glad to hear that you are going out of town for a little, and I only hope you may have good

⁷⁰ Sir Noël Paton.

⁷¹ Philip Bourke Marston.

⁷² Philip Bourke Marston.

⁷³ Rossetti created three paintings titled *Dante's Dream*. The first is a watercolor from 1855, and the second, to which Sharp is referring here, is an oil from 1870. It is, according to Sharp's book on Rossetti, the artist's largest painting, and its full title is *Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice*. The third *Dante's Dream* is an oil from 1878.

weather. I shall give your message to Sir Noël⁷⁴ when I see him on Monday. I had (wonder of wonders for the man of postcards and telegrams) a long letter from him the other day — in which he writes of you as follows: “you will understand how much I am pleased to know that I did not bother Rossetti by breaking in upon his work in June; for I have sometimes feared it must have been otherwise. Certainly I was conscious of being deplorably inarticulate. The fact being that I was so *dumbfounded* by the beauty of his great picture that I was unable to give any expression to the emotions it excited, — emotions such as I do not think any other picture except the Madonna di San Sisto⁷⁵ at Dresden ever stirred within me. Again and again I have attempted to write to him on the subject — but the memory of such a picture is like the memory of sublime and perfect music: it makes any one who *fully* feels it — *silent*.”

“I am so glad for the pig-headed public’s sake, no less than for Rossetti’s own, that it is being exhibited, altho’ I could have wished it had been first seen in London, as the centre of a special exhibition of his works. But as it is, it is well. Fifty years hence it will be named among the half dozen supreme paintings of the world.”

In much haste

Ever yrs affectionately | William Sharp

P.S. My old address, 19 Albert St. is now cancelled — and my address in London till I take new rooms (when I will let you know) will be | 72 Inverness Terrace | Kensington Gardens | W. | where I shall be returning before the end of the month.

ALS University of British Columbia

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [September 22, 1881]

Rosslyn Terrace | Kelvinride Glasgow. | Thursday Evening.

My dear Rossetti,

I promised I would let you know how I found Sir Noël. He is fairly well, but unfortunately both he and Lady Paton have been much pulled down by nursing; their son Victor being just convalescent from typhoid fever. This on the head of the results of their late accident has told against both. It adds also to his insomnia, unfortunately. He is going to give your Camphor remedy a trial, & thanks you for thinking of it.

He is engaged on a fine painting at preset, about which I will tell you when I see you next; & has also finished a particularly fine relief in bronze, illustrating the by no means new

⁷⁴ Sir Noël Paton.

⁷⁵ Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna* (1513) is at the Gemaldegalerie in Dresden.

idea of a good & bad angel striving for the mastery of a man. It is peculiarly his own, however.

You will be glad to hear that when I spoke to him about Shields⁷⁶ not being rewarded for his work according to the measure of its worth, & being at times in stress of deficient means, he said he thought he would be able to do Shields a service by strongly advising the Duke of Westminster to take the cartoons themselves likewise, and at a good price — & also letting him know indirectly that in his (N.P.'s) opinion the designs were underpaid. In default of this, Sir Noel knows of another social potentate who may turn out to be of signal service. I do hope his efforts may not be wholly without avail. He sends you his warmest remembrances with many kind auguries — tho' I daresay some of his family wish that *Dante's Dream* and its author were both permanently damned in perdition, hearing the head of the family refer to it so often and so insistently.

His sister (Mrs. D. O. Hill) has finished the most remarkable and beautiful bust of Shelley I have ever seen. She intends it as a free gift for Shelley's grave, if the Shelleys themselves are agreeable. It closely resembles the fine engraving in Moxon's early edition,⁷⁷ *but stronger*: and is also founded on Mrs. Leigh Hunt's small (& to me, repellent) bust of the poet; & further verified by the small exquisite engraving issued privately for the Shelleys by Colnaghi & Co., of Percy at the age of 14, from a drawing by the Duc de Montpensier. In this latter, I notice a rather marked resemblance to Keats at a later age.

When is the book⁷⁸ to be out? I, for one, am very impatient.

In haste

Ever yours | William Sharp

ALS University of British Columbia

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, September 23, 1881

16 Rosslyn Terrace | Glasgow. W. | Friday. 23 Sept./81

My dear Rossetti,

Your letter from Cumberland dated Tuesday only reached me this morning, hence the delay in reply.

I am glad to be able to comply with your request as to the letter from Sir Noël. My chief reason for not having sent it to you at once was that I might find it useful someday in *proving* the high opinion an artist like Sir Noël had of yourself — and also as a pleasant record of the two

⁷⁶ Frederick James Shields.

⁷⁷ *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Mary Shelley and published by Edward Moxon (London: 1839).

⁷⁸ Either *Poems* or *Ballads and Sonnets*.

men I most like and admire and who have been so kind and generous to me. However, I am only too glad to render it up if it can be of any service to you — and I quite see how some *guarantee* of this nature will go a long way with the worthy Liverpool committee, by strengthening their confidence in the good fortune of having purchased your painting.

As the first page or two related to private matters, I supposed you would not object to its partial dismemberment — however, everything that is necessary for identification is there.

Hoping you will have a pleasant time in Cumberland (thro' which I shall pass on Monday) & be the better of the change, and have decent weather.

In haste | Your affectionately | William Sharp

ALS University of British Columbia

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [early October, 1881]

72 Inverness Terrace | London W. | Thursday.

My dear Rossetti

Just returned from my “villegiatura”, & don't relish London again. Have only time to reply by a hasty line to your note received this morning: I regret what I meant in mere fun was so worded as to make you think it possible Lady Paton & the others disliked now the mention of your name. Let me assure you, what I wrote was merely from a kind of high spirits & had no other origin than in my own confounded love of playful badinage. *Au contraire*, Lady Paton is very glad indeed at her husband having seen you, as it seems to have done him good, & the only sentiment that exists in the family is that of curiosity to see the man and the work of which the head of the family has such a high and enthusiastic opinion. Lady Paton was just saying she felt quite grateful to you for the good you had done Sir Noël.

As to the letter from the latter, just do as you wish yourself. If you would at all like to keep it, by all means do so.

Glad you are having fine weather, & hope it will continue, & that you will be ever so much the better of the change.

In great haste

Yours ever | William Sharp

P.S. My address in future will be | 13 Thorngate Road | Sutherland Gardens | W. | altho' the address heading this note will always reach me also, being my “young woman's”.

ALS University of British Columbia

To Dante Gabriel Rossetti, December, 1881

The Fine Art Society, | (Limd.) | 148, New Bond St. W. | Dec. 1881

My dear Rossetti,

I sincerely hope you are feeling somewhat stronger since I saw you last week — though indeed I was glad to see such a marked change for the better even then. And I trust also that Caine is no longer feeling out of sorts.

I am now writing to you on a matter of business. You have so long refrained from exhibiting that even your best friends are beginning to despair of any such result. But I think you have somewhat changed your mind about this since your Liverpool success. There could not be a better time than next Spring, if an exhibition is ever to come off at all: and I know how much it will weigh with you when I tell you how earnestly (when I was staying with him last September) Sir Noel Paton hoped such an exhibition would now be no longer deferred, and how he urged upon me to use all my persuasive powers to this effect. He meant to have spoken about it when he saw you last July, but forgot in the pleasure his necessarily brief visit afforded him.

An Exhibition early in 1882 could not fail to give very great pleasure to all lovers of art, besides giving a great “fillip” to your reputation, adding in consequence much to the commercial value of your work.

Mr. Huish⁷⁹ has spoken to me with reference hereto, and requests me to write as follows. If you will give your consent to a representative collection of your paintings (say about 15, or from 15 to 20) every assistance will be afforded to you to do so satisfactorily — a well-lit and good-sized gallery would be at your entire disposal, and the hanging could be carried on under whatever superintendence you wished, either by those here including myself (and I could always report and describe to you personally, you know, how matters were) or under the superintendence of Shields⁸⁰ or whomever else you would appoint. I should think Mr. Graham, Mr. Leland, Mr. Rae, Mr. Craven, Ionides, and others wd. be only too glad to gratify the many who know your works but slightly, and also add much to your own reputation, by lending two or more each for purposes of Exhibition.

The best time for this would be beginning with March, or no later than April at farthest — so as to give ample time for “the fame thereof to spread abroad” before the artistic and social season is in full swing.

I need hardly say that every care is taken to prevent damage or loss of any description.

⁷⁹ Marcus Bourne Huish (d. 1921), editor of *Art Journal* from 1881 to 1893, and founder of “The Years Art.” He was also a watercolor landscape painter and, most likely, head of the Fine Arts Society at the time of this letter. His publications include *Greek Terra Cotta Statuettes*; *Year’s Art*; *Japan and its Art*; and *Happy England*.

⁸⁰ Frederick James Shields.

There could be no better place for exhibition than the Fine Art Society's (and I am not saying this simply because I am in it myself) — for it has got a name for having nothing but high-class exhibitions, often undertaken from the reverse of a commercial standpoint, as witness the exhibition at different times of the works of Hunt and Prout, of the Inner drawings, of those of Millais, of Beurich, and now of those of Samuel Palmer.⁸¹

I know you are not using your hand more than necessary at present — so I can look in to talk this matter over (and which I sincerely trust you will acquiesce in) on either Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday nights of this week — | Please send a card to say when you wd. like me to come.

I was in at Ellis & White's today, and your book⁸² is having a steady sale.

Ever yrs affectionately | William Sharp

P.S. I write now, as this is a matter which requires to be settled months beforehand. The Directors have one or two other important intentions in hand, but would be willing to put everything aside for such an Exhibition as yours would be, only they wd. require to know soon. Monetary, or other matters in connection herewith can be better talked over than written about, as I am in haste.

If you agree, would not it be well to get Watts (the artist) or Burne Jones⁸³, or Sir N. Paton to write the notes?

Pray think favorably of this proposition — & thus both do good to yourself and give long-anticipated pleasure to others.

W.S.

ALS University of British Columbia

⁸¹ All are prominent nineteenth century artists.

⁸² Identify?

⁸³ George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898).