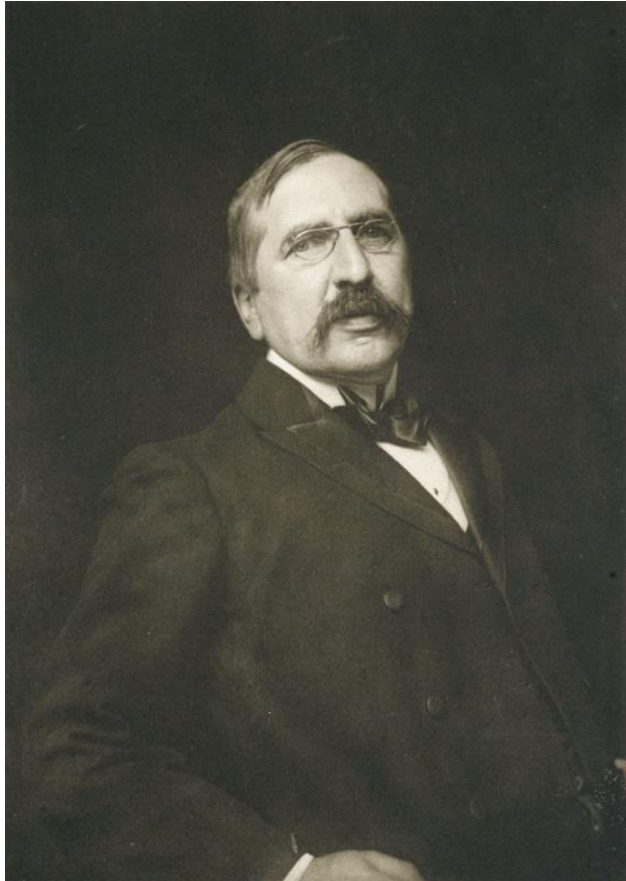


the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

GLEESON JOSEPH WILLIAM WHITE (1851-1898)



Hollyer, Frederick. *Gleeson White*. 1897. Die Kunst in der Photographie, Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons August 14, 2013.

Born at Christchurch (Hampshire), near Bournemouth, UK, Gleeson White was educated at Christ Church School. The son of a bookseller and stationer, he was a self-educated craftsman and designer, a collector, and a perceptive writer on art, illustration, photography, and literature. Born as Joseph William he later replaced his first names, which were identical to his father's, with his mother's maiden name, Gleeson. White became a highly influential editor in the 1890s. He championed new talents and the most innovative trends in design and poetry in his capacity as art editor to the publisher George Bell and Sons and as first editor of *The Studio*, the wide-circulation magazine whose graphic personality dominated the fin-de-siècle art scene.

Best known for his books and articles on illustration and painting, White also had a real impact on the literary world of the *fin de siècle*. Douglas Sladen claims, for example, that White's early edited volume on *Ballades and Rondeaux* (1887) — an insightful introduction to the old French poetic forms and a collection of the best examples of the kind by well-known authors such as Henry Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and Andrew Lang — was at the origin of a

veritable rage of ballade-writing. Meanwhile, Haldane Macfall declares that, quiet and unassuming as he was, White was in fact “one of the men who made the artistic and literary life of London at this time” (35). A friend of A. L. Baldry, Acton Bond, Harley Granville-Barker, Charles Kains-Jackson, Jerome K. Jerome, Louise Jopling, Richard Le Gallienne, Charles Lewis Hind, Phil May, Joseph Pennell, Frederick Rolfe, William Sharp, C. J. Shannon, and many others, White’s London “at-homes” entertained a large set of literary, artistic, and theatrical people (Sladen 63).

In 1890 White moved to New York, where he edited *The Art Amateur* (1891-92), a popular art magazine making extensive use of the latest photographic reproduction technology. White returned to London in 1892 to work for the publisher George Bell and Sons, designing book covers and editing a series on art and architecture with Edward F. Strange.

In 1893, he welcomed Charles Holme’s invitation to become founding editor of *The Studio* (1893-1895). Subtitled an *Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, and costing only a sixpence, *The Studio* became one of the most important magazines of the period, with its influence extending throughout the UK, and most of Europe and North America. One of White’s innovations — the exclusive use of photomechanical reproduction for the monthly magazine’s artwork — made *The Studio*, in Clive Ashwin’s words, “the first visually modern magazine” (“The Founding,” 9). Since the first issue also featured the art of Aubrey Beardsley on its cover and in an illustrated feature, *The Studio* rapidly became associated with graphic style designed specifically for reproduction. Influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, *The Studio* also embraced foreign trends and industrial art and design. Under White’s editorship, the magazine introduced the public to the poster movement, the nude in photography, and the bold work of artists such as Beardsley, Charles Klinger, Charles Ricketts, Frederick Rolfe, Henry Scott Tuke, and the “Glasgow Four” (Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Herbert MacNair, and Margaret and Frances MacDonald). Lavishly illustrated with exclusively photographic images, yet relatively inexpensive, it made the avant garde popular, while enhancing the legitimacy and appreciation for the homoerotic works of the Uranian movement, which included artists such as Tuke and writers such John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde. It was thanks to *The Studio*’s reproductions of his black-and-white drawings that Beardsley was later commissioned to illustrate Wilde’s play *Salomé* (1894). The magazine quickly became a commercial success, with a French and an American version becoming available for international readers. White

ceased to be editor of *The Studio* in 1895 but continued to contribute to the magazine until his death, from typhoid fever, in 1898, writing pieces on painting, photography, book-binding, design, and illustration.

As a designer, White became a member of the Art Workers Guild in 1895. The following year, he became the literary editor of *The Pageant*, with Charles Shannon as art editor. He also wrote articles for *The Pageant*, as well as other periodicals such as *The Dial*, *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, and *The Dome*. White's last editorial venture was the short-lived *Parade, an illustrated gift-book for boys and girls* (1897), which attempted to awaken the artistic sense of the young without being patronizing. His last book, the compendious *English Illustration: 'The Sixties' 1855-1870* (1897) is one of his most influential and enduring contributions to studies of the wood-engraved periodical and book illustrations of the Pre-Raphaelites and other artists working in the high Victorian period.

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Selected publications by Gleeson White

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