“WE DISGRUNTLED DEVILS DON’T PLEASE ANYBODY”: PAMELA COLMAN SMITH, THE GREEN SHEAF, AND FEMALE LITERARY NETWORKS

by Elizabeth Foley O’Connor

In A Room of One’s Own Virginia Woolf famously conceives of the plight of Judith Shakespeare, the “wonderfully gifted” sister of the bard. Equal in imagination and temperament, she is not educated like her brother nor is she allowed to pursue her dreams. Judith runs away to London in order to escape an arranged marriage, but, due to her sex, she cannot find honest work inside or outside of the theatre. Finding herself pregnant out of wedlock, Judith kills herself in desperation, her genius stifled before it produced anything. While Woolf presents this tragic tale to illustrate why there were so few women writers before the 18th century, the situation for women writers and artists in the early 20th century—especially those, like Woolf, who wanted to kill the specter of the self-sacrificing angel of the house and to offer alternative visions for women—was changing but still bleak. Although some gifted women, like Woolf, were able to achieve literary success and financial security through their pens, many others were not so lucky. This essay examines the work and life of Pamela Colman Smith, a multi-talented expatriate American artist and writer who attempted to blaze her own path during the first two decades of the 20th century. She achieved some moderate success before her refusal to conform to the expected subjects and behavior of a women writer led her to retreat from public life. This resulted in a descent into poverty and anonymity that lasted for almost three decades before her death in 1951.
Although primarily remembered today for designing the Rider-Waite tarot deck, which, ironically enough, isn’t even known by her name, Pamela “Pixie” Colman Smith was also an accomplished artist, poet, folklorist, editor, publisher and stage designer; she was active from the mid-1890s through the 1920s. Her paintings were exhibited at galleries in the U.S., England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, France, and Germany, including several international art exhibitions. She also has the distinction of being the first non-photographic artist to have her work shown at Alfred Stieglitz’s “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession” in New York. Very prolific, Colman Smith illustrated over 20 books and pamphlets, wrote two collections of Jamaican folk tales, co-edited *A Broad Sheet* with Jack Yeats from 1902 to 1903, edited the *Green Sheaf* from 1903 to 1904 by herself, and, after its demise, ran *The Green Sheaf Press*, which focused particularly on women writers, including her own work. Her venture into publishing appears to have emerged as both a calculated business move and a reaction to the frustration she encountered when dealing with the publishing establishment, which at the time was overwhelmingly dominated by men. She repeatedly refers to them in letters as “pigs” and vents her frustrations over not receiving royalties to which she considered herself entitled. Although records are scant, *The Green Sheaf Press* appears to have continued for a few years and then ceased business due to ongoing financial problems and her desire to focus her efforts on her art.

Colman Smith’s letters to friends, patrons, publishers, and gallery owners reveal an irrepressible spirit committed to rooting out all types of hypocrisy and prejudice, including classism, sexism, and racism—she was of mixed race, and her letters often recount the inability people had in “placing” her. The persona that she cultivated with her androgynous nickname “Pixie” raised further ambiguity. As a teller of Anansi stories at public performances in both London and New York, she was able to blend her interest in Irish and Jamaican folk tales into a personal mythology that celebrated freedom, fearlessness, and independence of spirit. These characteristics can all be seen in her two published collections of Jamaican folk tales *Annancy Stories* (1899) and *Chim-Chim Stories* (1905); the latter was published by her Green Sheaf Press, and she rewrote several traditional tales with a distinctly feminist bent. After providing some information on Colman Smith’s early life and training, I will concentrate on her building a community primarily, but not exclusively, of women artists and writers through her work as both editor and publisher of *The Green Sheaf* and owner/operator of *The Green Sheaf Press*.

As Anne Fernald observes in the introduction to the 2013 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, which she edited, on “Women’s Fiction, New Modernist Studies, and Feminism,” “It will never be enough to simply note that a writer is neglected. Instead scholars must show how a forgotten or understudied text helps challenge or advance the field.” In the case of Colman Smith, the aspects of her work that anticipate later artistic and literary trends are not hard to see. Although her folktales, her poetry, and her music paintings are all worthy of further study in their own right, a number of her texts will help in our understanding of modernism. Moreover, her web of influence was unusually widespread. Colman Smith made contributions in a multitude of different mediums to disparate networks of people in London, Dublin, and New York, as well as some brief forays to the Continent. While Colman Smith has seemingly vanished from our current understanding of modernism, she was far from invisible during the approximately thirty years that she was active (1896–1927). While this is not an exhaustive list, the communities Colman...
Smith were involved with include Arthur Wesley Dow and the American Arts and Crafts movement in fin de siècle New York; the Yeats family, as well as writers and artists associated with the Irish Literary Revival in Dublin and London; Arthur Edward Waite and the pre-World War I London occult community; the Trans-Atlantic little magazine and small press network; the post-Impressionist art world in London and New York; Alfred Steiglitz’s circle in the 1910s and teens in New York; Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, and the Lyceum Theatre scene as well as the more radical theatre groups associated with both Gordon and Edith Craig (who were Terry’s children and Colman Smith’s longtime friends); scarcely to mention the Women’s Suffrage Atelier in London.

Colman Smith, therefore, personified the recent widening and broadening of definitions of modernism and the growing focus on intersectionality and the transnational. She was a bi-racial, lesbian artist, designer editor, and writer who was born in England to American parents; she spent a significant part of her childhood in Jamaica, and studied at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn before returning to England in the late 1890s. Frequently traveling between New York and London, before permanently settling on the Lizard in Cornwall in the early 1920s, Colman Smith clearly displayed modernism’s intersectional and transnational aspect. She is one of the women on the fault lines that Laura Winkiel notes “functioned to police the borders between modern and non-modern subjects where women, as markers of race, class and national identities, were particularly vulnerable.” Groundbreaking studies by Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Jane Marcus, Ann Ardis, Jane Garrity, Barbara Green, Bonnie Kime Scott, Sonita Sarker, and Urmilla Shesagari acknowledge the important role women played in the development of modernism, but there are still many little-known outliers like Colman Smith whose contributions have yet to be fully recognized.

As published and unpublished letters, essays, and articles reveal, Colman Smith seems aware of her position on the margins of literary, artistic and social circles. She is also cognizant of difficulties many Anglo-Americans had in determining key facts about her, such as her age and ethnicity. Rather than accommodating the engrained prejudices and narrow-mindedness of her audience, Colman Smith developed her distinctive androgynous “Pixie” persona to confront them openly. For example, John Butler Yeats, the father of William and Jack, had this assessment of Colman Smith after meeting her for the first time to arrange a possible literary venture with his son William:

Pamela Smith and [her] father are the funniest-looking people, the most primitive Americans possible, but I like them much…. Her work whether a drawing or the telling of a piece of folklore is very direct and original and therefore sincere —its originality being its naïveté. I should feel safe in getting her to illustrate anything…. She looks exactly like a Japanese. Nannie says this Japanese appearance comes from constantly drinking iced water. You at first think her rather elderly, you are surprised to find out that she is very young, quite a girl…I don’t think there is anything great or profound in her, or very emotional or practical.8

John Yeats’s assessment reflects both his paternalism and his biases against “primitive” Americans, especially those whom he assumes to be in a class below him and whose racial origins he has trouble ascertaining. However, his comments also highlight the difficulty
that so many white Anglo-Americans appear to have encountered when trying to discern basic details about Colman Smith, such as her age and ethnicity; she was twenty-one at the time of the visit. This difficulty of readily “placing” her age, ethnicity and class translates into a tendency both to exoticize her background and to depict her as simple and naive. Similar impulses can be seen in Arthur Ransome’s description of Colman Smith, whom he refers to as “Gypsy” in his 1907 *Bohemia in London*, where he terms her a “strange little creature” and states that, upon welcoming him into her London salon, she described herself as a “goddaughter of a witch and sister to a fairy.” While it is impossible to know whether Colman Smith actually uttered these words or they are Ransome’s own contribution, it does seem in keeping with her tongue-in-cheek response to Anglo-American prejudice. For example, in response to John Yeats’s narrow-minded comments, she created a sketch of herself in a kimono drinking ice-water. Thus, rather than knuckling under to these biased views, Colman Smith seems to have celebrated her position as a marginalized outsider, which her Pixie persona would only strengthen.

Adapting to a variety of people, places, and situations is something that seems to have been ingrained in Colman Smith through her peripatetic childhood. When she was 24-years-old, she wrote to an acquaintance, “I have been on a good many long voyages—twenty-five—beginning when I was 3 months old….” While it is unclear where Colman Smith went on her infant voyage—most likely Jamaica, where her mother had family—what we do know is that Corinne Pamela Colman Smith was born on 16 February 1878, in the Pimlico area of London, to Charles Smith and Corinne Colman. Colman Smith spent the majority of her early childhood outside Manchester, where Charles Smith worked as an auditor for an upholstery manufacturer. At age ten, the family moved to Saint Andrews parish, near Kingston, Jamaica; her father took a job with the West India Improvement Company and they had family in the area. Colman Smith remained there until 1893, when she travelled to New York to attend the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn at the young age of fifteen.

Both of Colman Smith’s parents came from prominent American families that were based primarily in New York. It is unclear why the couple settled in England or how long they had been living there before their daughter’s birth. On her father’s side, she was related to the stage actor William Gillette, who debuted the role of Sherlock Holmes on the New York stage and of whom she would make several drawings. Her maternal grandmother, Pamela Chandler Colman, was an author of children’s books, and her maternal uncle, Samuel Colman, was a noted landscape artist of the Hudson River School. Through her mother, Colman Smith was also related to Joel Chandler Harris, the author of the Br’er Rabbit stories, and she reportedly read the Uncle Remus tales obsessively as a child. Despite her well-known relatives, Colman Smith was, as Kathleen Pyne notes, “a woman of mysterious origins, who to contemporaries seemed part Asian or part African or of some indeterminate ‘mixed blood.’” Rather than attempting to distance herself from this difference, Colman Smith appears to have embraced it, creating an “identity as an authentic primitive and childlike voice that spoke the truth of the inner self against the restrictions of cultural convention.” Her exposure to both Jamaican folktales and pirate lore as a teenager, her friendship with several members of the Yeats family, and her interest in Irish mythology during her early adult years appear to have been key factors in the development of that voice. As an adult she estimated that “I lived on & off in Jamaica
about seven years and heard a lot of folk stories—from the natives—and two years ago published a book of them."20

At Pratt, Colman Smith studied composition, drawing and painting and was widely regarded as a “child wonder.” 21 She was befriended by the noted photographer Gertrude Kasebier, who later introduced her to Alfred Steiglitz. Although Colman Smith remained matriculated at the Brooklyn art school until June 1897, she did not take a degree. This is likely because she spent much of the mid 1890s in Jamaica taking care of her sick mother, who died in 1896. A 1902 article in The Reader states that she studied at the Pratt for only two years; “[a]s no noticeable change showed itself in the character of her work under this tutelage, and as she became more determined to work out her own problems in her own way, she ended her connection with the school."22 While Colman Smith’s resolve to do things her own way seems to be a hallmark of her personality, she does seem to have been influenced by at least one of her Pratt professors, the artist Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow, who was also influential in Georgia O’Keeffe’s training, taught his students that rather than imitating nature, paintings could be composed by using color, tone, shape and line.23 Through Dow, Colman Smith became acquainted with symbolism and 19th century Japanese ukiyo-e prints, with their flat shapes, bright colors, and subjects in action-filled poses.24 She assimilated all these elements into her work in an original and highly creative manner. I. A. Haskell, writing in the Pratt Institute Monthly in 1897, compliments both her “feeling for color arrangement” and her “comprehension of form in line and design” but reserves his strongest praise for her originality: “No doubt she has been influenced and helped by study of the art world; but she seems to have the power of assimilating these influences and using them as a stimulus in her own growth, not wearing them like a borrowed garment.”25 Thus, what set Colman Smith apart was the originality and uniqueness of her paintings, which the January 1898 edition of Studio magazine describes as “extremely interesting, though it is difficult to classify them.”26

Audiences and critics were receptive, at least initially, and in 1897, Colman Smith, who was only 19 then, had her first feature exhibition at William Macbeth’s gallery in New York, where she sold four of her water colors.27 By the end of 1897, Smith’s Christmas cards, illustrations, and prints were being sold regularly through the gallery. Several critics heaped praise on her work, such as Gardner Teall in the June 1900 issue of Brush and Pencil. He writes:

Even in this day of unusual movements in art…it is not an ordinary thing to find one so absolutely untrammeled by Traditions of the Schools, so unhampered by the whisperings of convention in art, so undeterred by any dictates of precedent from venturing farther afield, and one so masterfully conquering color and tactfully forcing an allegiance of it to purpose which has come whole-souled, as has Pamela Colman Smith, whose work stands unique in America, and certainly as unique everywhere.28

Thus, Teall, like Haskell before him, views Colman Smith’s work as unique and uninfluenced by the major artistic developments of the time. Other critics, however, disparaged her drawing, terming it “naively crude,” “unformed,” or too reminiscent of the Victorian illustrator Walter Crane.29 Teall himself says that the “draughtsmanship” of her work
“would be rather open to controversy” and that her “lines are not of the same defined sort that characterized the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley,” an artist with whom she was often unfavorably compared.30 Similarly, James McNeill Whistler states that “She does not know how to draw or paint, and she does not need to do either.”31 Whistler, who was at the forefront of the fin-de-siècle Anglo-American art scene, voices the unspoken view that seems to characterize much of the contemporary criticism of Colman Smith’s art: that it is not her technique—or lack thereof—that matters; the value of her work is purely imaginative. Although never explicitly stated, this is heavily implied as a feminine characteristic, which allows her work to be dismissed and overlooked both in America and England, where she returned in 1899 and spent the majority of the rest of her life.

A distinctive feature of Colman Smith’s works during this period is a union of foreground and background to create an almost two-dimensional effect due to complicated compositions of swirling lines and areas of pattern and texture, which, at least in these compositions, are used to depict the sea. Other unique characteristics of her drawings are the activity of her subjects, a large number of whom are female; they are decidedly not shy and retiring late Victorian wall-flowers or languishing decadent dames. The diversity of Colman Smith’s subjects is most clearly evident in her illustrations for the Old English ballad Widecombe Fair (1899), which depicts a diverse group of men and women from all walks of life. Her illustrations show women blushing under the gaze of a nearby male, boldly staring at potential suitors, or teasing men with whom they are dancing, riotously enjoying themselves, or disdainfully observing the merrymaking. There are several pirates in attendance and at least one dark-skinned performer.32 In addition to Widecombe Fair, she contributed designs to at least three other books in 1899, as well as compiling, writing, and illustrating folk tales for her Annancy Stories. Her twelve full-color illustrations for the old English ballads, The Golden Vanity and the Green Bed, are representative as they highlight her interest in sailors, nautical themes, and pictorial representations of Jamaica that were all to remain important to her and were to feature prominently in The Green Sheaf.33

During this fin de siècle period, Colman Smith conceived of several book-length projects, including an illustrated collection of Shakespearean heroines, a book of fairy tales, and an illustrated edition of Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s 1778 Lessons for Children, which she attempted to place with multiple publishers but to no avail. These ventures into the world of publishing yielded a range of emotions from Colman Smith, frustration chief among them. She vents her annoyance in a series of letters to Alfred Bigelow Paine, whom she affectionately refers to as “Dear Tutter.” Paine was the children’s page editor of the New York Sunday Herald in 1898, and from 1898 to 1909 was an editor at St. Nicholas Magazine; in 1901 he became a reader and solicitor of material for the Henry Altemis publishing company, and he is most famous for his multi-volume biography of Mark Twain. While none of Paine’s letters to Colman Smith remain, the comfort and intimacy between the two is remarkable. A March 1901 letter to Paine sees her anger and annoyance bubble to the surface of the usually upbeat and pragmatic tone of most of her letters. She writes, “Pigs! The publishers are all pigs !?!”34 At times her inability to place her work led her to humorously negotiate, as she does in an August 1899 letter to Paine: “We are…dead broke so will give St. Nick some old bargains cheap! Ha!”35
other letters, she celebrates small victories: “I got $89.80 royalty on Irving Souvenier!! Ha! Much forced!! Perhaps I shall someday get as much as $50.75 out of RHR.” RHR refers to Richard H. Russell, a representative of the William H. Russell publishing firm that brought out much of her early work. Colman Smith’s frustration over her difficulty placing with a publisher her edition of Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children*, which she endearingly refers to as Little Charles, is indicative. As she writes to Paine in May 1901, “That bloomin pig! [Grant] Richards! Kept Little Charles 6 weeks and then returned him! Then sent him to Heineman and Land and Duckworth in turn. And he came back from each! An older and a wiser Charles! But still he is in a neat little red portfolio and no publisher is likely to take him! Dam!!!!!!!!!!!” Later that same summer she expresses her exhaustion over the whole process, especially her distance from many of the New York publishers: “Has RR [Russell] been over here [England] this year? Or Doubleday? I can’t find out anything! Dam publishers any way! —I am tired of ’em.” Thus, it is not difficult to see why Colman Smith would be interested in gaining more control over the publication process, first by becoming the editor of two literary magazines and then, eventually, owning and operating her own small press. One of Paine’s short stories, “The Boat of Dreams,” was included in the ninth issue of *The Green Sheaf*.

Colman Smith’s independence of thought was not limited to her personal correspondence or even just her interactions with publishers. In a July 1907 piece in *The Craftsman* magazine—one of her rare essays on the role of the artist—Colman Smith laments that too many American artists are overcome with doubts and are afraid to embrace new ideas. “Each one has a great fear of himself, a fear to believe, to think, to do, to be, to act,” she claims. In order to combat this trend, she urges young art students to draw on real life, to exhibit fearlessness and freedom of thought, and to work tirelessly to eradicate “those mawkish weeds of sugar-sweet sentimentality.”

Colman Smith’s little magazine, *The Green Sheaf*, put these ideas into action from its origins as a response to her experiences as co-editor with Jack Yeats of *A Broad Sheet*. This partnership appears to have served as her first-hand introduction to the world of little magazines. Her role in this publication began after she struck up a friendship with Jack and his wife, Mary “Cottie” Yeats, cultivated by their shared love of miniature theatre. In June 1901 Colman Smith visited the Yeatses at their cottage in Devonshire, where she watched Jack’s performance of his miniature circus and then regaled them with performances of Jamaican folktales replete with handmade cardboard cutouts of the key characters. In an August 1901 letter to Paine, she fondly recalls her trip and how nice Jack and Cottie were, noting approvingly that Jack “draws such bully things!” Through Jack, Colman Smith finally met his brother, the poet William Butler Yeats, during an October 1901 trip to Dublin. She described the poet this way to her friend Alfred Bigelow Paine: “He is a treat! The poet—so like an owl!—kind of chants in his talk and looks through his glasses sort of kockeyed! Ha! Forced!” While Colman Smith does not elaborate on why she views the poet as forced, the blunttness of her description characteristically does not give in to flattery or social expectations. It also does not foreshadow the close mentorship that was to develop between the two writers; Colman Smith consulted W. B. Yeats in all of her major editorial endeavors during this period. Through his sponsorship, she entered the Society of the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, where she met Edward Rider Waite—the person who commissioned her now-famous tarot deck in 1909.
A Broad Sheet, as its name implies, was a one-page publication that was published and sold by Elkin Mathews, with a subscription of 12 shillings a year and $3 in the United States. It primarily featured large, hand-coloured drawings by Jack Yeats and Colman Smith, accompanied by poetry and prose from many prominent figures of the Irish Literary Revival. Notable highlights from Colman Smith’s tenure at A Broad Sheet include her illustration of the “Blood Bond” passage of George Moore’s and W.B. Yeats’s Grania, her illustration of George Russell’s “The Gates of Dreamland,” and her drawing “A Cobweb Cloak of Time” accompanied by a short poem she had written. It is noteworthy that, for the 11 issues over which Colman Smith served as co-editor, seven feature large drawings by her at the top of the page, which might have contributed to some of the conflict between her and Jack Yeats. A 15 December 1902 letter from Jack Yeats to John Quinn hints at personal discord between them: “Between you and me and the wall, as they say, Miss Pamela Smith (though I think her a fine illustrator with a fine eye for colour and just the artist for illuminating verse) is a little bit lazy, and she being a woman I can’t take a very high hand with things, so there is often a lot of fuss about the numbers, and I don’t like to be responsible for anything that I have not got absolute control of.” Jack Yeats continued to edit this iteration of A Broad Sheet without interruption until December 1903 and did contribute a drawing to the tenth edition of A Green Sheaf.

In January 1903 Colman Smith launched her own little magazine after lengthy discussions with William Butler Yeats during the planning stages; ultimately, however, she did not incorporate many of his suggestions. She replaced his choice of The Hour-Glass with The Green Sheaf for a title and dedicated it not to “the Art of Happy Desire,” as he had suggested, but more simply to “pleasure.” Where Yeats wanted the subject matter to be confined to dreams of an ideal state, “beautiful or charming or in some other way desirable,” Colman Smith chose to have her title page proclaim “pictures, verses, ballads, of love and war; tales of pirates and the sea…ballads of the old world.” An enigmatic title, The Green Sheaf, with its accompanying image of a sheaf of green coloured pages tied with a red ribbon, brings to mind the image of U.S. currency, of which Colman

![The Green Sheaf](image-url)

Figure 2: Title page, fourth number of The Green Sheaf. Photo courtesy of Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
Smith often lamented her shortage, but also the green sheaves of grain that in the Bible the Israelites offer to God in order that He may bless the spring harvest. While grain is the most commonly discussed sheaf, it can also refer to “a cluster or bundle of things tied up together.” In this respect, the title is quite apt, as the magazine contained a range of art, poetry, translations, and non-fiction prose of a wide variety of styles. In addition, green, a colour traditionally associated with health and fertility, began to be associated with homosexuality in the 1890s, when Oscar Wilde and others wore green carnations to identify themselves. While Colman Smith’s familiarity with this practice is unclear, she did like the color and wrote almost all of her business and personal correspondence in green ink during this period.

Notably, The Green Sheaf did not include any Colman-Smith retellings of Jamaican folk tales although, beginning with the sixth issue, the magazine did contain advertisements for readers to hire “Gelukiezanger”—Colman Smith’s stage name for herself for these performances—to tell these stories at parties. One possible explanation for this omission is that Colman Smith felt strongly that her retellings of Anansi stories needed to be written in a language that reflected, but did not completely mimic, the patois of the Jamaicans from whom she first heard the tales. While this is now standard practice, it was not the case when Colman Smith first began publishing her versions of these tales in the mid-1890s. The Green Sheaf, which as its editorial statement affirms, was very Catholic in its content and printed a wide variety of fairy and folktales from several different countries. However, all of its content was written in Standard English and it may be the fear of losing subscribers that caused Colman Smith to refrain from publishing any of her retellings in the pages of her magazine. Despite having persistent problems with money throughout her adult life, Colman Smith’s letters reveal that she was very attuned to financial concerns and quite savvy in at least some of her financial decisions.

As Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier have noted, in the early decades of the 20th century, “periodicals were becoming complex visual texts, changing the reading experience in hard-to-fathom ways even as the rise of a modern advertising industry contributed to the transformation of older business models in publishing.” The Green Sheaf, which has not been discussed in its relationship to this wider movement, definitely reflected the trends of “the rapidly changing ‘Atlantic Scene’” of English-language publishing at the turn of the 20th century, just as Ardis and Collier discuss. While A Broad Sheet, the magazine on which she collaborated with Jack Yeats, was closer in spirit to such fine-art small-press publications of the 1880s and 1890s as the Hobby Horse, The Green Sheaf can clearly be seen as a forerunner of the little magazines of the teens and twenties. Instead of A Broad Sheet’s single page, The Green Sheaf was generally 12 pages, with a few issues as large as 16 and some as small as 8 pages. It was priced at 13 shillings for a yearly subscription—a shilling more than A Broad Sheet—but offered 13 issues for that price instead of the 11 for A Broad Sheet. Colman Smith’s publication also provided readers with the option to purchase individual issues for 13 pence each. While both magazines were published on a letter press printer on thick, hand-made paper, and colored by hand, A Broad Sheet was published and sold by Elkin Matthews and printed by Farncombe & Son, Printers, Croydon. Mathews, in partnership with John Lane, published the infamous Yellow Book in 1894 and, after their split, became the first publisher of such authors as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Robert Bridges. In contrast, The Green Sheaf was edited,
published, and sold by Colman Smith herself. There is no record of who printed the magazine; the one exception to this fact appears to be the supplement to the ninth number that contained John Todhunter’s “A Dream,” which is credited as being printed by the Farncombe firm. But this supplement seems to be a bit of an anomaly as the back advertising page notes that “After Thirteen numbers of the First Volume have been completed The Green Sheaf will be published Quarterly.” This change did not happen nor was the notice repeated in the tenth or eleventh numbers.

Early issues of The Green Sheaf saw poetry, fiction, and drama by many of those who graced the pages of A Broad Sheet—writers such as William Butler Yeats, A. E. [George Russell], and F. York Powell. The Green Sheaf also continued and extended on the earlier journal’s practice of publishing work from now-deceased artists and writers. To that end, The Green Sheaf printed several works by William Blake, short stories by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and poems by John Keats as well as a short translation by Friedrich Nietzsche and a painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. And just like the earlier publication, each issue featured multiple drawings and poems by Colman Smith. Numbers of The Green Sheaf also included work by such figures of the Irish Literary Revival as Lady Augusta Gregory and J. M. Synge. Names more commonly associated with the theatre such as Edward Gordon Craig, Martin Shaw, Mary Brown, and the Shakespearean actor E. Harcourt Williams also graced the pages of the magazine. Colman Smith probably met them through her long-time friend Ellen Terry, whom she frequently sketched and illustrated—and for whom she possibly ghost-wrote Terry’s 1913 book on The Russian Ballet. Colman Smith even toured with the Lyceum Theatre Company at the turn of the twentieth century, appearing primarily in crowd scenes but also occasionally contributing costume and set designs. It was during her time on tour that Colman Smith met Edy Craig, Terry’s daughter and Edward’s sister. The two became fast friends and perhaps lovers, collaborating on a range of costume and stage designs, most notably for the November 1904 London premier of William Butler Yeats’ play When There Is Nothing. Almost every issue of The Green Sheaf contains an advertisement for “Edith Craig & Co.” which provided costumes for private and public theatricals. Other contributors included Victor Bridges, Lady Alix Egerton, Cecil French, W. T. Horton, Laurence Irving, John Masefield, Yone Noguchi, Earnest Radford, Reginald Rigby, and John Todhunter. The Green Sheaf also published the work of a host of seemingly unknown women writers as well as anonymous contributions which increased as the numbers progressed.

Some of these women’s names appear to be pseudonyms, possibly even for Colman Smith herself. However, as no formal records from the operation of the magazine appear to have survived, it is impossible to know for certain. As Ann Ardis notes, “the phenomenon of anonymous, pseudonymous, and semi-pseudonymous publication is far more common in the early twentieth century than scholarship in modernist studies trains us to expect.” As recent work by scholars such as Holly Laird, Sean Latham, Bette London, and Jayne Marke, attest, many if not most turn-of-the-twentieth-century writers multiplied their authorial identities in ways that “defy a Foucauldian conceptualization of the author function or a modernist notion of an authorial imprimatur.” As no business records of The Green Sheaf appear to have been saved, it appears unlikely we will ever know the full extent of the magazine’s use of pseudonyms. Christabel Marshall, a noted campaigner for women’s suffrage as well as a playwright and novelist, contributed a range
of fiction and translations in almost every issue under the pseudonym Christopher St. John. Leslie Moore, the pen name of the South African novelist and memoirist Ida Constance Baker, who is best known for her long-term relationship with Katherine Mansfield, contributed the short story “Will o’ the Wisp” to the fifth issue.54

The first issue of The Green Sheaf begins with a full-page illustration by E. Monsell entitled “The Book-worm.”55 It features a portly gentleman, dressed in a light green waistcoat and breeches, peering through spectacles at a large pile of finely-bound books at his feet. Before him is a blue globe that is almost completely blank; there is only a pink corner of what appears to be Eastern Europe that remains visible. By choosing this image as the first one in the inaugural issue of her little magazine, Colman Smith seems to be poking fun at old men and patriarchal culture more broadly defined, essentially at anyone who insists on looking for answers to the problems of the day by peering into old books rather than choosing a more active life that begins to help us fill in blank spaces—both those spaces clearly missing on the map and those entities less easily quantified but also neglected in the early 20th century—that is, the experiences of women, the lower class, and immigrants. This is the same gesture that Woolf makes in the third chapter of A Room of One’s Own with the invention of Judith Shakespeare. Thus, the wide variety of content that graced the pages of the The Green Sheaf—drawn from both high and low sources—will do their part in working to fill in those gaps in our understanding of the full range of art and literature.

Although some issues of The Green Sheaf have a unifying theme, such as the focus on dreams and the supernatural in the second issue, most numbers of the magazine were more loosely conceived. Colman Smith’s editorial direction seems to have been to present the widest range of content possible. For example, the third issue begins with “The Harvest Home Masque” by Edward Gordon Craig and Martin Shaw, which is partly an explanation of this dramatic representation of the peasant celebration of the end of the harvest and partly an advertisement for a modern version the authors could present in a home or theater setting; the masque is accompanied by an unattributed full page illustration.56 This is followed by Alix Egerton’s poem “The Lament of the Dead Knight,” which explores the supernatural love between the dead speaker and his bereaved lady love; at the bottom of the page is a Cecil French drawing of grieving lovers separated by coils of snaky brambles that seems more in keeping with the nineteenth century than the twentieth.57
Earnest Radford’s poem “Eventide” follows and is joined by one of Colman Smith’s more mystical illustrations—an androgynous figure wrapped in a shawl and pulled along by cavorting red-headed pixies while pairs of lovers embrace on clouds scattered throughout the darkening sky. Sheet Music for the folk song “Spanish Ladies,” which was arranged by Martin Shaw, is accompanied by both a rectangular Colman Smith illustration and the song lyrics that were “given to James Masefield by Wally Blair.” Colman Smith’s drawing brings to mind her work on *The Green Bed* and *The Golden Vanity*; while one of her Spanish ladies has downcast eyes and raised fan in response to the blandishments of a seaman ready to set sail for England, the other stares disinterested into the distance. Other items of note in the issue include Christopher St. John’s “A Ballad of a Night of Refuge,” which is dedicated to Maxim Gorky, a reproduction of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s drawing of Mrs. Stirling, and Herbert Shaw’s “A Pagan Rhyme.”

Shaw’s poem is indicative of a focus on the writing of and about the city that can be seen in several issues of *The Green Sheaf* and that deserves closer scrutiny. His text is accompanied by a rectangular Colman Smith drawing of dark, featureless figures of both men and women who are set against the pinkish purple background of twilight. The poem’s speaker personifies the city as a woman through whose streets “big men” walk “with ease… / Careless… if they sin” as all is licensed by their laws. Interestingly, these men, and all the other groups the poem touches on, delight in the freedom and anonymity of being “an outsider / One of the crowd.” Women, who were still largely excluded from the anonymity of the *fin de siècle* city due to slowly changing social mores and the ubiquity of prostitutes, do not walk the streets but “They drive adown her ways— / Armed scornful ‘gainst all glances / And heedless of men’s praise.” While they do not blush and cower under the acquisitive gazes of the men they pass, they cannot meld themselves with the throng but can only cry silently: “Give me to love an outsider / One of the crowd.” The androgynous speaker concludes by stating a wish “to live beyond the pale” where the focus will not be on clothing or other markers of worldly station but on strength of character and independence of spirit. Sentiments that are echoed in the last refrain: “Give me to be an outsider / Nothing less.”

While the majority of the content of *The Green Sheaf* pertains to legend, fantasy, or the distant past, a few issues of the magazine contain poetry and drawings that deal with contemporary life and, notably, they are created by Colman Smith herself. For example, the fourth issue contains her stark illustration of a woman walking by herself in a field that is barren except for two leafless trees standing watch. It is complemented by the poem, “Alone” in which the speaker laments that she feels alienated regardless of the setting: “In cities large—in country lane, / Around the world—it’s all the same; / Across the sea from shore to shore, / Alone—alone, for evermore.” Although it is tempting to read into this work Colman Smith’s own isolation and alienation, the poem can definitely be seen as foreshadowing the bleaker, more introspective, turn in poetry of the modernist period. Colman Smith returns to the hazard of city life in the penultimate issue, number 12, through the large illustration and accompanying poem, “The Town.” Featuring the profile of a woman caught in a rare moment of repose while she contemplates the talking men and dancing lovers that surround her, the vividly-colored drawing conveys the glamour and bustle of city life as well as the dissatisfaction many of its inhabitants experience. The brief poem, unlike almost all of
the other poems in the magazine, features enjambment and does not contain any rhyme: “O deary me how idle is / This great and weary town. / For people talk and never do / As they go up and down.”

In this work, even “the great” town is “weary”; interestingly, this lassitude is not due to the hustle and bustle of the thousands of people who flood its streets every day, but by the emptiness of their talk and their complacent failure to actually do anything they say they will.

Early 20th century reviews of The Green Sheaf appear to have been infrequent. A small notice of the magazine did appear in the February 6, 1904 issue of The Academy & Literature, where the unnamed writer notes that “The Green Sheaf is a refreshing publication, as its name implies….the literary contents are quaint and sometimes beautiful, but the chiefest charm lies in the hand-coloured prints, which are highly-decorative, simple in treatment and of a pleasant old-world flavor.” The note erroneously comments that the little magazine was published by Elkin Matthews, who is listed on the title page only as the seller. However, a month later, another unsigned notice appeared in the same publication to correct the error but struck a very different tone: “I have been flipping through the dandified leaves of the ninth number of that strange little periodical ‘The Green Sheaf’ published and edited and sold by the strange personality whom we call Pamela Colman Smith.”

The author goes on to state that “some of the designs, by far the best, are from her own whimsical hands,” but it is impossible to ignore the repeated use of “strange” to describe both Colman Smith and her publication. Moreover, this bemused treatment, often manifest in condescension and infantilization, is in keeping with other Anglo-American views of her and infiltrates assessments of her magazine. While the first account stressed the beauty and “old world charm” of The Green Sheaf’s contents, the second called it “dandified” and asserted that even the best drawings are merely “whimsical.” Although it is impossible to know what could have accounted for this change, it is also possible to infer that Colman Smith’s unconventionality and free-spiritedness might have ruffled more than a few feathers.

Colman Smith’s own views of the magazine also changed dramatically over the course of its publication. In April 1903 she wrote to gallery owner William Macbeth, thanking him for subscribing to The Green Sheaf and agreeing that “it does look well!” and adding...
that “It is exciting getting it out every month—planning it all out…”70 She also points out that she has recently opened a school for hand coloring, a venture that “I have had in mind for long.”71 The school is frequently advertised in the back pages of The Green Sheaf and seems one of several money-making ventures that Colman Smith conceived of during this period. It is also possible—but is not addressed in this letter nor any others that I have found—that pupils of the school may have helped her color The Green Sheaf illustrations as part of their training, thus lightening the burden of her having to color each copy by hand and providing valuable experience to her students. However, it is unclear how many students, if any, signed up for this school. By February 1904, Colman Smith’s initial optimism and excitement regarding The Green Sheaf had cooled considerably. As she writes to Paine, “The Green Sheaf will probably go on semi annually because there are many other things to do more important….I am telling Annancy stories very often now and hope in time to make some money by it—Green Sheaf does not pay yet—It is most discouraging to go on working at it.”72
Discouraged and frustrated by The Green Sheaf’s inability to live up to her economic dreams and, undoubtedly, by the amount of work it took to single-handedly edit, publish, and sell even a small circulation literary magazine, Colman Smith wrote W. B. Yeats in February of 1904 with a new plan. She wanted his advice on a scheme to set up a small press with her close friend, Mrs. Fortescue: “We want very much to set up a hand press to print small editions of books (by subscription) hand-coloured.”73 She raises two potential projects as a possibility—Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience and a book devoted to the work of the Victorian painter, printmaker, and engraver, Edward Calvert. She astutely knows that other publishing companies are working on editions of each: Methuen for an edition of Blake using a three color printing process and joined by an introduction by Laurence Binyon and a long-announced edition of the Calvert by the Unicorn Press. Colman Smith requested Yeats’s help in the form of an introduction for the Blake and for “what text there is” for the Calvert. Almost certainly, she was after the prestige—and accompanying sales—Yeats’s name would bring to either project. She knew that secrecy was important and implored Yeats to “Please keep this to yourself.”74
The last number of The Green Sheaf ends with a short advertisement that informs readers:

Miss Pamela Colman Smith begs to inform the Green Sheaf subscribers, and other friends and customers, that she, in conjunction with MRS FORTESCUE has opened a shop for the sale of Hand-Coloured Prints and other Engravings, Drawings, and Pictures, Books, &c, at the foregoing address. Orders taken and promptly executed for Christmas and Invitation Cards, Menus, Ball Programmes, Book Labels, and every kind of Decorative Printing and Hand-colouring.75

While readers may have been surprised at this somewhat unexpected new direction, this notice was far from the only personal advertisement that ever appeared in the pages of the magazine. Early numbers contained more traditional ads for other books published by Elkin Mathews. However, beginning with the fourth issue, other advertisements highlighted a costume service by Edy Craig and a personal jewelry gallery by John Baillie that also offered classes in metalworking and various forms of painting. In the sixth issue, Colman
Smith begins hawking her own services as “Gelukiezanger,” a name that she appears to have created that refers to herself as a teller of West Indian folktales. All of these suggest that Colman Smith wanted to move away from traditional advertisements that, as Ardis and Collier note, were focused on “sheer top-down manipulation” to an alternative model based on informed choice and communality that was to become popular in better-known highbrow little magazines such as The Little Review and The Egoist.

While it is unclear how long the Green Sheaf shop operated or if it was ever financially successful, Colman Smith did operate her Green Sheaf Press until at least 1906. The press published a range of novels, fairy tales, folk tales and poems by predominately women writers. Although her planned editions of Blake and Calvert never materialized, she published several books, most of them by contributors to The Green Sheaf. They include Shadow Rabbit: A Story of Adventure by Dolly Radford and Gertrude M, Bradley, A Sheaf of Song by Alfred C. Calmour, Among the Animals by Margaret Ward and Alphaeus P. Cole, The Book of Hours by Lady Alix Egerton, The Book of Good Advice by Reginald Rigby, In the Valley of Stars There Is a Tower of Silence: A Persian Tragedy by Smara Khamara. The latter work contains a full-color frontispiece by Smith and both Tales from My Garden, which was also illustrated by Smith, and Four Plays by Laurence Alma Tadema. Furthermore, the press published Colman Smith’s Chim-Chim Stories in 1905, which was the most experimental of all of her prose work. It is fascinating to speculate that if Colman Smith had had the interest and economic resources to continue the press, what sort of work she might have produced. What would have issued forth if she, like Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, had obtained the freedom and control to become an experimental writer?

After the demise of The Green Sheaf Press, Colman Smith appears to have refocused her interest in pursuing a fine art career, for she exhibited in London, Edinburgh, Paris, Ghent, and Munich, and she had three shows at Alfred Stieglitz’s Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession in New York between 1907 and 1909. By 1909, she had returned to London where she became active in the Suffrage Atelier, a group of political artists formed by Laurence and Clemence Housman (siblings of A. E. Housman) to prepare for the 21 June 1909 demonstration by the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). The Atelier, which became a major political entity, encouraged professional and non-professional artists to submit work—and paid them a small percentage of the profits—which was unusual for suffrage organizations at the time. While a few of Colman Smith’s posters and drawings bearing her trademark have long been known to be associated with the group, it appears that she contributed many more unsigned posters and handbills in support of both suffrage and women’s rights more broadly defined. Her involvement with the Atelier appears to have come to a precipitous end in 1911, spurring a return to New York where she became active in the American movement.

Colman Smith also continued to submit both art and prose to newspapers, magazines, and journals during this period, with mixed results. As she wrote to Alfred Stieglitz in March 1908, “The publishers are as dull here as elsewhere! Except for the usual harmless dull insipid stuff by feeble females! I know plenty of ’em who are living well by the inanities! We disgruntled devils don’t please anybody!” While her humor is still visible, the anger regarding the actions of publishers that she expressed to Paine and others is now less obvious. In its place is an almost cheerful resignation. Having lived in London for the better part of eight years, she now knows how the system works and understands that it is...
indeed possible for a woman writer to survive—even live well—by their “inanities.” However, Colman Smith is not “feeble” and willing to guide her artistic and literary output to conform to popular taste. She is a “disgruntled devil” who will remain true to herself and her art, even if it resulted in poverty and anonymity.

Colman Smith returned to England after World War I broke out in 1914. She was active in the war effort and contributed drawings to both the War Refugee Relief Fund and the Polish Victim’s Relief Fund. In the teens and early twenties, she contributed a few illustrations and magazine pieces, but her published output dwindled precipitously during these years. After receiving a small inheritance from a relative, Colman Smith bought a house in Cornwall that she ran with her longtime partner, Nora Lake, as a vacation home for Roman Catholic priests until her death in 1951.

Notes
3. March 17, 1901 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP 1677, Huntington Library.
6. February 17, 1902 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to George Pollexfen, Stony Brook University, William Butler Yeats Collection, Box 53, 120, 44.
10. February 17, 1902 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to George Pollexfen, Stony Brook University, William Butler Yeats Collection, Box 53, 120, 44.
14. Kaplan writes that Corinne Colman Smith “was believed to have also been from Brooklyn, but may have been of Jamaican descent” (*Artwork and Time*, p. 5). He does not offer a source for this assertion.
19. Ibid.
20. February 17, 1902 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to George Pollexfen, Stony Brook University, William Butler Yeats Collection, Box 53, 120, 44.
of The Arts, 1999; pp. 55-108, especially p. 66. Richard Whelan suggests that Georgia O’Keeffe may have been influenced by Colman Smith’s second show at the “Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession” in early 1908. Both women relied on Dow’s compositional principles and both shared “a preoccupation with trying to express in visual terms their reactions to music.” Richard Whelan, Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997); p. 373.

24. An unsigned review of Colman Smith’s Annamcy Stories and Widiccombe Fair in The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine & Applied Art 20.89 (August 1900): p. 199 notes, “Although her [Colman Smith’s] methods are in no sense an imitation of the technique and mannerism of the Japanese, yet the result in the case of these coloured pictures—prints we cannot justly term them—is quite as decoratively satisfactory as are the best Japanese colour-prints, and considerably more so than many of the European imitations of Far Eastern work.”

25. I. A. Haskell, “The Decorative Work of Miss. Pamela Colman Smith,” Pratt Institute Monthly, VI.3 (December 1897); p. 65


27. Pratt p. 147.

28. Gardner Teall, “Cleverness, Art, and an Artist.” Brush and Pencil 6.3 (June 1900); p. 135.

29. See Pyne p. 51 and Reader p. 332.


31. Quoted in “Als Ik Kan: Notes: Reviews” The Craftsman, XI.6 (March 1907); p. 770.


34. March 17, 1901 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP 1677, Huntington Library.

35. August 7, 1899 letter to from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP1671, Huntington Library.

36. March 17, 1901 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP 1677, Huntington Library.

37. May 28, 1901 from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP1678, Huntington Library. Punctuation in the original.

38. August 1901 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP1679, Huntington Library.

39. Pamela Colman Smith, “A Protest Against Fear,” The Craftsman 11, no.6 (March 1907); p. 728.


41. August 1901 letter from Pamela Colman Smith to Alfred Bigelow Paine, AP1679, Huntington Library.

42. Ibid.


45. This description is on the title page of each of the thirteen issues of Colman Smith’s Green Sheaf.

46. See Leviticus 23: 10-14


52. Ann Ardis, “Staging the Public Sphere: Magazine Dialogism and the Prosthetics of Authorship at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880-1940; p. 42.

53. Ibid.


John Grey

Everglade Sunset

egrets coiffed by white feathery fading sun,
steps as weightless as the mangrove island itself,
its drifting roots shaped like twisted arches -

levitating pastures, breeze perfumed heat and mud,
skeletal lighthouse overgrown with vines,
buzzing insects living on their nerves -

not a heaven an angel would choose,
but a gator slinks into the brackish glare,
a passage into night, strongly worded