



the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE (1866–1947)



Sickert, Walter. *Bodley Heads. No. I: Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. 1894.* Charcoal Drawing. London. *The Yellow Book* Volume 4.

Richard Thomas Gallienne (the “Le” was a later addition by Richard) was born in Liverpool on January 20, 1866. He was the eldest child of John (originally Jean) Gallienne, employed since 1855 at the Birkenhead Brewery, and Jane Smith, from Baxenden, just outside of Liverpool. Le Gallienne had six sisters and three brothers (two of whom died young). He was married three times and the first two marriages each produced a daughter. His first marriage in October 1891 to Eliza Mildred Lee was cut short by her death from typhoid fever in May 1894. This death, according to Le Gallienne’s biographers Richard Whittington-Egan and Geoffrey Smerdon, was to have a lasting effect on the remainder of his life (255-56). A year later, in May 1895, he began an affair with Julie Nørregaard (anglicized as Norregard). They were

married in February 1897, separated in October 1903, and divorced in July 1911. In October of that year, he married Irma Hinton, former wife of the American sculptor Roland Hinton Perry. His daughters, in order, were Hesper Joyce and the actress Eva; he also had a stepdaughter from his third marriage, Gwendolyn, a painter.

Le Gallienne attended the Middle School of Liverpool College from June 1875 to December 1881 and afterwards, at the instigation of his father, was articled to a firm of chartered accountants. Le Gallienne took no interest in this career path and it came to

an end in December 1888 when he failed his final accountancy examinations. His ambition had long been to write books rather than balance them. The year before he failed his examinations, he had published his first literary work, *My Ladies' Sonnets* (1887), and was reviewing books for *The Academy*. The book of poems brought him to the notice of John Lane, whom he met (probably along with Elkin Mathews) in June 1888 (Nelson 14-16). He moved to London in February 1889, and the following month his collection of poems *Volumes in Folio* became the first book to be published under The Bodley Head imprint by the new Elkin Mathews-John Lane collaboration. (Mathews and Lane, and subsequently Lane alone, would continue to publish works by Le Gallienne until 1924.) When Lane formally became Mathews's publishing partner in January 1892, Le Gallienne became their first reader.

Le Gallienne was active as a reader, critic, lecturer, and author throughout the 1890s. In June 1891, he took over the position of book critic on the *Star* vacated by Clement Shorter, signing with the pseudonym "Logroller." He was also a member of the Rhymers' Club, which met at the Cheshire Cheese, and which published (through The Bodley Head) two collections of verse: the *Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1892) and *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1894).

After his separation from Nørregaard in 1903, Le Gallienne left England permanently to live in the United States, where he had largely been resident since October 1900. He continued to write and publish, but was unable to build the successful literary career he had hoped for in America. His romantic perspective was increasingly seen as old fashioned and, after 1925, his output declined sharply. In the autumn of 1927, he and his third wife moved to France, where they lived mostly in Paris and Menton, although they were forced to take refuge in Monte Carlo for the remainder of World War II after the defeat of France in June 1940. Le Gallienne died in Menton on September 16, 1947 and is buried in the English Cemetery there, near Aubrey Beardsley's grave.

Le Gallienne appears in all but four volumes of *The Yellow Book*. His first contribution, "Tree-Worship," a substantial poem comprising eighteen quatrains in alternate rhyme, appeared as the second textual piece in Volume 1, between Henry James's "The Death of

the Lion” and Max Beerbohm’s “A Defence of Cosmetics.” The poem is a fanciful meditation by the speaker on the experiences of an ancient tree, which culminates in the speaker imploring the tree to “accept [his] worship” since he is seeking a god, all other gods having failed him. Somewhat contradictorily, the poem concludes with a reference to “all-loving” God and a description of the tree not as a god, but as “God’s best Angel of the Spring.” This poem garnered a fair amount of derisive comment in the reviews of the first volume, *The New Quarterly* remarking: “It will be confessed few poets have taken more words to say nothing” (‘A Yellow Melancholy’). Le Gallienne’s next contribution was the lead-off poem of Volume 4, “Home...,” which Whittington-Egan and Smerdon describe as “a terrible testament to the agony of spirit in which Richard found himself after Mildred’s death, and by its very sincerity is fused into true and wonderful poetry, every line of which is heavy with the dread nostalgia of the bereaved” (269). This volume also contained Le Gallienne’s portrait, drawn by Walter Sickert, as the first in the series of “Bodley Heads” to appear in the magazine. Le Gallienne’s third *Yellow Book* publication, “Song,” consisting of two quatrains in alternating rhyme, appeared in Volume 5. Probably another tribute to the deceased Mildred, the poem expresses the speaker’s sense of the presence of an unnamed “she” in natural phenomena such as sunlight, plant growth, the movement of birds, and “every wistful, waiting star.” These three poems were republished in Le Gallienne’s collection, *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Elegy, and Other Poems Mainly Personal* (1895). “Song” was later included in the *Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1900*, edited by Arthur Quiller-Couch (1906). Le Gallienne’s work was retained in Quiller-Couch’s second edition of the anthology, including poems up to 1918 (1939), but was dropped from Helen Gardner’s newly selected 1972 edition (including poems up to 1950).

Despite his popular reputation as a poet, the remainder and the majority of Le Gallienne’s *Yellow Book* contributions were prose. The short story “A Seventh-story Heaven” (the opening text selection of Volume 7) is an idyllic and elegiac vignette idealizing Richard’s bohemian life at his “literary loft” at 29 Trafford Chambers, Liverpool, “a tall dingy pile of offices” where he lived from October 1889 to April 1891, during the courtship of his first wife Mildred (Whittington-Egan and Smerdon 115-20, 298).

The remainder of Le Gallienne's contributions is a series of "Prose Fancies" published in installments of four (in Volumes 6 and 9), three (in Volume 8) and two (in Volumes 12 and 13), although he embedded poems into three of these pieces (in Volumes 6, 9 and 12). The fancies of Volume 6 are short essays on a range of subjects: "On Loving One's Enemies"; "The Dramatic Art of Life"; "The Arbitrary Classification of Sex"; and "The Fallacy of a Nation." They are modeled, in subject matter, tone, style, and use of inversion and paradox, on Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* (1891). Those in Volumes 8, 9, 12 and 13 are stories reflecting on a range of subjects and themes, some featuring the narrator's interactions and conversations with a character called Sphinx, inspired by Julie Nørregaard (Whittington-Egan and Smerdon, 379). The final illness (from tuberculosis) of Le Gallienne's old schoolfellow Theodore Craig London (1867-1895) was the inspiration for the bittersweet "About the Securities" (Volume 9) (Whittington-Egan and Smerdon 95). Along with "A Seventh-story Heaven," the pieces from Volumes 6, 8 and 9 were included in Le Gallienne's *Prose Fancies (Second Series)* (1896). (Le Gallienne's first collection of *Prose Fancies* had been published in 1894.) Those of Volumes 12 and 13 were republished as the first four pieces in *Sleeping Beauty and Other Prose Fancies* (1900).

Prose Fancies (Second Series) also contains "The Boom in Yellow," an essay written in a somewhat flippant tone on the cultural triumph of the colour yellow and a defense of its traditionally positive associations. While admitting "no doubt there are many [...] yellow disagreeables," Le Gallienne asserts "we prefer to dwell upon the yellow blessings" (88): "Let us dream of this: a maid with yellow hair, clad in a yellow gown, seated in a yellow room, at the window a yellow sunset, in the grate a yellow fire, at her side a yellow lamplight, on her knee a Yellow Book" (87). The essay distances both the colour and the periodical from their popular association with decadence; it begins with a discussion of green and the green carnation, "which is, indeed, the badge of but a small schism of aesthetes, and not worn by the great body of the more catholic lovers of beauty" (79). Oscar Wilde, who had been tried and convicted for gross indecency with males the previous year, had been popularly associated with the green carnation in large part because he was the model for Esmé Amaranth in Robert Hichens's *The Green Carnation*

(1894). He was also wrongly supposed to have had a volume of *The Yellow Book* with him when he was arrested at the Cadogan Hotel— a legend repeated by Le Gallienne in *The Romantic '90s* (164). (The book he was holding was in actuality *Aphrodite*, a novel by Pierre Louÿs [Hyde 154 n. 1]).

In *The Romantic '90s*, Le Gallienne notes that “*The Yellow Book* has become the symbol of the period and the two or three writers and artists to whom the word ‘decadence’ may perhaps be applied have been taken as characteristic of a time which was far from being all ‘yellow,’ or ‘naughty,’ or ‘decadent’” (162). He argues that the contributors to the periodical, as well as those people who are associated with the 1890s, had only one thing in common – the publisher John Lane. While admitting that the quarterly “certainly struck the psychological moment, and the shock which it gave the British public [...] was deep and lasting,” he also remarks that, except for Beardsley’s drawings, “it is hard to realize why it should have seemed so shocking” (226-27). *The Romantic '90s* also contains Le Gallienne’s reminiscences of people associated with *The Yellow Book*: Lane, Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, Stephen Phillips, Henry Harland. The book closes with an appreciative reminiscence of Wilde, who had been an idol to La Gallienne from his youth and who, the author points out, is missing from the pages of *The Yellow Book* (242). In Le Gallienne’s judgment, Wilde “is, beyond comparison, the incarnation of the spirit of the 90s” (269), a spirit which was for Le Gallienne progressive rather than decadent:

He may be said to have included Huxley and Pater and Morris and Whistler and Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Max Beerbohm in the amazing eclecticism of his extravagant personality, that seems to have borrowed everything and made everything his own. Out of the 1890s chaos he emerged an astonishing, impudent microcosm. (269)

Le Gallienne looms relatively large in the literary history of the 1890s but, beyond his association with that decade, his work has largely been neglected. He was included in the anthologies compiled by Stanley Weintraub, Derek Stanford, and R.K.R.Thornton in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was a resurgence of interest in the 1890s. Osbert Burdett regards him as one of the representative poets of the “Beardsley Period” (along

with Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, and Arthur Symons) (93), who “embodied the public idea of the poetic personality” (186), but stresses his importance as a reader and reviewer in shaping the literary landscape of the Nineties over his achievement as a poet (poor, in Burdett’s estimation). Bernard Muddiman is similarly dismissive of Le Gallienne’s literary output, characterizing it as “watery Wildism” (58). For James G. Nelson, Le Gallienne’s work contains little of the Nineties temperament: “while affecting the pose of the aesthetic young man who worshipped Pater and Rossetti, Le Gallienne was at heart a good old-fashioned Victorian sentimentalist who liked to gush over young love and write lyrics about birds and flowers and compose odes to autumn” (215). Holbrook Jackson describes him as a “a sort of *fin de siècle* Leigh Hunt” (41), and commends his “bookish but always charming romances” (226), while noting that some of Le Gallienne’s works, including perhaps his most famous prose work, *The Quest of the Golden Girl* (1896), “have characteristics which would have made their appearance irrelevant before or after the decade in which they were published” (228). If for nothing else, Le Gallienne will be remembered as a characteristic personality of the 1890s who played a significant role at the Bodley Head during its formative years and was a major contributor to the defining periodical of the Nineties, *The Yellow Book*.

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"'A Yellow Melancholy': *The New Quarterly*." Rev. of *The Yellow Book* 1. *Current Literature* June 1894: 503. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2010. Web. [April 15, 2013]. <http://www.1890s.ca>