

DECADENT FEMINISM: 'NEW WOMAN' WRITERS IN THE ARCHIVES

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP) project – Summer 2022

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Catalogue of books in the University of Reading Special Collections and the University of Reading Library

INTRODUCTION

The 'New Woman' era emerged in the 1890s, including authors such as Sarah Grand, E. Nesbit, Michael Field, Alice Meynell, George Egerton, and some less renowned writers such as 'Lucilla', Alice Edwardes, and Emily Hickey. Many of these authors have unfortunately faded into obscurity, but luckily their books remain. Titles include Field's *Attila My Attila*, Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, Vernon Lee's *Vanitas: Polite Stories*, Egerton's *Discords*, and Anodos' (Mary E. Coleridge) *Fancy's Guerdon*. In 1894, Sarah Grand wrote her essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', and promptly gave a name to the movement.

New Woman writing as a genre is harder to pin down, especially as it is an endogenous category, meaning that it was named within the era by its contemporaries, and so different writers had different opinions on what *made* a New Woman. However, most works incorporated social commentary, often from a pre-suffrage feminist or socialist angle. This stirred up controversy in late Victorian Britain, as New Woman writers were going to university, lobbying for sexual and political autonomy, and generally, as Carolyn Christensen Nelson says, 'arguing that the separate spheres [for men and women] was a construct of society and culture rather than a biological mandate...[and demanding] that women be given the same opportunities and choices as men'.¹ Following legal reform, women were allowed to retain property after marriage, and hence were becoming increasingly capable of living without the necessity of marriage. For example, the two authors that were Michael Field, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, lived together as a lesbian couple on inherited money from Bradley's father.

The New Woman engaged with the *fin de siècle* movements like Decadence and Aestheticism. Decadents such as Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley ran in the same literary circles as some New Women, like Vernon Lee (aka Violet Paget), George Egerton (aka Mary Chavelita Dunne) and Ella D'Arcy. The Decadents' commitment to shocking the middle class with their scandalous writings and lifestyles matched the New Women's, who sought to challenge tradition, and opened discussions about women's suffrage and sexual autonomy. Some women sent their works into decadent publications such as the *The Yellow Book*. Its publishers, John Lane and Elkin Mathews, welcomed submissions from women writers, and published many New Woman works.

Grand, in her essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' (1894), describes the New Woman as in 'silent contemplation... she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong'.² She blames men for berating women, and chastises women for their supposed meek submission to patriarchal society. While Grand does not say much about the qualities of a New Woman, she certainly paints a picture of a motherly, intellectually superior woman. In her novels, the female

¹ Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 'Introduction' in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Broadview Press Ltd., 2001) p. ix

² Sarah Grand, 'A New Aspect to the Woman Question' in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Broadview Press Ltd., 2001) p.142

characters were often autonomous, such as Evadne in 'The Heavenly Twins' (1893), who effectively disowns her husband after finding out he has syphilis from illicit sexual activity prior to their marriage.

Ouida, aka Maria Louise Ramé, wrote an article criticising the New Woman and her refusal to disclose the 'remedy' for women's suffering. She pokes fun at Grand's idea that women 'graciously refrained from preventing'³ men's mishandling of the world, suggesting that the irony does not occur to the New Woman. Instead of the 'overweening and unreasonable grasping at...positions [of power]',⁴ Ouida proposes that the New Woman focus on the 'immense fields of culture untilled'.⁵ She argues that women can pursue any sort of artistic endeavour they choose to, without needing to 'steal' men's techniques. She calls the New Woman vain and overestimated in her own value. However, instead of providing any sort of counter to Grand's New Woman, and the advancement of women's emancipation, Ouida insists that women 'till' their own sphere in order to produce better children and society.

Charles Elkin Mathews (1851–1921) was a publisher and bookseller, who studied in Bath and London before establishing himself as a legitimate publisher in Exeter in 1884. In 1887, he moved back to London where he and John Lane (1854–1925) founded The Bodley Head. Bodley Head books garnered a particular meaning among the literary circles of London. As a small publisher, the company took on works from unknown and rebellious authors, who would not have been published otherwise. Bodley Head books were known for breaking with literary, social, and moral conventions. Mathews was more conservative in his choices of publications, but John Lane, as the more forceful of the two, convinced him to publish more controversial works. In 1894, the partnership collapsed, and Mathews returned to bookselling and publishing less outlandish works. In contrast, Lane made the company a welcoming space for daring works, including New Woman ones.

This catalogue contains many books from Mathew's own collection, the majority of which were published by his two companies. Some books are one of only 100 copies, and it is sobering to think that without the copies in the catalogue, some of these writers would have been totally forgotten. As the twentieth century progressed, fewer and fewer of the New Woman authors remained in print, and modernism delivered a mortal blow. Some authors, such as 'Lucilla', remain only a pseudonym, with nothing but their works to give any clue as to who they were. Others used their real names, such as Alice Edwardes, but their lives, too, have been lost to history.

Building this catalogue meant I had to decide what to include and what to exclude. I was not discriminatory as to genre, since the New Woman expressed her views on society just as strongly through poetry and non-fiction as she did in fictional prose. However, the window of time I worked within was more flexible, as the University's collections included New Woman *writers*, but not necessarily works by them that were published in the 1890s. Edith Nesbit's *Ballads & Lyrics of Socialism* was published in 1908 but included works by her that had been written during the New Woman period. John Oliver Hobbes (aka Pearl Mary Teresa Craigie) was another example; the only copies of her work that the University owned were published in 1905, though she wrote steadily throughout the 1890s. The New Woman movement spread beyond Britain, and there are some American, European, and South African (Olive Schreiner) authors who have contributed to this catalogue.

Further cataloguing work could be made; I believe there are probably more works by New Woman authors within the University's collections, perhaps by women using pseudonyms. The New Woman

³ Ouida, 'The New Woman' in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Broadview Press Ltd., 2001) p.154

⁴ Ouida, p.155

⁵ Ouida, p.156

herself is a character that existed in writings stretching back to the 1860s, and so works including a New Woman could be made into a sub-catalogue.

Though many have been lost to time, some New Woman works have survived and remain important up to today. E. Nesbit is still remembered for her children's stories, particularly for *The Railway Children*, though perhaps less so for the literary and political criticism she published in the 1890s. This new catalogue can hopefully contribute to wider efforts to include New Women and their works in the Victorian canon, so that they can be deservedly studied as a literary movement in their own right.

Secondary Research:

Buzwell, Greg, 'Daughters of decadence: the New Woman in the Victorian fin de siècle' (2014), <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/daughters-of-decadence-the-new-woman-in-the-victorian-fin-de-siecle>

Cunningham, A.R., 'The "New Woman Fiction" of the 1890's' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 17.2 (1973), pp.177–186, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3826183>

Dowling, Lina, 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890's' in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 33.4 (1979), pp.434–453, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2933251>

Hreno, Tine, 'Writers in London in the 1890s' (2013), <http://1890swriters.blogspot.com/2013/07/isnt-that-dandy.html>

Parker, Sara, 'Poets and lovers: the two women who were Michael Field' in *The Conversation* (2020), <https://theconversation.com/poets-and-lovers-the-two-women-who-were-michael-field-130411>

Stetz, Margaret Diane, 'Sex, Lies, and Printed Cloth: Bookselling at the Bodley Head in the Eighteen-Nineties' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 35.1 (1991), pp.71–86 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827765>

Stetz, Margaret Diane, "'The mighty Mother cannot bring thee in": E. Nesbit in the Wilderness' in *Victorian Poetry* Vol. 33.2 (1995), pp. 221–232 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40002402>

Tusan, Michelle Elizabeth, 'Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics during the Fin-de-Siecle: 1997 VanArsdel Prize' in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 31.2 (1998), pp. 169–182 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20083064>

Whelan, Shona, 'Decadence: A man's world?' in *Varsity*, (2021), <https://www.varsity.co.uk/arts/22239>

1888

Call number: XX(2053177.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Atherton, Gertrude

Title: What Dreams May Come: A Romance

Publishing info: [Auckland: The Floating Press (1888)]

Notes:

1889

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--HIC

Personal author: Hickey, Emily H.

Title: Verse-Tales, Lyrics, and Translations

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1889)]

Notes:

1890

Call number: STORE—57477

Personal author: Schreiner, Olive

Title: Dreams

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (Reprint 1925. First published 1890)]

Notes:

1891

Call number: PAMPHLET BOOK--T011

Personal author: Caird, Mona

Title: The Position of Women

Publishing info: [Congleton: Mrs Wolstenholme Elmy (1891)]

Notes:

1892

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION—FIE

Personal author: Field, Michael (pseudonym for Cooper, Edith and Bradley, Katherine)

Title: Stephania

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, Vigo St. (1892)]

Notes: Inscribed 'J. Todhunter from DLT. Oct. 1893'

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--FIE (58328)

Personal author: Field, Michael

Title: Sight and Song

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1892)]

Notes:

Call number: XX(2033032.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Lee, Vernon (pseudonym for Paget, Violet)

Title: Vanitas: Polite Stories

Publishing info: [New York: Lovell, Coryell & Co., (1892)]

Notes:

1893

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION—MEY

Personal author: Meynell, Alice

Title: Poems

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1893)]

Notes: Inscribed 'Edith Calvert in memory of a summer's day. 6.7.94'

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--MEY

Personal author: Meynell, Alice

Title: The Rhythm of Life

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1893)]

Notes: Inscribed 'Edith Calvert in memory of a summer's day. 6.7.94'

Call number: CHILDREN'S COLLECTION—821.8-RAD

Personal author: Radford, Dollie

Title: Songs for Somebody

Publishing info: [London: David Nutt (1893)]

Notes:

Call number: ROBERT DAWSON COLLECTION—214

Personal author: Robins Pennell, Elizabeth

Title: To Gipsyland

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (1893)]

Notes: Robert Dawson Collection copy: Publisher's original beige cloth binding with red letters and design to front board and spine; Gold ex libris label with black horse's head; Author's inscription: 'To Leonard Whilely(?), from Elizabeth Robins Pennell, Joseph Pennell, 13.11.93.'

1894

Call number: STORE--45602

Personal author: Barlow, Jane

Title: Irish Idylls

Publishing info: [London: Hodder and Stoughton (1894)]

Notes:

Call number: STORE—07015

Personal author: Barr, Amelia Edith

Title: The Bow of Orange Ribbon

Publishing info: [London: James Clarke & Co. (1894)]

Notes:

Call number: XX(2127119.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Blind, Mathilde

Title: The Ascent of Man

Publishing info: Originally published 1894

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-EGE

Personal author: Egerton, George (pseudonym for Dunne Bright, Mary Chavelita)

Title: Discords

Publishing info: [London: John Lane (1894)]

Notes: Small drawing with label 'D. 1444' on first page

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--EGE

Personal author: Egerton, George

Title: Keynotes

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, Vigo St. (1894)]

Notes: Signed 'W.H Campbell Treesbanth(?) 1894' on cover; signed 'E.M Gardin' on first page

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--FAR

Personal author: Farr, Florence

Title: The Dancing Faun

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1894)]

Notes: Initialled 'J.Q(?)' on first page

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-GRA

Personal author: Grand, Sarah

Title: The Heavenly Twins

Publishing info: [London: William Heineman (1894)]

Notes: Mrs E.D. Mansfield bequest (July 1956)

Call number: PRINTING COLLECTION—821.89-CHE

Personal author: Hopper, Nora

Title: Ballads in Prose

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Bodley Head (1894)]

Notes:

Call number: STORE--67257

Personal author: Robinson, Agnes Mary Frances

Title: Froissart

Publishing info: [Paris: Hachette et cie, (1894)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--TYN

Personal author: Tynan Hinkson, Katharine

Title: Cuckoo Songs

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1894)]

Notes:

1895

Call number: STACK—823.89-DAR

Personal author: D'Arcy, Ella

Title: Monochromes

Publishing info: [London: John Lane (1895)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-OUI

Personal author: Ouida (pseudonym for Ramé, Maria Louise)

Title: Views and Opinions

Publishing info: [London: Methuen & Co., Essex St. (1895)]

Notes: 1st edition

Call number: XX(2032485.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Sharp, Evelyn

Title: At the Relton Arms

Publishing info: [Boston: Robert Bros. (1895)]

Notes:

1896

Call number: STORE—51834

Personal author: Bell, Florence

Title: The Story of Ursula

Publishing info: [London: Hutchinson (1896)]

Notes:

Call number: STORE—07104

Personal author: Braddon, M.E.

Title: London Pride, Or When the World Was Younger

Publishing info: [London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd. (1896)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-COR

Personal author: Corelli, Marie

Title: The Murder of Delicia

Publishing info: [London: Skeffington & Son, Piccadilly (1896)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-BAL

Personal author: Clothilde Balfour, Marie

Title: Maris Stella

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Vigo St (1896)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--FIE

Personal author: Field, Michael

Title: Attila My Attila

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews (1896)]

Notes: Inscribed 'with the author's Kindest Regards'

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-HEN

Personal author: Henniker, Florence

Title: In Scarlet & Grey

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Vigo St. (1896)]

Notes: Inscribed 'Magdalen Idef(?)'

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-HOL

Personal author: Holmes, Eleanor

Title: A Painter's Romance

Publishing info: [London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd., Great Marlborough St. (1896)]

Notes: Inscribed 'B H from E.H, Sept 1897'

Call number: XX(2033032.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Lee, Vernon

Title: Hauntings: Fantastic Stories

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Bodley Head (1896)]

Notes:

1897

Call number: STORE—67257

Personal author: Alma Tadema, Laurence

Title: Realms of Unknown Kings

Publishing info: [London: Grant Richards (1897)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--ANO

Personal author: Anodos (pseudonym for Coleridge, Mary E.)

Title: Fancy's Guerdon

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1897)]

Notes:

1898

Call number: STORE--07098

Personal author: Braddon, M.E.

Title: Rough Justice

Publishing info: [London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd. (1898)]

Notes:

Call number: STORE—08259

Personal author: D'Arcy, Ella

Title: Modern Instances

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Bodley Head (1898)]

Notes:

Call number: DONALD GORDON COLLECTION—Y5/047

Personal author: Gore-Booth, Eva

Title: Poems

Publishing info: [London: Longmans, Green & Co. (1898)]

Notes:

1899

Call number: STORE—96109

Personal author: Atherton, Gertrude

Title: A Daughter of the Vine

Publishing info: [London: Service and Paton (1899)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--FUR

Personal author: Furlong, Alice

Title: Roses and Rue

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1899)]

Notes: Inscribed 'For dear Edie, 14 April '99'

Call number: XX(2053334.1) (EBOOK)

Personal author: Nesbit, Edith

Title: Royal Children of English History

Publishing info: [London: Raphael Tuck & Sons (1899)]

Notes:

Call number: CHILDREN'S COLLECTION—823.9-NES

Personal author: Nesbit, Edith

Title: The Story of the Treasure Seekers: Being the Adventures of the Bastable Children in Search of a Fortune

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (1899)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--THE

Personal author: Various, includes Anodos

Title: The Garland

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1899)]

Notes:

1900

Call number: STORE—86587

Personal author: Blind, Mathilde

Title: The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind (ed. Arthur Symons)

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (1900)]

Notes:

Call number: STORE—07183

Personal author: Broughton, Rhoda

Title: Foes in Law

Publishing info: [London: Macmillan (1900)]

Notes:

1901

Call number: RESERVE—823.912-GLY

Personal author: Glyn, Elinor

Title: The Visits of Elizabeth

Publishing info: [London: Duckworth & Co., Henrietta St. (1901)]

Notes: Inscribed '(?) S.C Mansfield, Feb 1907'

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--LUC

Personal author: Lucilla (pseudonym for unknown)

Title: Songs of Lucilla

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1901)]

Notes:

1902

Call number: RESERVE—821.89-CUS

Personal author: Custance, Olive

Title: Rainbows

Publishing info: [London: John Lane, Bodley Head (1902)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.912-GLY

Personal author: Glyn, Elinor

Title: Reflections of Ambrosine

Publishing info: [London: Duckworth & Co., Henrietta St. (1902)]

Notes: Inscribed 'M. E. C Mansfield fr. G.F.M Xmas /02'

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--FLE

Personal author: Macdonald Fleming, Alice and Macdonald Kipling, Alice

Title: Hand in Hand: Verses by a Mother and Daughter

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1902)]

Notes: Inscribed 'RLomah(?)'

1903

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--EDW

Personal author: Edwardes, Alice

Title: Lyrics and Unfinished Romances

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1903)]

Notes: Contains two literary notes on other books by the publisher, and a request for the book to be reviewed by the Devon Daily Gazette

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--EGE

Personal author: Egerton, Alix

Title: The Lady of the Scarlet Shoes and Other Verses

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1903)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.912-GLY

Personal author: Glyn, Elinor

Title: The Damsel and the Sage

Publishing info: [London: Duckworth & Co., Henrietta St. (1903)]

Notes:

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--MOO

Personal author: Moore, Evelyn

Title: The Company of Heaven

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1903)]

Notes:

1904

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--BAL

Personal author: Baldwin, Mrs Alfred (pseudonym for Baldwin, Louisa)

Title: A Chaplet of Verse for Children

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1904)]

Notes:

1905

Call number: ELKIN MATHEWS COLLECTION--GOR

Personal author: Gore Browne, Dorothea

Title: Sweetbriar: A Pastoral

Publishing info: [London: Elkin Mathews, Vigo St. (1905)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-HOB

Personal author: Hobbes, John Oliver (pseudonym for Craigie, Pearl Mary Teresa)

Title: A Study in Temptations and a Bundle of Life

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (1905)]

Notes:

Call number: RESERVE—823.89-HOB

Personal author: Hobbes, John Oliver

Title: The Flute of Pan

Publishing info: [London: T. Fisher Unwin (1905)]

Notes:

1908

Call number: RESERVE—823.912-NES

Personal author: Nesbit, E.

Title: Ballads & Lyrics of Socialism (1883-1908)

Publishing info: [London: The Fabian Society, 3 Clements Inn (1908)]

Notes: