



the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

HENRY HARLAND (1861-1905)



Eddy, Sarah J. *Henry Harland*. 1882. Ink portrait sketch on autograph manuscript poem by Harland. Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library, Newark.

Born in New York City on March 1st, 1861, Henry Harland is mainly remembered for the central role he played in the artistic and literary coteries of fin-de-siècle London, especially his editorship of *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897). He was the son of Justice Thomas Harland and Irene Jones Harland of Norwich, Connecticut. Harland studied in New York City College from 1877 to 1880, before briefly attending theology classes at the Harvard Divinity School (1881-1882). He left the USA in 1882 to spend a year in Rome. Upon his return to New York, he worked in his father's legal practice until 1886, while starting to spend his free time writing. In May 1884, he married Aline Herminie Merriam, an American music lover who shared her husband's artistic interests and played a crucial role in his career. Aline also wrote for *The Yellow Book* as "Renée de Coutans," she contributed a love poem (Vol. 10) and a short story (Vol. 12). After Harland died in 1905, she published some of his work posthumously.

Like Oscar Wilde and other fin-de-siècle authors, Harland cultivated the art of

lying and enjoyed fictionalizing his own life. Fascinated by the aristocracy, Harland refashioned himself as the heir of a Russian prince: for this reason, many biographies, including the pre-2004 editions of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, falsely state that he was born in St. Petersburg. At the beginning of his literary career, he wrote under the allegedly Jewish pen name “Sidney Luska,” misleading some of his contemporaries to think he was Jewish himself. Later in his life, he attempted to trace his lineage, hoping to find distinguished aristocrats among his ancestors, and he enjoyed referring to himself and Aline as “Sir and Lady Harland.”

The first book Harland published under the pseudonym “Sidney Luska” was *As It Was Written – A Jewish Musician’s Story* (1885). It was the first in a series of novels depicting the Jewish American circles of his time, which he thought particularly picturesque, and to which he felt very close in spite of his attraction to Roman Catholicism. It was followed by *Mrs. Peixada* (1886), *The Yoke of Thorah* (1887), and *My Uncle Florimond* (1888), which were written in the same vein. Although Harland gave up this pseudonym once his actual identity was revealed, he continues to be recognized as one of the first American novelists to make the Jewish community the centre of his fiction. The style of these early novels is radically different from that of his later romances and half-realistic, half-sentimental descriptions of Bohemian life in Paris, Rome, or London.

In 1889, the Harlands left the USA for Europe, settling first in Paris before moving to London. Here in their flat on Cromwell Road they received many personalities of the 1890s, and were friends with a variety of authors and artists of the time, ranging from the most respectable, such as Edmund Gosse, to the most avant-garde, such as Arthur Symons, Aubrey Beardsley, and Frederic Rolfe (aka Baron Corvo). In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Harland published the novels *Grandison Mather* (1889), *Two Voices* (1890), and *Mea Culpa* (1891), as well as two collections of short stories, *A Latin Quarter Courtship* (1889) and *Mademoiselle Miss* (1893), all under his actual name. These are transitional texts heralding the type of fiction he was to produce during his *Yellow Book* years.

Some of them are already inspired by his fascination for Bohemian life and the aristocracy, and obviously influenced by his great admiration for Henry James and Guy de Maupassant, whose styles he strove to imitate.

During the summer of 1893, at Sainte-Marguerite, Brittany, the Harlands were the centre of a small group of novelists, art critics, and artists, including Charles Conder, Dugald S. MacColl and Alfred Thornton, who shared an interest in avant-garde art and publications. The GROB – named after some of its participants, Littelus Goold and three sisters named Robinson – was a kind of literary camp with an unconventional, at times eccentric, atmosphere. It was here that MacColl made the daring suggestion of creating a new magazine in which the letterpress and the art would be independent of each other. A few months later, on January 1st, 1894, Harland and Beardsley allegedly discussed the launching of a new magazine that would publish works unlikely to be accepted by mainstream publishers. John Lane was contacted at The Bodley Head, and he immediately expressed his enthusiasm: the first volume of *The Yellow Book* was released in April 1894, with Beardsley as art editor and Harland as literary editor.



Beerbohm, Max. *The Yellow Dwarf*. 1896. Ink on paper. *The Yellow Book* 11 (Oct. 1896): 7.

With fourteen realistic short stories or sentimental romances to his credit, as well as three satirical essays under the pen name “The Yellow Dwarf,” Harland was the only author who contributed at least one story or article to each volume of *The Yellow Book*. Some have suggested that he published two other stories under the pseudonyms “Scott Matthewson” (“La Goya: A Passion of the Peruvian Desert,” Volume 10) and “Robert Shews” (“The Elsingfords,” Volume 11), though there is no actual proof of this. Harland’s *Yellow Book* stories were also included in two of his collections – *Grey Roses* (1895) and *Comedies*

and Errors (1898). While he never became the equal of James and Maupassant, he did contribute to the development of the short story as a genre. His fiction often presents artists struggling with poverty in Paris, Rome, or London, or aristocrats struggling with the increasing power of the middle class. As such, it reflects the preoccupations of many fin-de-siècle artists who, like Wilde, considered the artistic and social elites to be a last stronghold against what they saw as growing social mediocrity. Another characteristic of Harland's *Yellow Book* stories is the nostalgia many of his characters express for the golden years of their childhood, which only involuntary memory can revive, and then only for privileged moments. One critic even described Harland as a forerunner of Marcel Proust (O'Brien).

In Volumes 7, 9, and 10 of *The Yellow Book*, Harland published three overtly polemical "letters to the editor" (that is, to himself). These appeared under the pen name "The Yellow Dwarf" – a reference to the French "Nain Jaune," initially a cruel fairy tale character and later the title of at least two early 19th-century French satirical magazines. The three essays rekindled the audience's waning interest in the magazine after Wilde's trials and Lane's dismissal of Beardsley as art editor in April 1895. The piece in Volume 9 was accompanied by Max Beerbohm's mysterious depiction of a yellow dwarf wearing a black mask – notably the only colour plate in the whole print run of the magazine. These "letters to the editor" adopt an ironic tone, attacking in a light though incisive manner both authors and readers of the late-19th century, and at times challenging the quality of even *The Yellow Book* itself. Harland also contributed critical essays to other magazines and books – including a piece on the short story that gives an interesting insight into the genre ("Concerning the Short Story").

Harland was famous for his eccentricities more than for the quality of his writings. His literary fame was slow to come, and only *The Cardinal's Snuff Box*, published in 1900, met with some success. Two other works followed: *The Lady Paramount* (1902) and *My Friend Prospero* (1904). All three novels reflect his

late conversion to Roman Catholicism and focus on the rediscovered beauty of the Catholic faith. The tuberculosis from which Harland had been suffering for years ultimately compelled him to spend long months in the milder and drier climate of San Remo, Italy. He died there on December 20th, 1905, but was later buried in his family's hometown of Norwich, Connecticut. He left behind the incomplete manuscript of *The Royal End*, which his wife finished and published in 1909. His correspondence is to be found primarily in the collections of the Boston Public Library, Columbia University, and Westfield College in London.

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Selected publications by Henry Harland

Novels

As It Was Written: A Jewish Musician's Story. New York: Cassell, 1885. [Sidney Luska].

The Cardinal's Snuff Box. London; New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1900.

Grandison Mather; or, An Account of the Fortunes of Mr and Mrs Thomas Gardiner. New York: Cassell, 1889. [Sydney Luska].

The Lady Paramount. London; New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1902.

A Land of Love. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1887. [Sidney Luska].

Mea Culpa – A Woman's Last Word. New York: John W. Lovell, 1891.

Mrs Peixada. New York: Cassell, 1886. [Sidney Luska].

My Friend Prospero: A Novel. New York: McLure, Phillips, 1904.

My Uncle Florimond. Boston. D. Lothrop 1888. [Sidney Luska].

The Royal End: A Romance. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1909. Posthumous publication, completed by his wife, Aline Merriam Harland.

Two Voices. New York: Cassell, 1890.

Two Women or One? From the Mss. of Dr. Leonard Benary. New York: Cassell, 1890.

The Yoke of Thorah. 1887. New York: Cassell, 1896. [Sidney Luska].

Short Stories

Comedies and Errors. London; New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1898. Includes nine *Yellow Book* short stories: "Rosemary for Remembrance," *The Yellow Book* 5 (Apr. 1895): 77-96; "Tirala-Tirala," *The Yellow Book* 6 (July 1895): 65-76; "The Queen's Pleasure," *The Yellow Book* 7 (Oct. 1895): 29-70; "P'tit Bleu," *The Yellow Book* 8 (Jan. 1896): 65-93; "Cousin Rosalys," *The Yellow Book* 9 (Apr. 1896): 25-53; "The Invisible Prince," *The Yellow Book* 10 (July 1896): 59-87; "The Friend of Man," *The Yellow Book* 11 (Oct. 1896): 51-79; "Flower o' the Clove," *The Yellow Book* 12 (Jan. 1897): 65-109; "Merely Prayers," *The Yellow Book* 13 (Apr. 1897): 19-50.

Grey Roses. London: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1895. Includes five *Yellow Book* short stories: "Mercedes," *The Yellow Book* 1 (Apr. 1894): 135-142; "A Broken Looking-Glass," *The Yellow Book* 1 (Apr. 1894): 142-148; "A Responsibility," *The Yellow Book* 2 (July 1894): 103-115; "When I Am King," *The Yellow Book* 3 (Oct. 1894): 71-86; "The Bohemian Girl," *The Yellow Book* 4 (Jan. 1895): 12-44.

A Latin Quarter Courtship, and Other Stories. New York: Cassell, 1889.

Mademoiselle Miss, and Other Stories. London: William Heinemann, 1893.

Play

The Light Sovereign. With Hubert Crackanthorpe. London: Lady Henry Harland, 1917. Posthumous publication.

Articles / Essays

"A Birthday Letter." *The Yellow Book* 9 (Apr. 1896): 11-22. ([The Yellow Dwarf]).

"Books: A Letter to the Editor." *The Yellow Book* 7 (Oct. 1895): 125-143. ([The Yellow Dwarf]).

"Concerning the Short Story." *Academy* June 5, 1897: 6-7.

"Dogs, Cats, Books and the Average Man." *The Yellow Book* 10 (July 1896): 11-23. ([The Yellow Dwarf]).

"Octave Feuillet's Novels." *The Romance of a Poor Young Man*. By Octave Feuillet. Trans. by C.G. Compton. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1902. v-xxvii.

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Alexander, Calvert. *The Catholic Literary Revival*. 1935. New York: Kennikat Press, 1968. 209-214.

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