



## the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

### **THE YELLOW BOOK: INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 10 (JULY 1896)**

In the summer of 1896, *The Yellow Book's* tenth volume hit the stands, with 15 authors offering 17 verbal texts and 10 artists offering 15 visual texts. First-time literary contributors included Marie Clothilde Balfour, Eva Gore-Booth, K. (Katherine) Douglas King, Vernon Lee, Samuel Mathewson Scott, and Francis Watt. Aline Harland, wife of *The Yellow Book's* literary editor Henry Harland, also contributed for the first time, under the pseudonym Renée de Coutans. Six of the 10 artists were also new. First- (and last-) time contributor J. Illingworth Kaye is represented by his new designs for the title-page and front-cover. He is joined as a new contributor by Katharine Cameron, sisters Frances and Margaret Macdonald, J. Herbert McNair, and Nellie Syrett. The fact that just over half the contributors appear in the periodical for the first time (13 out of 25), and the majority of them are women (9 of the 15 authors, and exactly half of the 10 artists), confirms that Volume 10 maintained the editors' commitment to new and diverse authors and artists.

Israel Zangwill, writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, is one of the only people to review the volume. He himself had been listed as a pending contributor in prospecti, but never actually appeared in the periodical. His response to Volume 10 was extremely positive, albeit somewhat disengaged. Declaring *The Yellow Book* to be "much better worth its price than most books of other colours," he complements the fiction by past contributors Ella D'Arcy, Ménie Muriel Dowie, Henry Harland, and Oswald Sickert, as well as new contributors Balfour, Scott, and Lee. Himself a fiction writer, Zangwill makes no mention of either the issue's poets or its visual artists, although this may be due to verse and visual art making up a relatively small portion of the volume's 336 pages of creative content: roughly 3% and 4.5% respectively. In his one slight criticism, he declares that,

“if the *Yellow Book* keeps up to this level, even the intolerant impudence of the Yellow Dwarf,” who appears in Volume 10, “will not be able to kill it.”

In “Yellow and Green,” a piece in the *National Observer* addressing the latest volumes of *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, the reviewer describes King’s short story as “a rather dull and sordid tale of improbable intrigue,” Sickert’s as “savour[ing] of apprenticeship,” and Harland’s piece as *The Yellow Dwarf* of “singularly poor taste.” The remaining 14 pieces of literature, however, are complement<sup>3e</sup> for their “high level of excellence.” Unlike Harland’s “Yellow Dwarf” essay, the reviewer declares his story “The Invisible Prince” to be the strongest piece of literature in the issue. While commenting on various individual pieces, the reviewer also notably envisions it as a single text, pervaded he notes by a “literature of landscape.” The poetry, the critic summarizes, is not as strong, although he complements the sonnets by Gore-Booth (“mildly reminiscent of Rosetti”) and Garnett. Artwork by Mrs. Stanhope Forbes and Cameron are admired, while the work of Conder and Frances Macdonald are not, the latter being described as “the most wicked and hopelessly symbolic of bogies.”

The comparative decline in reviews of Volume 10, as compared to previous issues, leads one to speculate on the cause, although no definitive reason is possible. *The Savoy* and other newer avant-garde periodicals were taking up some of the attention. *The Yellow Book* had also seen a gradual shift toward lesser known authors and artists. Although Volume 1 had been new to the scene, many of its contributors actually already had established reputations, including Aubrey Beardsley, George Egerton, Henry James, Laurence Housman, George Moore, Joseph Pennell, and Sir Frederic Leighton. Volume 10, meanwhile, boasts nowhere near such a line-up. Other than Vernon Lee, all the contributors to the latest issue who had established reputations had appeared in previous issues of the journal already. And the contributors to this latest volume did not have the combined renown of those in the premier issue. There had also been a gradual increase in female contributors, from Volume 1, with only three writers and no artists who were female, to Volume 10, in which female contributors dominate. With all named reviewers of the periodical being male, an implicit gender-bias appears to underlie the feedback the journal received. And yet, reviewers for Volume 10 refer to female

contributors at least as positively as they do to male contributors, and with roughly equal attention.

Harland suggests one other possible reason for the reduction in critical response. The first written text in Volume 10 is the third and last piece he would publish under his pseudonym of The Yellow Dwarf. In this fake letter to the editor, Harland tortures a metaphor of Dog- and Cat-Literature to differentiate between two dominant forms of contemporary prose. The former is more popular despite being poorly written while the latter is less appreciated but more feminine and beautiful, written “in a complex shaded language all its own, which the Average Man is too stupid or too indolent to learn” (17). Authors of Dog-Literature include Marie Corelli, Arthur Conan Doyle, Jerome K. Jerome, George Moore, and Max Nordau. Those who produce Cat-Literature include Max Beerborhm, Hubert Crackenthorpe, D’Arcy, Dowie, Kenneth Grahame, Henry James, and Alice Meynell.

As literary editor of *The Yellow Book*, it is not surprising that Harland had already published most of the Cat authors he champions. However, he had not published Meynell – who, after Oscar Wilde’s conviction, was concerned of any affiliation with *The Yellow Book* and its publisher John Lane (Hughes 205). Moreover, Moore, although cool to the periodical (Mix 230), *had* appeared in the inaugural issue. Harland’s most curious inclusions in the list of authors of Cat-Literature are John Lane, the publisher of *The Yellow Book* but not known as an author, and Harland himself who, we are enigmatically informed, “has given us some very pretty Grey Kittens” (17). Thus, in Harland’s view, the writers published in *The Yellow Book* were the more complex and profound authors of the period to which the average reader has adopted if not outright “distrust and dislike,” then “mere torpid indifference” (11). By Volume 10, Harland suggests, critics speaking to the average reader had shifted from their early agitated attacks to a state of apathy.

The literary editors –D’Arcy and Harland – are the only two contributors to have two pieces in Volume 10. This decision is obscured somewhat by D’Arcy’s pieces appearing under one title, “Two Stories,” and Harland using his pseudonym of the Yellow Dwarf

for one of his. The longest contributions, however, are by authors who had not published in the periodical previously and would not appear again. Together, Scott's 67-page "La Goya: A Passion of the Peruvian Desert" and Lee's 56-page "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" constitute over a third of the issue's 336 pages of material. The critic of "Yellow and Green" suggests both could have been shortened.

Scott was a respected American anthropologist who, working in the Chira Valley in Peru, uncovered various signs of a thriving pre-Spanish civilization, including burial grounds containing mummified bodies (Scott). His story "La Goya," marked with moments of acute realism and thorough knowledge of indigenous belief systems, includes details taken directly from his scientific writing. The piece is narrated by a foreigner who falls in love with and marries a young Peruvian woman. Through her customs, beliefs, and familiarity with local witchcraft, the narrator becomes enmeshed in the spiritual lives of the locals.

Lee was already an established philosopher and author of psychological ghost stories by the time she published in *The Yellow Book*. A tale of obsession and insanity, Lee's contribution depicts a prince who becomes enamoured of a powerful transpecies female. The work can be read as a critique of late-Victorian society's objectification of women and the natural environment, as well as its view of women as part of the natural environment – an appropriate topic for an issue dominated by female contributors.

Only ten of Volume 10's pages are given to verse, with five less-established poets offering five distinct works. Both Marriott-Watson's "D'Outre tombe" and Gore-Booth's "Finger-Posts" hang on issues of spiritual doubt around life after death, supporting a gothic sense also found in Lee and Scott's stories. Garnett's nature sonnet "An Emblem of Translation" offers an alliterative speculation on the co-dependencies within nature. Coutans's (aka Aline Harland's) "A Lady Loved a Rose" and Wentworth's "Night and Love" are both sentimental pieces on the fickleness of love. In response to her poem "A Lady Loved a Rose," one critic regretted the heroine hadn't chosen "something more animate" for her attentions (qtd. in Mix, 230).

Volume 10 also includes somewhat fewer visual works than it had generally in the past, with 9 of the 15 works being by one of the six new contributors. Notable among these is the art nouveau depiction of irises by English wallpaper designer Kay for the cover, which is echoed on the spine, as well as in the crowded, curvilinear masses of flowers that Kay created for the title page. Lesley Jackson notes that the “quasi-Symbolist imagery and restless composition” of Kay’s works has “a fantastical, dreamlike quality” (19), an element also apparent in art works such as Housman’s now famous “Barren Life,” McNair’s “The Dew” and “Ysighlu,” and Frances MacDonald’s “Ill Omen.”

Volume 10 stands out for its strong Glaswegian influence (see Sawyer 2). The only Scots authors are Marie Clothilde Balfour and Francis Watt (a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson). However, the majority of the contributors of visual art – if not born in Scotland – were associated during the 1890s with the Glasgow School, as was the case with Volume 8 of *The Yellow Book*. D.Y. Cameron is the only Glaswegian in both volumes, the others in Volume 10 being Katharine Cameron and three members of what came to be known as the Group of Four: Frances and Margaret Macdonald (who had moved to Glasgow in the 1890s), and James Herbert McNair. The fourth member, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, did not appear in *The Yellow Book*.

The contributions by Glasgow School members are not aesthetically coherent, each artist displaying distinct styles and subjects. Katherine Cameron’s “Babies and Brambles” suggests her successful career in illustrating children’s books, while McNair and Frances Macdonald both turn to art nouveau styles to depict pagan spiritualism. Margaret MacDonald’s two contributions are stylized, somewhat impressionist works, while Cameron’s two pen and ink drawings display his skill at capturing detail. Of the non-Glaswegians’s works, both Syrett’s “Five Sweet Symphonies” and Housman’s “Barren Life” maintain the PreRaphaelite influence on *The Yellow Book*. Condor’s watercolour of two women outdoors, “Windermere,” effectively captures the play of light and shade. What does mark the cohesion of this issue is the sustained investment in new artists and authors of the British avant garde.

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