

Doris M. Palmer and her Publisher Husband

When I began to research this article some time back, it was to have dealt with the artist Doris M. Palmer, her illustrated edition of *The Rubaiyat*, and any other books she had illustrated. It soon became clear, however, that it was difficult to write about the artist without her husband (whose identity I did not know at the start) making his presence felt, and it was this which led to the choice of the above title.

The Rubaiyat of Doris M. Palmer

This bulky edition of *The Rubaiyat* (Potter #117) was published by Leopold B. Hill in London, and though undated, contemporary reviews date it to 1921, as does Potter. Clement K. Shorter reviewed it under the heading “Some Books of the Autumn Season” in *The Sphere* on 22 October of that year ([Fig.1a](#)), for example, and it was reviewed among the Christmas Gift Books in *The Scotsman* on 8 December that same year ([Fig.1b](#).)

The book uses the text of FitzGerald’s first edition, the quatrains being contained within a yellow decorative border ([Fig.2a](#).) There are twelve coloured plates in all, each signed DORIS M. PALMER, nine of which are shown here as Figs. [2b](#), [2c](#), [2d](#), [2e](#), [2f](#), [2g](#), [2h](#), [2i](#), & [2j](#) these illustrating quatrains 3, 8, 13, 16, 20, 33, 39, 59 & 74 respectively. (The relevant quatrains are printed on the tissue guards of each plate.) To be honest, they are not among my favourite *Rubaiyat* illustrations ([browse](#).) I find the colours a bit garish, and their content a little too literal, with no Omarian symbolism to add a bit of extra zest, for which reason, they require little or no explanation here. Nevertheless, they are a classic of their type, and certainly merit some scrutiny on account of the story behind them and their creator.

First, then, who was Doris M. Palmer?

Some Biographical Details

She was born Doris Mary Lambert in Eastbourne, East Sussex, on 29 September 1896, the daughter of Auguste Lambert and his wife, Georgina. The 1901 Census Return gives us a good picture of the family, living at 5 Lewes Road, Eastbourne. Her father, aged 35, is listed as a Languages Tutor, born in London, and her mother, aged 42, is listed as having been born in Belfast. They are recorded as having five children, Charles (aged 10), Irene (aged 9), Eileen (aged 6), Doris (aged 4) and Raymond (aged 7 months). At the time of the 1911 Census, the family were still at the same address, though Charles had now moved out. This Census return gives us a little more information about the family: Auguste Lambert was a French Master at the Municipal Secondary School; Irene was by now a Governess, Eileen an Art Student, and Doris and Raymond were both still at school. This Census return also records that they had had five children all of whom were still living. Since the youngest child Raymond was now 10 years old, and their mother Georgina was 52 years old, we can safely assume that this was to be the full extent of the family.

On 9 September 1919 at the Register Office in the district of St. Giles, London, Doris Mary Lambert, Spinster, Artist Painter, age 22, of 5 Lewes Road, Eastbourne, married Harry Cecil Palmer, Bachelor, Publisher, age 30, of 91 Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. London. But was he Cecil Palmer the well-known publisher, or do we have here a coincidence of names and occupations ? At this point we must devote a little space to her husband.

Harry Cecil Palmer was born in Fulham in 1889. Tracking him through online records is not very easy, as his name is registered in different forms at different times. He is Harry Cecil Palmer in the list of births for the second quarter of 1889; he is Harry C. Palmer in the 1891 census, he is simply Harry Palmer in the 1901 census; and he is H. Cecil Palmer in the 1911 census. That they are all one and the same person is confirmed by the consistency of dates and ages, by the names of his parents, Thomas and Rhoda, and by the names of his younger brothers, Frederick and

George. (He also had a younger sister, Eva, but she features with the family only in the 1901 census.) In the 1911 census the occupation of the 22 years old H. Cecil Palmer is listed as “Manager of Publisher”, in accordance with the details quoted from the marriage certificate above, and that of his 19 years old brother Frederick W. Palmer as “Publisher’s Assistant.” (Their brother George E. Palmer, aged 18, in contrast, is listed as “Horse Dealer’s Assistant.” Sister Eva, then aged 16, was in hospital at the time of this census.) The brothers are still living with their father, Thomas, a taxi-cab driver, at 36 Godolphin Road, off the Uxbridge Road, London. Curiously, the column headed “Rank or Profession of Father” on the marriage certificate contains the entry “of independent means”, but as Thomas was dead by then – he had died in 1915 – he was in no position to quibble. The name of their mother, Rhoda, has been entered on the census return, but then crossed out, presumably indicating that she was not at home at the time of the census. (She died in 1958 at the ripe old age of 95.)

But to return to the biographical details relating to Doris, on 17 February 1924 their daughter Mary Therese Palmer was born in the Ravenswood Nursing Home, Highgate Road, London.

After 1924, aside from the various books she illustrated, of which more below, no information has come to light about the events of Doris’s life, and we next see her in the 1939 Register. This lists Doris M. Palmer, “Commercial Artist”, as resident at 24 Little Russell Street, Holborn. London, though the whereabouts of both her husband and her daughter at that time are not clear.

To jump forward, we know that Cecil Palmer died on 18 January 1952, shortly before setting out for America on what would have been his third round of lectures and broadcasts, of which more presently. His death at the age of only 62 was the result of a serious heart condition. His death certificate makes it clear that at the time of his death he was living with E. E. Sproule, his step-daughter, at 26A The Broadway, Stanmore, Harrow (where his death

occurred), and that it was she who was the informant of the death. The 1951 electoral roll clarifies the situation, for it reveals that resident at 26A The Broadway in that year were Cecil Palmer, Ellen H. Palmer, Elizabeth E. Sproule and Michael A. Sproule. Marriage records reveal that Elizabeth E. Sproule (née Wilson) married Michael A. Sproule in Marylebone, London, in 1947. But who was Ellen H. Palmer ? She certainly wasn't Cecil's sister, for he had only one, younger, sister, the above-mentioned Eva. If Elizabeth was Cecil's step-daughter, then Ellen was presumably his wife and Elizabeth's mother, in which case her name before marriage was Ellen H. Wilson. But a trawl through the England & Wales Marriage Index 1916–2005 in search of an Ellen H. Wilson who became a Palmer on marriage yields no results. All this presumably means that by the time of his death, Cecil Palmer and his actual wife Doris M. Palmer had separated and that he was then living in an unofficial marriage to Ellen H. Wilson, who assumed the name of Palmer for respectability's sake. Certainly I could find no record of Cecil and Doris M. Palmer ever having divorced.

Doris Mary Palmer survived her husband by many years, and died in Worthing Hospital, Worthing, West Sussex, on 23 September 1977, her "Occupation and usual address" being listed, somewhat curiously, as "Widow of Cecil Palmer, Publisher / Journalist, Windycot Sea Road, Littlehampton." The informant of the death was her daughter, by then married, Mary Therese Byrde, her address being the same as that of her mother. (She had married John M. Byrde in Eastbourne in 1942.)

Cecil Palmer, the Publisher

As indicated above, Harry Cecil Palmer immediately brings to mind the publisher Cecil Palmer & Hayward, who published the so-called Haversack Edition of *The Rubaiyat* in 1916 (Potter #111 – [Fig.3](#)) and who published *A Miscellany of Poetry – 1919*, edited by W. Kean Seymour, a miscellany which contained contributions from, amongst others, G.K. Chesterton, John Drinkwater, Richard Le Gallienne and Edith Sitwell, all previously

unpublished in book form. The book was decorated by Doris Palmer, without an M. Its title page is shown in [Fig.4a](#) and three of its silhouette decorations (which seem to have little to do with the poems which they accompany) are shown in Figs.[4b](#), [4c](#) & [4d](#).([Browse](#).)

That H. Cecil Palmer is indeed the same as the Cecil Palmer of Cecil Palmer & Hayward, and that this Doris Palmer is the same as his wife Doris M. Palmer will become clear as we go along, though it is disconcerting, to say the least, to find a G.K. Chesterton Calendar first published in 1916, with a quotation from the works of Chesterton for every day of the year, selected by H. Cecil Palmer but published by Cecil Palmer & Hayward (its title-page is shown in [Fig.5](#)) – one would dearly like to know the reason for the disappearing and reappearing H for Harry, but I will retain it where and when it appears. Likewise, though common sense and intuition leap at the equating of Doris Palmer and Doris M. Palmer, Doris Palmer was a common name in the early 20th century, and it is possible that one of them was a different artist to ‘our’ Doris M. Palmer. So one feels a trifle wary about leaping to conclusions without knowing why the M appears and disappears. The first strong indication that the two are the same, though, lies in the silhouette figures common to [Fig.2h](#) and Figs.[4b](#), [4c](#) & [4d](#). ([Browse](#).)

Incidentally, Cecil Palmer & Hayward seem to have been in business from about 1910 to 1919. Overlapping with that period, Frank Palmer ([1a](#)) published a number of books between about 1909 and 1914, at which point Cecil Palmer joined him to form Frank & Cecil Palmer. Together they published several books between about 1914 and 1915, including H.G. Wells’ book *The War that will End War*, in 1914, and an H.G. Wells Calendar in 1915, this latter having previously been published by Frank Palmer alone in 1911. (In fact, the calendar idea came from Frank Palmer originally – amongst others he published a George Bernard Shaw Calendar in 1909, an Oscar Wilde Calendar in 1910, and even a Napoleon Calendar in 1911! ([1b](#))) Cecil Palmer seems to have gone

solo between about 1920 and 1935, during which period he published a large number of books in a wide range of fields, from novels, poetry and plays, via books about music & musicians, people & places, literature & history, to ghosts, palmistry, astrology, reincarnation, and what we would now call self-help health books for both men and women. Showing that times don't change much, he published Charles Henri Willi's books *Facial Rejuvenation* in 1926 and *The Secret of Looking Young* in 1932. Many of Palmer's other titles will get a mention in what follows. A list of the various calendars published by him up to 1920 is shown in [Fig.6a](#), for example, and another list of his "National Proverb Series", again dating from 1920, is shown in [Fig.6b](#). Again, though, the National Proverbs series originated with Frank Palmer – he had certainly published a dozen such by 1913, beginning with England in 1912. ([1c](#))

One of my favourites among Cecil Palmer's publications is *Premature Epitaphs, mostly written in Malice* by Kensal Green, published in 1927. Its front cover is shown in [Fig.7a](#). Kensal Green, of course, is one of the large London cemeteries, and we know that it was the pseudonym of "a majestic poet and a militant libertarian" friend of Cecil Palmer's ([2a](#)). It contains amusing pseudo-epitaphs in verse of the likes of Charlie Chaplin (in summary, he'll cause such laughter on stumbling into Heaven that his sins will be forgiven), Albert Einstein (in summary, buried relatively near here) and Bernard Shaw (in summary, dreading meeting St. Joan in Heaven), not to mention Cecil Palmer ("The fellow looked exactly like a farmer") and, last in the book, Kensal Green himself ("Kensal Green, his skin to save, / Here takes refuge in the grave.") The book's Omarian epitaph for "Any Communist" is particularly apt here in view of what follows below, so I quote it in full:

At last the secret is revealed
He would not take on trust –
That man can only equal man
When ALL are turned to dust.

The back of the dust jacket advertises two other quirky publications of Cecil Palmer's ([Fig.7b](#)). As these are as likely to intrigue readers of this essay as much as they did me, I give a sample two-page spread from the former in [Fig.7c](#) (p.18–9), and from the latter in [Fig.7d](#) (George Bernard Shaw).

Cecil Palmer also published numerous books relating to the Shakespeare Controversy, a useful listing of which, taken from the back of a copy of Gilbert Standen's book *Shakespeare Authorship: a Summary of Evidence*, published by Cecil Palmer in 1930, is shown in [Fig.8a](#). Lest anyone wonders if Palmer was making his own views on the somewhat eccentric ([3](#)) Shakespeare Controversy clear by putting, in the same list, *Mummy's Bedtime Story Book* (which was illustrated by Jessie M. King, note) and *Little Fairy Daydreams*, I can assure readers not. In my collection of eccentric literature I happen to have a copy of the listed book "*Shakespeare*" identified in *Edward de Vere* by the unfortunately named J. Thomas Looney (actually one of the saner contributions to the Shakespearean debate!), and tucked inside it is a letter from Palmer to a Mr. Squire, dated 18 February 1920, in which he declares himself to be a "Looneyite." This being a unique unpublished document I show it here as [Fig.8b](#). (Though the letter-head is that of Cecil Palmer & Hayward, the book was published by Cecil Palmer alone.)

Cecil Palmer, the Author

To begin before his marriage to Doris, H. Cecil Palmer had compiled *The Reflections of a Cheerful Pessimist*, published by Erskine Macdonald in London in 1914 – its title page is shown in [Fig.9](#). Why he didn't publish it himself is not clear, but he didn't. It contained two interesting reflections on Art: "Before Art can reign supreme in all her glory, we must first shoot three-quarters of the students of art, and bury their work with them" (p.12) and, "In the house of art are many mansions; if it were not so it would be less difficult to detect the many charlatans who live therein" (p.28). Musically, he

was not much enamoured of Ragtime either, describing it as “the natural expression of unnatural musical taste” (p.15). In addition, there is a reflection declaring that “Woman may sometimes be ‘a thing of beauty’; she is seldom ‘a joy for ever’” (p.13) and another which asserts that, “The bachelor THINKS that marriage is a market where you pay your money and take your choice; the married man KNOWS that it is a market where you pay your money and DON’T take your choice – you take what is given unto you” (p.22). (This comes from a bachelor of age 25, remember.) One wonders if Doris read this little book of 43 pages somewhere along the line, but that we will probably never know, though if she did, she may have been placated by her husband’s observation that “ ‘a gladiatorial contest for sovereignty’ between the sexes cannot be in the best interests of either.” (p.38) Another of his reflections perhaps explains why they married in a register office: “The greatest obstacles to religion are the Churches, and all that in them is.” (p.12)

But *Reflections* is interesting also for its references to such things as Capitalism, Democracy, Social Reform, Strikes, and Poverty, for these (written when Palmer was only in his mid-twenties, remember), pre-figure what was to be the work which he regarded as his magnum opus, *The British Socialist Ill-Fare State*, published in America in 1952. Its title-page is shown in [Fig.10](#), and as can be seen from its facing page, *Reflections* was “by the same author”, thus confirming that H. Cecil Palmer is indeed the same person as Cecil Palmer.

As is clear even from the title, the book is a condemnation of Socialism and the Welfare State, running to a somewhat repetitive 600+ pages. Socialism is, according to Palmer, nothing more than adolescent communism which controls the people under the guise of democracy, and imposes heavy taxes on them to pay for ‘free’ services, whether they use them or not; its Nationalised Industries are overly bureaucratic, inefficient and they suppress the spirit of free commercial enterprise; its Trade Unions can hold Industry to ransom with threats of strikes

for no good reason; the Welfare State (Palmer's Ill-Fare State, of course) is not only an economic disaster, but it encourages the work-shy and the shirker to claim benefits, as well as being an insult to the British virtues of self-reliance and self-help; and its National Health Service (Palmer's National Ill-Health Disservice) is promoting a nation of hypochondriac medicine drinkers and pill takers at a cost which is spiralling out of control. Palmer was, in his own words, "an old-fashioned die-hard Tory." (2b). Many of his complaints, of course, rightly or wrongly, have echoes in today's political arena.

The book was published in America because by then Cecil Palmer had moved out of publishing (2c) and, according to the obituary of him published in the newspaper *Truth* (Fig.11), he could find no English publisher willing to take it on. The American interest came from the fact that at that time the USA was wary of socialism but at the same time was watching the progress of the English Welfare State and its National Health Service, as it was considering something similar. Hence there was much interest in Palmer's lectures as well as his book, and he was well enough known to meet General Eisenhower in New York in 1950 (2d).

In his anti-Socialist crusade, Palmer published a number of books and articles in the 1940s and up to his death in 1952, though it is not necessary to go into details here as *The British Socialist Ill-Fare State* says it all. It is perhaps worthy of mention that back in 1919, Cecil Palmer & Hayward had published *Trade Unionism for Clerks* by J.H. Lloyd & R.E. Scouller, with an Introduction by George Bernard Shaw, and that in 1912, as H. Cecil Palmer, he had edited *The Open Mind: a Monthly Magazine for the Free and Open Discussion of Public Questions*, though it seems to have been short-lived, possibly running to as few as four issues. (4) The front cover, contents page, and Palmer's Editorial for the first issue are shown here as Figs.12a, 12b & 12c.

But this has taken us out of chronological sequence, so let us now back-track slightly and return to our artist.

It would be interesting to know what Doris Palmer thought of some of her husband's publishing activities, and whether or not she shared his anti-socialist views. It would also be interesting to know if she accompanied her husband on his American lecture tours, some of which were very extensive: we know, for example, that he was in America for much of 1948 and 1949 ([2e](#)). But alas, as yet, we know none of these things, though as indicated above, it does seem as if she and her husband had separated by then, and all we have is her art work. It is a regrettable fact that Doris M. Palmer, like most of us, lived her life without making much impact on the press, and a broad sweep of the British Newspaper Archive turns up nothing relating to her aside from about half a dozen reviews / listings of her *Rubaiyat*, a mere mention of one of her other books (*The House with the Twisting Passage* – see below), and a simple advertisement for a shop in Worthing, of which more later. She had a much lower public profile than her husband, alas. Plus, not having become famous, no letters to or from her relating to her work seem to have survived, or at least, at the time of writing, I am not aware of any.

Other Works illustrated / decorated by Doris M. Palmer for Cecil Palmer.

Cecil Palmer was a great fan of Charles Dickens and between 1920 and 1930 published more than a dozen Dickens-related books, including George Gissing's book *The Immortal Dickens* in 1925, and, unable to stay away from politics for too long, *Dickens and Democracy*, and *Other Studies*, by Cumberland Clark, in 1930. He was also involved in publishing *The Dickensian*, the Journal of the Dickens Fellowship, certainly between about 1920 and 1927, but possibly longer. Of particular interest to us here, though, is that in 1920 he published "Four Dainty Dickens Booklets" which were illustrated and decorated by his wife under the name Doris M. Palmer. Each appeared in a dust-jacket like that shown in [Fig.13](#) (this being the version for no.3 in the series) and each had a colour illustration on the front cover. As the "Season's

Greetings” on the inner front flap of the dust–cover shows, the books were brought out specifically for the Christmas market. The four booklets were:

No.1: *The Seven Poor Travellers* – its cover is shown in [Fig.14a](#), its title–page in [Fig.14b](#), and an example of its silhouette–style decorations (on p.26) shown in [Fig.14c](#). ([Browse.](#))

No.2: *A Christmas Tree; and What Christmas is as We Grow Older* – its cover is shown in [Fig.15a](#), the title–page of *A Christmas Tree* in [Fig.15b](#), the title–page of *What Christmas is as We Grow Older* in [Fig.15c](#), and the silhouette–style tail–piece of the latter in [Fig.15d](#). Note the unusual signature “DMP” in [Fig.15c](#). ([Browse.](#))

No.3: *A Child’s Dream of a Star; and The Holly Tree* – its cover is shown in [Fig.16a](#), its title–page in [Fig.16b](#), and a nice example of its line–drawings (that on p.10, neatly depicting the dying Child and the figure of Death with his Scythe) together with the title–page of the following story, “The Holly Tree”, in [Fig.16c](#). (For some reason, aside from its frontispiece, “The Holly Tree” is not illustrated.) ([Browse.](#))

No.4: *Holiday Romance* – its cover is shown in [Fig.17a](#), its title–page in [Fig.17b](#), and [Fig.17c](#) shows both another of her silhouette–style decorations (p.18) and an example of the embellished initial letters at the beginning of each chapter (p.19.) ([Browse.](#))

In 1920 Cecil Palmer also published *Arachne*, a play in verse based upon the Greek myth, by Adelaide Eden Phillpotts ([5](#)) which had decorations by Doris M. Palmer. Its title–page is shown in [Fig.18a](#) and a good example of its silhouette–style figures and embellished initial letters in [Fig.18b](#). ([Browse.](#))

Straight away, readers will note the common silhouette styles of Doris Palmer’s decorations for *A Miscellany of Poetry – 1919* in Figs. [4a](#), [4b](#), [4c](#) & [4d](#), and those of Doris M. Palmer in both the “Four Dainty Dickens Booklets”

(Figs. 13 to 17 inclusive) and *Arachne* (Figs. [18a](#) & [18b](#)), not to mention [Fig. 2h](#) in her *Rubaiyat*. These are indeed the same artist, M or no M. ([Browse](#).)

Of the greatest interest to us here, though, is another book published by Cecil Palmer, rather later, in 1931: *Tell me a Story: Original Tales and Verses Written and Illustrated by Doris Palmer*. As with *A Miscellany of Poetry – 1919*, then, there is no M between Doris and Palmer. The cover, the decorated title–page and full title–page are shown in Figs. [19a](#), [19b](#) & [19c](#) respectively. The book contains four colour plates, illustrating four of the eight stories, all of which are shown here as Figs. [19d](#), [19e](#), [19f](#) & [19g](#). ([Browse](#).) All are signed DORIS PALMER. A brief description of the story–line associated with each of these coloured plates is perhaps in order, for they give us one of our closest points of contact with both author and illustrator.

[Fig. 19d](#): “The Gentle Breeze”: A rather strange story about three pilgrims crossing a desert, two of whom die of heat and thirst, and the third of whom prays to Allah for a gentle breeze to cool him down. His prayer is answered and he is able to reach the shade of palm trees and a source of running water. How did this happen ? The story shifts to a Princess who, despite her husband’s great wealth, has remained childless. One evening she sighs, “Oh, if I had a son!”, at which point a gentle wind arises and whispers to her that her wish will be granted, but that for three months of the year the soul of her son will be taken away by the Wind, and he will be as dead. The Wind reassures the Princess that after three months his soul will return. The story finishes:

And often when this little child is lying in her lap she gazes deep into his eyes, which seem to have a far–away expression as if he were out of the world, high up in the heavens like a gentle breeze coming to bring joy to pilgrims on the sand–baked deserts and the rolling plains. (p.21–2)

[Fig. 19e](#): “The Yellow Scarf”: a story about Mr and Mrs

Ratentat and their children, a rat family from Catford (“a very unfortunate place for a rat to be born.”). The yellow scarf is a present from the work-shy Mr Ratentat to placate his long-suffering wife. Their children went to “Rodent College for the sons of Land and Water-rats”, by the way (p.32).

[Fig.19f](#): “The Star”: The story of the Princess Jadia whose love for a Prince is thwarted by his jealous Magician King father, who also has eyes for the Princess. When she refuses to marry the father, he turns his son into a star, compelled to look down on the Princess but unable to be with her. He also banishes the Princess to a dark forest, and condemns her never to die, so that her soul shall never be re-united with the Prince. The illustration shows the Princess in the forest having her first glimpse of the star into which the Prince has been turned (it can be seen reflected in the pool in front of her, somewhat in defiance of the Laws of Reflection!) After many months of separation, one day the star has disappeared, and the Princess hears someone coming towards her through the undergrowth. It is the Prince, who tells her that his father is dead, the spell is broken, but that she must return with him to the star. The story ends:

So he lifted her up, and their souls rose higher and higher above the forest, above the world, above everything; and they lived in the brightest star for ever and ever. Perhaps you have seen them. (p.42)

[Fig.19g](#): “The Two Orange Trees”: The tale of the Spanish Princess Dorinda, whose father had planned for her to marry a very rich Prince. Unfortunately, she had fallen in love with the Troubadour Antonio, and to forestall her father’s plans she disguises herself as a dancing girl, sneaks out of the palace, and she and Antonio are married by a priest in the orange grove. When the arranged marriage approaches – to be conducted in the orange grove – the Princess is forced to confess to her father, who slays Antonio with his sword, upon which the Princess falls dead. The story ends:

They say she died of a broken heart, but strangely enough, the next day on the same spot where the lovers died, two new orange trees appeared, and it is said they blossom all the year round, and the flowers never fall or die, and they are called the Trees of True Love, and when there are weddings people come and gather their orange blossom from these trees.

Even now they are there, and will be till the world is no more. (p.49)

So much for the stories. Let us look now at the poems.

In *Tell me a Story* there are twenty four poems in all, though for some reason only the first seventeen are decorated / illustrated with line drawings. To give readers a good idea of the drawings and their associated poems, I reproduce four examples here: [Fig.19h](#) illustrating the poem “Curry”; [Fig.19i](#) illustrating the poem “Things I’d Like To Be”; [Fig.19j](#) illustrating the poem “The Changeling Child”; & [Fig.19k](#) illustrating the poem “My Goblin”. The first would probably be regarded as “racially inappropriate” today, as indeed would her other poem “Mr. G. Wog”, despite its affectionate closing couplet, “I’d hate to lose my Gollywog, / I’d *hate* it – wouldn’t you ?” The other three show a common interest in Fairies, the Little People and Goblins (as does another poem, “My Gnome”). This is not unusual in children’s books, of course, though I sometimes wonder how much of such material in this era was given a boost by Conan Doyle’s eccentric classic *The Coming of the Fairies*, published by Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. in 1922 ([6a](#)), and which aroused much interest and controversy at the time of its publication and for long after. Note that the second of the poems illustrated here is written from the perspective of a boy (as are two other poems “Visitors” and “In The Garden”) and that the other three poems illustrated here are written from the perspective of a girl (as are various others.) The book is presumably aimed at children generally, then, though it probably catered more for girls than boys. As for the target age-range of the stories,

though children of all ages delight in tales of Princes and Princesses, and in animal stories like “The Yellow Scarf”, the Proserpinesque concept of a child being rendered effectively dead for three months of the year by the Wind, as in “The Gentle Breeze”, is surely a very strange one for younger children and probably for most older ones as well.

Though the colour plates of *Tell me a Story* are more ‘basic’ and ‘modern’ in style, and their bold colouring is more artificial than her *Rubaiyat* illustrations, the signature in capital letters is very similar, and both the line drawings in *Tell me a Story* and the silhouette drawings in *A Miscellany of Poetry – 1919* are so similar to the line drawings & silhouette images in the Dickens booklets that it is clear that, as common sense and intuition alike suggest, Doris Palmer and Doris M. Palmer are indeed the same. If confirmation were needed, the dancing silhouettes in [Fig.2h](#) & [Fig.19a](#) provide it. That being the case, *Tell me a Story* represents a closer, more personal, point of contact for us with Doris M. Palmer than is her edition of *The Rubaiyat*.

Incidentally, the book was dedicated “To Mary”, who was presumably her daughter Mary Therese Palmer.

Finally, as a coda to the foregoing, in 1938 William Heinemann Ltd published Cecil Palmer’s book *The Truth about Writing*. It was dedicated, “For Mary, with Gratitude”, so this may well have been a dedication to his daughter. In it he wrote:

In my publishing days, I decided, rightly or wrongly, that the best policy for my small house was to specialise in certain clearly defined branches of literature. For example, for many years I refused to publish children’s books, and I took the trouble to make this fact apparent to all whom it might concern. I knew enough about the “juveniles” market to convince myself that it was a specialised branch of the publishing industry, and that to make a commercial success of it I should

need to inaugurate and capitalise a brand new production and selling organisation. I knew also that it was, and is, a fiercely competitive market. Wisely, I think, I left it alone. But would authors of children's books leave me alone ? Not a bit of it. I received, on an average, two hundred and fifty such manuscripts a year. And so, year by year, I let loose on the world, platoons of disgruntled authors, each firmly convinced in his own mind that my greatest fun in life was depriving little children of their little joys. (p.82–3)

I leave readers to draw their own conclusions from this.

Other Works illustrated by Doris M. Palmer for other Publishers.

The first and obvious question is: why didn't Cecil Palmer publish his wife's illustrated edition of *The Rubaiyat* ? One possible answer is that it was a costly and risky publishing venture that the Palmers felt was best farmed out to a publisher better able to shoulder both the cost and the risk. On the other hand, in 1921 or 1922 Cecil Palmer did publish an edition (7), in 6 volumes, of Edward William Lane's translation of *The Thousand and One Nights, or, Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, illustrated by Frank Brangwyn, so funds cannot have been in short supply.

In addition to her *Rubaiyat*, however, Doris seems to have illustrated / decorated only two other books for publishers other than her husband.

The first, as Doris M. Palmer, was *The House with the Twisting Passage*, by Marion St. John Webb, published by George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., in 1922. Its coloured frontispiece (which reminds me very much of Tenniel's Alice) is shown in [Fig.20a](#); three of its five full-page black and white drawings in [Fig.20b](#) (p.28), [Fig.20c](#) (p.209) & [Fig.20d](#) (p.243); and a page with a decorated initial letter and typical line drawing in [Fig.20e](#) (p.247). Note the almost cartoon style of Figs. [20b](#) & [20c](#) (cf

[Fig.19e](#)). ([Browse](#).)

The second, as Doris Palmer, was *Noah's Wife*, by Ian Dall, published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford, in 1925, whose title-page is shown in [Fig.21a](#). This was a book of six miniature plays in verse, each decorated with a head-piece and a tail-piece, one of which, set in the Ark needless to say, was "Noah's Wife." To be honest, the decorations for "Noah's Wife" are not Doris at her best, so I give here the head-piece with opening text of "One Sunset" ([Fig.21b](#)) and the full-page illustrations (the only two in the book) on p.35 ([Fig.21c](#)) & p.41 ([Fig.21d](#)) both illustrating the longest of the plays, "Among Old Instruments". In both illustrations compare the seated figure in [Fig.19d](#), and in the former illustration compare the (sometimes inconsistent!) use of reflections in [Figs.2c](#), [2d](#), [2g](#), [2j](#), and, less conspicuously, [Fig.16a](#). Note also the rather different use of a reflection in [Fig.19f](#). ([Browse](#).) ([6b](#))

It is curious that her first few illustrated works and her last, her 'magnum opus', as it were, were published by her husband whereas the intermediate three works were not. Whether this has any significance is not known.

Finally, as we saw earlier, Doris M. Palmer was listed as commercial artist in the 1939 register, and yet her last illustrated book was published in 1931. What was she doing after 1931 ? Two possibilities, of course, are that she was doing illustrations for magazines or for use in advertisements, which are much more difficult to track than books as they are so often unsigned and un-attributed. But given that she died in Worthing and that at the time of her death was living in Littlehampton, just along the coast to the west of Worthing, one intriguing possibility suggests itself, almost certainly erroneously, as it turns out, but worth mentioning here lest anyone else gets led down the same misleading trail.

On 19 September 1958 *The [Worthing] Herald* newspaper ran the advertisement for Doris M. Palmer's wool shop shown in [Fig.22](#). This particular advert appeared on a

page bearing similar adverts for other Worthing wool & woollens shops, these surrounding an article titled “Dressed to kill in a home made woolly – you’re up to date”, whose opening sentence was “Knitting is headline news.” Less prominent advertisements for the same shop featured in the same newspaper from about 1955. These certainly make one wonder if ‘our’ Doris had been involved at some stage in designing garments and / or doing illustrations for advertisements of them, and, if so, via this route, had come to earn a living by running this shop selling quality woollen goods and special wools for knitting.

Sue Worrall and Amy Perry of West Sussex Library Research Services very kindly did some local sleuthing on my behalf. Looking at the local street directories they found that the first available one which lists D. Palmer, wool stores, at 17 Station Parade, is that of 1956, but that she is there listed as *Miss D Palmer*. Since we have no reason to doubt the “Miss”, and since ‘our’ Doris M. Palmer was legally still a “Mrs.”, we must conclude that we have here two different Doris M. Palmers. Consequently, what Doris M. Palmer the book illustrator did after the publication of *Tell me a Story* in 1931 remains shrouded in mystery.

Finally, Sue and Amy checked their files of newspaper cuttings and microfilm versions of *The Worthing Gazette* and *The Worthing Herald* for the weeks following Doris’s death, but, alas, found no obituary of her. She died in obscurity, it seems.

Notes

Note 1a: I could find no trace of a London-based Frank Palmer, who was a publisher, in the 1911 census, and, besides Cecil Palmer, the only such Palmer associated with publishing that I could find was Frederick Palmer, Cecil’s brother.

Note 1b: These were perpetual calendars – that is, the dates were not related to any specific days of the week.

The years of publication given here are, so far as I know, those of their first appearance in print, but of course they could be re-printed in subsequent years as demand required.

Note 1c: It is perhaps worth giving here an image of the title-page of the English Proverbs volume, with, opposite, a list of other currently available titles ([Fig.23a](#)), and also an image of the book's prefatory note (which featured with appropriate adjustments in other volumes in the series), together with the date of publication, and (opposite) the first page of proverbs ([Fig.23b](#).) As can be seen from the opening proverbs, many of these are not exactly current today. However, the book is interesting not only as a catalogue of numerous now extinct proverbs, but also for the fact that some of them would now be condemned as outrageously sexist or racist – or both! Indeed, in my copy two proverbs have actually been scored through in pencil by a previous owner as being racially offensive.

Note 2: *The British Socialist Ill-Fare State*: a) p.xi & p.87 (Might he be Collin Brooks, “one of the most distinguished libertarians of the day” (p.56) and “a glorious man of wit” (p.560)? He was also a poet, his *Poems* having been published in 1914.); b) p.438; c) p.198; d) p.349–50; e) p.98.

Note 3: Cecil Palmer generally seems to have avoided the wilder shores of the Shakespeare Controversy – the use of ciphers, coded messages, acrostics, anagrams & Rosicrucian symbolism, not to mention intrigues at the court of Queen Elizabeth I and spiritualist communications, to ‘prove’ that Shakespeare didn’t really write the works attributed to him. However, Bertram G. Theobald’s *‘Shake-speare’s’ Sonnets Unmasked* could certainly be classed as a wilder shore of what John Fiske called “the silliest mare’s nest ever devised by human dullness.”

Note 4: The only surviving copies of *The Open Mind* known to me are those for February 16th, March 16th,

April 16th and May 16th 1912 (vol.1, nos.1 to 4) housed in the British Library in London. No others are listed on the Jisc Library Hub (formerly COPAC.)

Note 5: She was the daughter of poet, essayist and novelist, Eden Phillpotts, a friend of Cecil Palmer, who contributed two poems to *A Miscellany of Poetry – 1919* and to whom *Reflections* was dedicated. Cecil Palmer & Hayward had published her first book, *Illyrion and Other Poems* in 1916. In the same year they published her father's book, *The Girl and the Faun*, illustrated by Frank Brangwyn, having the previous year published an Eden Phillpotts Calendar.

Note 6a: Doyle's *Coming of the Fairies* attracted much ridicule for its serious treatment of the infamous Cottingley Photographs, allegedly photographs of real fairies taken by two young girls in the Yorkshire village of Cottingley, the first two in 1917, and the second three in 1920. The photos achieved notoriety when the first two were published in the Christmas number of *The Strand Magazine* in 1920, and Doyle's book, featuring all five photos, followed on from this, and reported on further investigations both by himself and by Theosophist Edward L. Gardner (who had actually encountered the first photographs before Doyle.) Though subject to ridicule, 'real' fairies, not to mention an equally 'real' prancing gnome, were nevertheless on the agenda to those with lively imaginations and mystical inclinations. Indeed, in some quarters the photos were regarded as the discovery of a new world, akin to Columbus' discovery of America! A slide-show exhibition of the photos at Theosophical Society Headquarters in London on 2 March 1921 was eagerly attended by 150 people, and was widely reported in the Press (eg. *The Shipley Times and Express*, 4 March 1921, p.8 col.2.) By 1925 the Theosophical Society had published Geoffrey Hodson's wonderfully eccentric book *Fairies at Work and at Play*, which recorded his psychic observations of Fairies, Elves and Gnomes. The book attracted enough attention to be reprinted in 1930, and at least three times thereafter. In

1942 Edward L. Gardner published his own book, *Fairies – the Cottingley Photographs and their Sequel*, this being another Theosophical Society publication. A notable convert to the fairy faith was Air Chief Marshall Lord Dowding who coined the phrase, “No fairies, no grass; no grass, no mutton chops.”

The two young girls who took the photos had started the whole thing as a joke, using fairy figures neatly copied from a book, then cut out and propped up with hat-pins. But the joke got out of hand so quickly that they were effectively trapped into pretending it was all as true as the great Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wanted it to be. It was only many years later, in the 1980s, that the girls – by now elderly women, of course – finally came clean.

Note 6b: By way of background, in some ways “Among Old Instruments” parallels Omar’s Potter’s Shop, with the pots replaced by musical instruments, and the shop by a musician’s loft: an instrument’s life, like that of a man’s, is transient (p.25). Each instrument tells its story in turn, and it is the tambourine which, having once belonged to a Salvationist, leads to talk of Heaven & Hell (p.44), of realms between the two (including that of fairies, elms and gnomes, this being a contribution from the violin – see below), and of the “phantasmata of the séance room” (p46–7) – this last being a contribution from the tambourine which, like the trumpet, regularly forms part of the medium’s paraphernalia. Of the two full page illustrations, [Fig.21c](#) is a garden scene from the violin’s story, and [Fig.21d](#) is a gypsy scene from the tambourine’s story.

It may or may not be significant, in view of note [6a](#) above, that on p.45–6 of the play, the violin quotes the following lines which (as a credit on the Contents page tells us) come from an unspecified issue of *The Occult Review*:

Alas, it is the earth’s unspoken grief
That fairies are destroyed by unbelief,
The elves, the gnomes discredited, and gone
The last far-echoing horn of Oberon.

And a few lines later:

In realms of Reason Fancy's but a thief:
The fairies are destroyed by unbelief...

Note 7: Actually, this was a republication of the 1896 Brangwyn-illustrated edition of Lane's *Thousand and One Nights*, also in 6 volumes, published by Gibbings & Co., London, and J.B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia.

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For an Addendum containing much more information about the artist and her work, supplied by her grandchildren Mary and John Byrde, click [here](#).

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