



the yellow nineties online

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MARION HEPWORTH DIXON (1856-1936)

“The name, of course, [...] the name counts for something,” declares an editor in Ella Hepworth Dixon's renowned New Woman novel, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), but there is occasionally some confusion about the spelling of Ella's older sister's name. Although born on the 17th of March 1856, her birth was only registered on the 26th of April and her name is given as “Marian,” but on her death certificate she is called “Marian, otherwise Florence Marian Hepworth, otherwise Marion Hepworth,” and in her will she calls herself “Marion.” Some have speculated that she preferred to sign herself as “Marion ” for publishing reasons, because the masculine spelling of her name hid her gender. A more straightforward explanation might be that she was simply distinguishing herself from her mother who was also called Marian, although her name was usually spelt Mary Ann or Mary Anne.

Like her more famous sister, Marion Hepworth Dixon began life as an artist and studied in Paris at the famous Académie Julian at the same time as Marie Bashkirtseff, the celebrated Russian artist who died of tuberculosis before she could develop her full artistic potential, but who is better known today for her intimate *Journal* which was published after her death. In fact, the first article signed by Marion that I have so far found is entitled “Marie Bashkirtseff: A Personal Reminiscence” published in the *Fortnightly Review* in February, 1890. Both sisters contributed to exhibitions in London, but owing to the sudden death of their father in 1879 which left the family in dire financial straits, their artistic careers had to be abandoned. Again like Ella, Marion took to writing to earn her living. Both sisters are mentioned in the *Lady's Pictorial* series on “Lady Journalists” which appeared from November 1893 to February 1894. However, the fact that the older sister is mentioned second and with a smaller, less well-

placed photograph would imply that Marion remained less well-known than her sibling. From correspondence with the publisher Chatto and Windus, it would appear that Marion acted as an agent for a short time for Ella. Ella dedicated *The Story of a Modern Woman* to “My Sister Marian” and, when discussing the novel’s success in her memoirs, Ella mentions being invited out a great deal with her sister.

Marion wrote several short stories, including two for *The Yellow Book*: “A Thief in the Night” – described as “gruesome in the extreme” by the critic in the *Lady’s Pictorial* – in Volume IV and “The Runaway” in Volume XIII. In each case the protagonist in the title turns out, unexpectedly, to be a woman. Marion also contributed at least one short story, “A Desperate Remedy” (again about a female protagonist behaving somewhat unusually) and several book reviews to her sister’s magazine *The Englishwoman*. The majority of her output, however, dealt with art and artists, as her regular articles in, for example, the *Magazine of Art* and *The Studio* would testify. The *Lady’s Pictorial* describes her as “one of our most successful and sympathetic art critics.”

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Valerie Fehlbaum is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She is the author of *Ella Hepworth Dixon: The Story of a Modern Woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), as well as articles on subjects including Marion Dixon, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Oscar Wilde, and the New Woman.

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