



LITERATURE AND CULTURE
AT THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE*

TALIA SCHAFFER

Literature and Culture at the *Fin de Siècle*



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Literature and Culture
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To my students, who teach me more than I teach them.





Table of Dates

- 1880 George Eliot dies, symbolizing the end of the era of great Victorian realist novels.
- 1881 W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* skewers aesthetes. Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*. First Boer War begins.
- 1882 Married Women's Property Act, allowing wives to retain some of their own property and conduct business in their own names. The Society for Psychical Research founded.
- 1883 Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*; Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*.
- 1884 Amendment to give women the vote defeated by the Prime Minister, William E. Gladstone. "Ouida" (Mary Louise de la Ramée), *Princess Napraxine*.
- 1885 W. T. Stead's explosive exposé, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon"; H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Leopold II takes over the Congo, initiating a regime of spectacular brutality. Invention of the "safety bicycle," with both wheels the same size, gives women independence and encourages "rational dress." The Indian National Congress forms.
- 1886 Two novels about the cost of repression: Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and James, *The Bostonians*. Gladstone introduces the Irish Home Rule bill; it is defeated.
- 1887 Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, celebrating 50 years of her reign. Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*.
- 1888 George Eastman invents the box camera. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*. Jack the Ripper's gruesome murders of prostitutes.
- 1889 Charles Stewart Parnell, charismatic leader of the Irish independence movement, is destroyed by the revelation of his affair with a married woman, Kitty O'Shea. George Bernard Shaw and Beatrice and Sydney Webb, *Fabian Essays in Socialism*. Deaths of poet Robert Browning, poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, and novelist Wilkie Collins.
- 1890 W. B. Yeats founds the Rhymers' Club, a group of poets including Ernest Rhys, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, Richard Le Gallienne, and Arthur Symons. The London Underground (subway) opens. Two scandalously sexual novels: Lucas Malet, *The Wages of Sin*, and Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (serial version; book version in 1891).

- 1891 George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, and Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, both cited by conservative critics as evidence of the decline of decency.
- 1892 Alfred, Lord Tennyson dies, and a deservedly obscure poet named Alfred Austin succeeds him as the Poet Laureate. Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Irish Home Rule bill is defeated again.
- 1893 Henry Ford's first automobile. Two significant plays: Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, and Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The most popular New Women novel: Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins*. Another defeat for the Irish Home Rule bill.
- 1894 The term "New Women" popularized when Grand and Ouida write dueling articles in the *North American Review*. Several controversial New Women novels: Mona Caird, *Daughters of Danaus*, and Iota, *The Yellow Aster*. Debut of the aesthetic journal, *The Yellow Book*, instantly famous for its provocative cover illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley. Kipling, *The Jungle Book*; Shaw, *Arms and the Man*. Stevenson dies.
- 1895 Two scandalous novels depicting cohabiting couples: Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (dubbed "Jude the Obscene" by one hostile reviewer), and Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did*. H. G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*. Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, his wittiest play. Max Nordau's *Degeneration* appears (in English translation), accusing Wilde of egoism bordering on madness. In May Wilde is convicted of "gross indecency" and sentenced to two years' hard labor.
- 1896 John Addington Symonds collaborates with Havelock Ellis on *Sexual Inversion*, suppressed, altered, rejected, and prosecuted in England. A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*. The Klondike Gold Rush. Kitchener's campaign to reconquer the Sudan.
- 1897 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrates 60 years on the throne, the longest reign in British history. Two major works of fantasy: Wells, *The Invisible Man*, and Bram Stoker, *Dracula*.
- 1898 James, *The Turn of the Screw*. Beardsley dies of tuberculosis at 25, begging his friends to destroy his "bawdy drawings" (they didn't). Wilde, "Ballad of Reading Gaol," published with his prison identification C.3.3. as the author's name. Gladstone dies.
- 1899 Second Boer War begins, pitting the British against the Boers (farmers of Dutch descent) for control of northern South Africa. Kipling, "The White Man's Burden."
- 1900 Wilde dies in a squalid Paris hotel. Max Planck develops quantum theory. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*. Australian Commonwealth forms. Antonio Gaudi designs Parc Guell in Barcelona.

- 1901 Queen Victoria dies, succeeded by Edward VII. Guglielmo Marconi's wireless transatlantic radio transmission. Bestselling novels: Malet, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, and Kipling, *Kim*.
- 1902 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, a landmark study of imperialism's ravages in Africa. The Boers surrender, ending their guerilla campaign. James, *The Wings of the Dove*.
- 1903 Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*. The Wright brothers' first successful flight.
- 1904 Conrad, *Nostromo*; James, *The Golden Bowl*; G. K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*; J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*; Shaw, *Man and Superman*; J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*. Yeats and his associates found the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to perform Irish plays.
- 1905 Henri Matisse exhibits his Fauve paintings. Shaw, *Major Barbara*. Sinn Fein, agitating for Irish self-governance, founded.
- 1906 John Galsworthy, *The Man of Property*. Paul Cézanne dies. The Dreyfus Affair, in which Captain Alfred Dreyfus was framed as a traitor because he was Jewish, ends with Dreyfus formally cleared of all charges.
- 1907 The Labour bill to give women the vote is defeated. Conrad, *The Secret Agent*. Kipling wins the Nobel Prize. Lord Baden-Powell founds the Boy Scouts.
- 1908 Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*; Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*; E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*. Riots in Dublin over Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Henry Ford produces the Model T.
- 1909 Wells, *Tono-Bungay*. Imprisoned suffragettes go on hunger strike and are force-fed.
- 1910 Forster, *Howard's End*. Edward VII dies, succeeded by George V. Art historian Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibition, about which Virginia Woolf later reminisces, "on or about December, 1910, human character changed."



Preface

Literature and Culture at the Fin de Siècle is the first reader to make the fascinating texts of the period from 1880 to 1910 available for classroom use. With famous poems, controversial journalism, and moving short stories, *Literature and Culture* gives a wide range of readings suitable for undergraduates and graduate students, designed for easy adaptation to many different types of courses. This book presents texts by major authors like Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, and W. B. Yeats, juxtaposing canonical masterpieces with neglected but significant literary texts. It reveals the period's new theories and new styles of writing, ranging from aestheticism to naturalism, from psychoanalysis to degeneration, from imperialism to the New Women movement. The *fin de siècle's* political and sexual upheavals fascinate students and scholars today, and *Literature and Culture* offers the full range of the era's writing in a way that has never before been possible.

I have organized this volume into four main sections, designed to demonstrate the period's richly complex cultural formations. For instance, "Aestheticism" not only includes the key manifestos of the aesthetic movement by Whistler, Wilde, Beerbohm, and Symons, but also juxtaposes them with Vernon Lee's fascinating dialogues of aesthetic philosophy and Alice Meynell's haunting meditation on the meaning of color. The light comedy of the most famous aesthetic prose finds a darker shadow in Una Ashworth Taylor's sexually charged parables. Similarly, "New Women" reproduces the central documents of this embattled feminist cause, including the pivotal exchange between Sarah Grand and Ouida that popularized the term and the much-discussed George Egerton short story "A Cross Line." But I have also included a range of poetry—not normally perceived to be part of the New Women corpus—that offers voices both militant and jubilant, comical and wistful. Just after Egerton's celebratory tale of female sexual choice I have placed Ella D'Arcy's unforgettable depiction of male cruelty towards precisely this sort of sexually adventurous women. You will find the period's anxieties about social and physical degeneration, urban decay, sexual perversity, and philanthropic and socialist programs represented in "Mind and Body," with urgent prose by George Bernard Shaw, Havelock Ellis, and Charles Booth, not to mention W. T. Stead's infamous exposé of child prostitution. You will also find A. E. Housman's poetry in this section, pointing out the contrast between Housman's willed pastoralism and contemporary urban blight. Another unusual connection emerges in "England and Its Others," when representative works from the Celtic Revival share space with British fantasies about India and Africa, suggesting how the tale of a timeless Irish prehistory might have served English interests as well as nascent Irish nationalism. I have also made a point of contrasting the canonical

works of imperialist discourse with other, often less well known, work that writes back against them. Thus Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy" meets Alice Perrin's "In the Next Room," which imagines fear, not love, as the keynote of interracial relations, and indeed Kipling's poems and stories find counterparts in work by Laurence Hope and Toru Dutt, women who wrote from (and identified themselves with) India.

By mixing famous works with more unusual texts, I hope to jolt readers into reconsidering, arguing, rethinking what we thought we knew about the late nineteenth century. This book works hard to avoid the usual approach of depicting the period's literary output as composed of the individual iterations of Great Writers who emerged at well-spaced intervals. I have chosen not to reproduce novels that are already widely available in print, some in Longman Cultural Editions: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Dracula*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Kim*, *Trilby*, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Turn of the Screw*. Instead I have selected texts that are just as fascinating but much harder to find. My selections have also been constrained by national and chronological limits: This volume is restricted to the British experience of the *fin de siècle*, across roughly 30 years (1880s–1910s). A wider historical and international range of readings in many of these issues may be found in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 2 (Romantics/Victorians/Twentieth Century) and *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*.

Although the *fin de siècle* was only a few decades long, it boasts an exceptionally rich range of fascinating literature—some newly rediscovered—and I hope you find this anthology an enjoyable way into the period. *Literature and Culture* presents the unquestioned classics of the era, illuminated by the contemporary culture of the periodical press, political cartoons, parodies, and memoirs. From the cheerful nonsense of Gilbert and Sullivan's "If You're Anxious for to Shine" to Stead's despairing "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," from the optimistic forecast of Grand's "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" to the futile dismay of Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, we can read many different *fin de siècles* in *Literature and Culture*, a collection that tries to communicate and celebrate, not resolve, some of the vast complicated vitality of its chosen era.

Such a project could not have been done alone, and in the past five years of working on this volume I have become acutely aware of how much I have learned and how grateful I am to the scholars from whom I have learned it. I am deeply indebted to the excellent notes in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 2, by William Sharpe and Heather Henderson, and I have tried to emulate their freshness, wit, and range of knowledge. I have learned much from Elleke Boehmer's scrupulously edited and impressively comprehensive collection *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870–1918*. My notes on "The Decay of Lying" benefited from Linda Dowling's admirably thorough scholarship in *Oscar Wilde: The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*. Karl Beckson's *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s* is the pioneering work in this field, and *The Fin de Siècle*, edited by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, is one of its newest and most useful contributions. These texts have helped me think about how to select and annotate readings; they have taught me what a good anthology should look like.

Almost every page of this volume has notes and facts that other scholars have generously helped me find. Specialists in the *fin de siècle* and Victorianist scholars have generously supported this project; there are too many to name, but I particularly want to thank the members of the VICTORIA listserve who took time to help me track down obscure queries. Specialists in philosophy, astronomy, French, fashion, and other fields equally beyond my range patiently explained various references. My colleagues gave me advice, steered me to resources, and cheered me up. Particular thanks to Joseph Bristow, Nancy Comley, Nicole Cooley, Saros Cowasjee, Elizabeth Ezra, Elaine Freedgood, Carrie Hintz, Linda K. Hughes, Anne Humpherys, Gerhard Joseph, Shuchi Kapila, Richard Kaye, Norman Kelvin, Paula Krebs, Steven Kruger, Mark Samuels Lasner, Diana Maltz, Andrew McCann, Sally Mitchell, George Musser, Anna Neill, Kathy Psomiades, David Richter, Solveig Robinson, Meri-Jane Rochelson, Fred Roden, Caroline Rupprecht, Jonathan Schaffer, Cathy Shuman, Jonah Siegel, Margaret Stetz, Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, Katie Sweeting, Pam Thurschwell, Stan Walker, John Weir, and Nancy Yousef. My students cheerfully endured being guinea pigs for these readings and asked wonderful questions that helped me realize what footnotes we needed. I am so grateful for their good humor and interest in this period.

Many people worked to turn this from just a “good idea” into a real book. David Damrosch encouraged me to send the proposal to Longman, and Jennifer Wicke helped me shape the contents. My research assistants, Kristen Case at the Graduate Center and Marilyn Howard at Queens College, procured many hard-to-find texts. A PSC-CUNY grant sent me to the British Library to find others. Christine Halsey, Dianne Hall, and Chrysta Meadowbrooke patiently answered questions, tabulated pages, and organized manuscript sections. Joseph Terry’s and Michele Cronin’s support kept the project on track. Above all I am grateful to Susan Wolfson, the most energetic, supportive, and ingenious of editors, who encouraged me to find new ways of thinking about the volume at every level. Susan’s wholehearted involvement in the volume almost qualifies her to be listed as a coauthor. She has done more for this book than any “editor” title can reveal.

Finally, I must thank the people who lived through this long process with me. I’m grateful for the love and support and advice, the days out, the barbecues, the long phone calls, and the babysitting from my family: Ann Schaffer, Ben Schaffer, Jonathan Schaffer, Olga Gershenson, Judy Musser, Eva Szekely, George Musser Sr., Bret Musser, Eileen Musser, not to mention Aidan, Katherine, and Kieran Musser. George Musser’s unwavering belief in me, and unmatched editorial skill, made all the difference. His strength gave me the confidence to do a book of this magnitude, and his conversation reminded me why it was worth doing. Eliana Musser grew along with this book, and her laughter, curiosity, love, and freshness have made my joy.

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