Looking Out for the Little Guys: Small Book Conservation Through the Eyes of a Paper Engineer
Kyle Olmon

Elizabeth Corbett Yeats and the Cuala Press
Robert Walp
On the front cover:
Example of Kyle Insert, version 1 by Kyle Olmon

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Looking Out for the Little Guys: Small Book Conservation Through the Eyes of a Paper Engineer

Kyle Olmon

Small books present a problem for librarians, curators, and collectors: how to safely and accessibly house them without losing them among larger items on the shelves? Kyle Olmon, a pop-up artist and paper engineer, developed a custom enclosure insert for small books that can be easily and quickly constructed for use in a large library collection. Here he discusses the design process behind this elegant solution and provides directions for its construction.

Elizabeth Corbett Yeats and the Cuala Press

Robert Walp

Numerous fine presses flourished during the Arts and Crafts period, but only one was founded and staffed entirely by women: Ireland’s Cuala Press, established by Elizabeth Corbett Yeats, sister of the painter Jack Yeats and the poet William Butler Yeats. Robert Walp provides a brief history of the Cuala Press, which set itself apart by hand-printing fine first editions of new work by leading writers of the period.
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Editor’s Note

It is with mixed emotions and gratitude to Cara Schlesinger that I share the long overdue Volume 48, 2019 with the membership of the Guild. I am grateful to these authors for their patience during this process. To those authors who withdrew from this issue for whatever reason, my apologies. We all wish things could have proceeded more smoothly and expeditiously. Your articles all had strong merits and were deserving of publication; we understand.

I am thankful to Cara for agreeing to carry on with this issue after her term ended at Standards 2019 and mine began. Cara had been working for a long time with these authors and the others who submitted articles. For that reason, it is important that she receives the credit for her labor, as do the reviewers who helped vet the articles. This labor is not to be underestimated as it is what ultimately helps define the successful publication of an issue.

This issue is being published electronically for two reasons. The first is to get to readers as quickly as possible; it has been a long time since the last. To the authors, you get to cite your articles as having appeared in Volume 48, 2019 of the Guild of Book Workers’ Journal. The other reason is that it is not fiscally responsible to go to print with these two articles only. Fear not, though, they will appear in the next print issue for which articles have been committed and are being worked on. It is my expectation, and that this print issue will appear before the end of the calendar year.

The Journal is one of the signature benefits of membership and helps define the Guild. It can only be successful AND sustainable through the contributions of the membership as a whole. You the members play a vital role in this by sharing your work, ideas, projects, etc., in presentations, on listservs, blogs, and on social media. What do you want to see more of in the Journal? Who should the Journal be writing for? Are there voices and/or topics you would like to see gain more exposure?

Equally important are Team members, especially a co-editor who is interested in carrying on the work of the Journal when my term ends in fall of 2021. This position can be extremely rewarding on many levels, and joining us as materials are still being gathered is a great time to learn the process. If you are interested, please reach out to me. In the meantime, it’s full steam ahead for Volume 49.

Enjoy these articles, and I look forward to hearing from you,

Peter D. Verheyen
Editor
The Guild of Book Workers Journal
Example of the Kyle Insert, version 2, constructed for a book in the collection of the Thomas J. Watson Library Special Collections, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
LOOKING OUT FOR THE LITTLE GUYS: SMALL BOOK CONSERVATION THROUGH THE EYES OF A PAPER ENGINEER

Kyle Olmon

The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s conservators were in search of a solution. The Thomas J. Watson Library, the Met’s main research library, has over a million items in its collection, and it processes hundreds of new acquisitions each month. Many of these items are tiny and could easily be lost or damaged, as they are shelved together with larger books of the octavo format.

To address this concern, the library’s Sherman Fairchild Center for Book Conservation initially adapted a preservation enclosure designed for small books that Hedi Kyle designed during her time as conservator at the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia. This “box with inset” template and a discussion of various enclosures by Hedi Kyle is made available by The Guild of Book Workers at the following link: https://guildofbookworkers.org/sites/guildofbookworkers.org/files/standards/2005-Kyle_Hedi.pdf. The sturdy structure was very effective and straightforward but time-intensive in the making. Maybe there was a way to reimagine a new solution.

During my fellowship at the Watson Library, the preservation librarian, Mindell Dubansky, and the associate manager of book conservation, Jenny Davis, handed me an example of their preservation enclosure for small books and asked if I would like to tackle this design challenge from a different perspective.

The goal was to protect small-format books while also finding efficiencies in labor and material costs. After reviewing the previous design, I knew that I had to create a structure that would support all sides of the book to prevent damage during transport. Relying on my experience creating pop-up books and movable cards as a paper engineer, I began to dream up some new designs.

When I create a pop-up mechanism, I first envision the movement or final structure, and then I reduce the object to basic geometric forms and planes. I think about how the size or thickness of the paper will make it rigid enough to prop up a large object, or conversely, flex with the paper grain to achieve a fluid movement or a graceful line. In this case,
I tried to push my designs of an enclosure beyond the traditional look of commercial packaging and strike a balance between simplicity and strength.

Initial investigations with various heavy cardstock and corrugated cardboard sheets revealed these materials to be too cumbersome, so I eventually focused my efforts on a single sheet of 10-point map folder stock. (As a general rule, I would not use an index or cardstock less than 110 lbs/200 gsm/9 pt.) Paying attention to paper grain can also be helpful when creasing your paper or allowing the sides to bend, but as we will later see, by using the second template variation described below, one can mitigate this concern and fold scrap paper with or against the grain.

I began by designing an insert for a small book measuring 4 inches tall, 2 ¼ inches wide, and 1 inch deep. My first prototype featured four corner pockets that the edges of the book would rest inside. This was envisioned as a negative space interpretation of those adhesive corner tabs that secure a photographic print to an album. After testing the design, I quickly realized that the entire center material must be removed to make space for the full dimensions of the book, but this iteration allowed me to recognize that the flexing paper on the sides would be strong enough to retain the book. An example of this first prototype can be found in the lower left corner of the photo below.

Next, I creased parallel lines in the map folder stock to create a ledge for the book to stand on. I then folded a cap for the top edge of the book that mirrored the lower ledge. When creating pop-up mechanisms, it is important to minimize folds and glue points for quicker construction and lower production costs. This holds true with commercial projects as well as unique editions of movable artists’ books. With this in mind, I experimented with various side wall designs.

The left and right-side walls serve double duty in containing the book and stabilizing the top and bottom ledges that would otherwise sag from the weight of the nested book. In the first template, Hedi Kyle had buttressed the book from all angles by carving out side walls to create similar structures that were perpendicular to the ledges, essentially creating a well or hole to encase the book. To save time and paper, I experimented with using a long, skinny sheet of the paper board and keeping all the creases parallel. This would prove to be an advantage in the event that a book has a very narrow width and a large spine or depth—a combination that would prove a challenge to creating side walls out of the interior section of paper, as required in Hedi Kyle’s design.

When handling heavy card stocks, I often think of paper grain and how to best utilize the directional strength of the fibers. Positioning the creases perpendicular to the paper grain would allow the sides of my structure to be more rigid and support the book. Conversely, by placing the creases parallel to the paper grain, I am able to get achieve sharp folds and introduce flex into the side walls of the structure, as seen in the diagram of my first variation.

I now had a simple but sturdy design using a single sheet of medium map folder stock. I was able to nest a small book upright between the two shelves, and a low-slung cradle supported the sides of the object. This flexed paper exposes the edges of the book at the center point, which provides an access point for easy removal of the book from the enclosure inset. Even with the ability to lift the small books from the middle, it was agreed upon that more optimal handling and retrieval could be achieved by attaching a small length of cotton or linen tape to the base of the enclosure with a protruding tail to lift the book from the cradle.
I began to call this completed design the Kyle Insert so that my name would live on long past my fellowship ended at the Watson Library. Mindell mentioned that my choice of name might be confused with Hedi Kyle and her original template, but I liked the idea that this design exploration was being passed from one Kyle to another and frankly, I would be honored if my work were mistaken for one of her ingenious creations.

In recent years, the Watson Library has been amassing a great artists’ book collection, which means that objects in all types of formats and materials would need to be accommodated by the Kyle Insert. It was suggested that I test the new design with other books. Thus began a flurry of cuts and creases as I tested a few more small books of various dimensions. I soon determined that if the book had a spine greater than one inch and an overall height less than four times the spine measurement, then there would not be enough paper to create the curved sides of the Kyle Insert. This was the case with the thick collection of twenty-four mini comic books titled *Corpus Corpus IV: pax* from 2012 (https://library.metmuseum.org/record=b1909565~S1).

To solve the problem of a thick spine relative to height, I created a variation of the insert in which I added a central crease and carved out some glue tabs to anchor the more angular insert to the base of the enclosure. I no longer needed to make creases along the paper grain to bend the side walls and was free to select paper scraps in any grain orientation. This second version required a revised set of templates and instructions and relied heavily on solving the unknown measurements using the Pythagorean theorem. (Everyone remember their $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ formula from their school days?) Despite the extra calculations, I was able to assemble each version of the Kyle Insert in about 20 minutes, achieving roughly a 60% savings in construction time and material usage. It appeared that I had found a new way to solve the Watson Library’s challenge.

In the years since my initial design, the two versions of the Kyle Insert have been used for dozens of miniature books of all shapes and sizes with great success. Jenny Davis noted that “the Kyle Insert has allowed us to safely house our ever-growing collection of small items in a way that is simple and efficient. Above all, we want the books to be protected within their enclosures, and this design achieves that while still being relatively quick to create and easy to teach to our skilled volunteers.”

My training as a paper engineer and book artist gave me a new perspective on the situation. I hope that by learning from my design process, you may be inspired to look at your own challenges with fresh eyes. Do not underestimate the value of collaborations with individuals from different fields, and don’t be afraid to try new solutions inspired by attending workshops or continuing education courses. I encourage you to try out the included templates of both versions of the Kyle Insert, which can be found at http://kyleolmon.wordpress.com/kyle-inserts, as well as Hedi Kyle’s original design, to find out what works best for your situation.

Happy cutting!
Elizabeth (left) and Susan Yeats (right) c. 1904
ELIZABETH CORBETT YEATS AND THE CUALA PRESS

Robert Walp

The history of printing is largely one of stories about men who designed typefaces, cut punches, ran huge printing enterprises, or nurtured their particular design philosophies through the creation of their own private presses. One notable exception in this history is the story of the Cuala [pronounced coola] Press and its founder, Elizabeth Corbett Yeats, who, along with her older sister Lily, and their two brothers, the painter Jack Yeats and the poet William Butler Yeats, contributed to what poet and literary critic Robin Skelton describes as one of the two most important of the many private Irish presses of the twentieth century (1964, 368), and the only one entirely staffed by women.

The Yeats children’s father, John Butler Yeats, and their mother, Susan Pollexfen, were married in 1863. Soon after, he quit a budding law practice and embarked on what became, at least in terms of providing for his family, a failed art career. He spent most of his married life apart from his family. In 1907 he went with Lily to America for the New York Irish Exhibition. It was intended to be a short trip, but after the exhibition concluded, Lily returned to Ireland alone. John Yeats died in 1922 in New York City, having never returned home. He is buried in a rural cemetery in the tiny Adirondack village of Chestertown, my home town, in the family plot of his friend Jeanne Foster.

My interest in the Cuala Press came about in 2003, when the Australian Yeats Society and the Yeats Society of New York held an international conference in Chestertown, a very big deal for this small town. The circumstances surrounding John Yeats’s burial so far from New York City are clouded in mystery. It may have been a gravediggers’ strike, but most likely Yeats was destitute and his family could not afford to bring his body to Ireland. Despite his laissez-faire attitude towards his family, it appears that the Yeats children were never totally estranged from their father. In my research I came across many examples of correspondence between John Butler Yeats and his children, leading me to believe they remained in contact throughout his long absences.

Even before their father left Ireland, the Yeats family faced constant financial difficulties that led them to move from city to city. Lily was born in Enniscrone, near Sligo on the west coast of Ireland, on August 25, 1866.
Elizabeth was born in London on March 11, 1868. In 1872 the family moved to Sligo to the home of their mother’s family, while their father stayed in London. The years that followed found the children and their mother living variously in Sligo, London, or Dublin, sometimes together, sometimes not, often without their father. In 1866 they all moved back to London.

In the autumn of 1888, Lily began work with May Morris in her London embroidery shop. May was the daughter of William Morris, a founder of the English Arts and Crafts movement. Through Lily's association with May, Elizabeth met Emery Walker, “the chief inspirer of the whole private press movement which was to revolutionize the approach to book typography in England” (Miller 1973, 20). Walker was well known among those involved in the English Arts and Crafts movement as a photographer, engraver, and typographer. In particular, it was he who inspired Morris to establish his Kelmscott Press. Walker and T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, the eminent bookbinder, together formed the Doves Press, one of the most influential of the English private presses. Walker later encouraged Elizabeth to enroll in a one-month printing workshop at the Women's Printing Society in London. This was Elizabeth’s only training for what was to become a lifetime career as master printer of her own publishing concern.

During this time, the sisters’ brother William founded the Irish Literary Society in London. It was there that they met Evelyn Gleeson, a wealthy patron of the arts who shared with them an interest in embroidery, the arts, and the emerging women’s movement in Ireland. Several years later, in 1902, Lily, Elizabeth, and Ms. Gleeson, now back in Ireland, met and decided to form a workshop for women. They chose the name Dun Emer Industries, after the wife of the mythological Irish hero and king, Cuchulain, and they set up shop in Dundrum, Ireland. In the old tales Emer was renowned for the beauty of her embroidery and weaving. According to the Dun Emer prospectus of 1903, the workshop was formed from “a wish to find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things.” Under Lily Yeats's direction, the women of Dun Emer made carpets and embroidered tapestries. Elizabeth, whose part in the enterprise was not at first clear, took Emery Walker’s advice to learn the printing trade, and developed and directed the publishing arm of the enterprise, called The Dun Emer Press.

The first book published at Dun Emer was a book of essays by William Butler Yeats titled In the Seven Woods. It came out in 1903. By the end of 1907, the press had published a total of eleven books, all by Irish authors, seven of which were either written or edited by William Butler Yeats.

The workshop was extremely successful and quickly gained a reputation for the quality of its work.
Elizabeth Corbett Yeats and the Cuala Press

...and design. However, friction developed between Evelyn Gleeson and the Yeats sisters, and in 1908 the partnership was ended. Lily and Elizabeth established their own workshop in a cottage at Churchtown, near Dundrum, in county Dublin. They chose Cuala Industries as its name, after the ancient barony in which their house stood. Elizabeth ran the printing side of things while Lily was in charge of sewing and embroidery. As at Dun Emer, the enterprise was staffed entirely by women. Feelings between the two rival workshops remained bitter, and “Elizabeth said that one of her greatest pleasures in working [on the first Cuala book] was that she did not have to put at the end the words ‘Printed in the house of Evelyn Gleeson’ as she had been obliged to do with all her previous publications” (Hardwick 1996, 156).

The output of the press flourished after the move. While at Dun Emer, Elizabeth had begun printing note cards, calendars, and pamphlets in addition to books. After the move she began printing bookplates as well. By 1940, the year Elizabeth Yeats died, the Cuala Press had printed sixty-two books, ten booklets, and thirty privately printed books and other publications, as well as innumerable pieces of ephemera. Throughout, Elizabeth used the same Albion iron hand press she started with at Dun Emer, although they added a second press around 1910 to keep up with production. [Rebecca, callout if needed for design purposes: By 1940, when Elizabeth died, the Cuala Press had printed more than sixty-two books, ten booklets, and innumerable pieces of ephemera.]

In June of 1908, just before the split with Dun Emer, the first issue of A Broadside, an Irish culture literary magazine, was printed. Each three-page issue contained poetry or music, with illustrations by Jack Yeats. There were three series. The first, begun in 1908 at Dun Emer, carried through until 1915. The second and third were printed twenty years later, in 1935 and 1937. A Broadside became one of the press’s most popular publications.

William Butler Yeats remained active in Cuala Press operations throughout his lifetime. As editor, his stature in Irish literary circles was undoubtedly instrumental in obtaining manuscripts from contemporary writers. From the beginning, the press had “set to work with a programme of producing new works by modern Irish writers ... and this programme was obviously made an easier one to follow through the association of W.B. Yeats” (Cave 1971 199). Robin Skelton goes further than most when writing of his influence:

To evaluate the importance of this press is now difficult, for the whole picture is distorted by the giant presence of Yeats, who, in this way, contrived to satisfy a part of his thirst for a truly national, aesthetically satisfactory, social-artistic movement with which he might identify himself. He worked hard for the Press; though
he always referred to it as “My sister’s Press,” it is clear that there must have been a touch of the proprietorial in his tone. (1964, 371)

The relationship between Elizabeth and her famous poet brother was tempestuous to say the least. Based on letters between William and their father, Gifford Lewis paints a picture of William’s controlling personality and insulting attitude toward his sister: “her chief fault after assuming that the press was her charge alone, was that she was unable to pretend that his errors in spelling and punctuation, which were renowned and bizarre, were actually her misprints” (Lewis 1994, 64-65). William also often argued with her about editorial decisions, particularly when she wanted to print works that she felt would be commercially viable but to which he objected on literary grounds. On the other hand, William was not above praising his sister’s work. Lewis notes that William wrote in his friend John Quinn’s copy of In the Seven Woods, “This is the first book of mine that is a pleasure to look at—a pleasure whether open or shut.”

The real value of the press is that it printed first editions of most of the foremost twentieth-century writers in Ireland—Frank O’Connor, George Russell, Oliver Gogarty, Ezra Pound, and John Synge among them. One notable exception was James Joyce, whose work the Cuala never published. In the beginning of Ulysses Joyce makes a seemingly derogatory remark about the Yeats sisters:

Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and fish-gods of Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind.

The reference to the “big wind,” a severe storm that wreaked havoc in the Mid-East region of Ireland, comes from the colophon of the first Dun Emer book, In the Seven Woods, which ends with “finished the sixteenth day of July, in the year of the big wind, 1903.”

Cuala scholars are not in agreement about the meaning of Joyce’s remark. Both Miller (1973, 32) and Skelton (1964, 371) appear to believe the words were directed at the press, but Lewis (1994, 40) had this to say:

James Joyce was here aiming at WBY more than his sisters. WBY was a compulsive re-writer, annotator and self-memoraliser and in his interest in himself he failed to give credit to his sisters for their physical and financial support to him before he had established himself as a self-sufficient writer.

In addition to his contribution as editor, Yeats on several occasions was forced to bolster the finances of the Cuala through loans and letters of credit. Elizabeth, although eminently capable in most things, was somewhat of an eccentric bookkeeper. Michael Yeats, son of William Butler, writes in the preface to The Dun Emer Press, Later the Cuala Press:

One of the great problems about Cuala was that it never became a profitable concern. My father was constantly expected to come to the rescue when financial difficulties arose, as when, for example, one of his own books was sold out in advance of publication but, as a result of some miscalculation, the firm lost £60 as a result. (1973, 7.)

Wanting to maintain their independence and so eschewing marriage as a way out of their financial difficulties, the Yeats sisters were working-women by necessity. Unlike the Kelmscott, Doves, Eragny, and other private presses of the time, they had no huge reserve of private funds behind them. At a time when most publishers, with the exception of the private presses, parceled the work out to printers who used composing machines and high-speed cylinder presses, the Cuala books were hand-set with metal type and printed on Elizabeth’s nineteenth-century hand press. Edition sizes were generally around 300 copies, at a time when average editions numbered in the tens of thousands (LeFebvre and Martin 1976, 282).
The books printed at the Cuala Press followed the same format as at Dun Emer (Miller 1973, 31). With the exception of the very first volume, *In the Seven Woods*, which was bound in full linen, all were case bound in quarter cloth with a natural linen spine and blue, green, or grey wove paper. The books all measured about 5¼ x 8¼ inches. In my research I found almost no discussion of the binding of the books—whether it was done in house or let out. The only clue came in the form of a small label on the front pastedown of several books I examined, including *Passages from the Letters of John Butler Yeats: Selected by Ezra Pound*, which arrived in my hands just as I was about to send this article off to the editors. The label states “Bound by Galway & Co., Eustace St., Dublin.”

A quick search of the internet turned up multiple entries about Galway & Co., a very large bindery in Dublin which employed a large number of female binders. Given that all the Cuala bindings I have seen are almost identical, it isn’t unreasonable to think that Galway & Co. may have been Elizabeth’s bindery of choice.

Elizabeth did the design and most of the presswork herself. The single typeface used was 14-point Caslon. Body text was printed in black; titles, headings, notes, pressmarks, and colophon were sometimes in red. The mouldmade wove rag paper was made at Swiftbrook paper mills in County Dublin. Cuala books are austere to say the least: simply designed, well made, the presswork more than passable. There are generally few illustrations except for a wide range of pressmarks. The typography, while thoughtful, does not call attention to itself. These are books made to be read, not looked at.

After Elizabeth’s death in 1940, William Butler Yeat’s wife, Georgina, took on the operation of the press. With Esther Ryan and Mollie Gill, who had worked with Elizabeth since the Dun Emer days, she printed another fifteen books before her own death in 1968. The following year the press was reorganized under the direction of William’s children Anne and Michael, and Liam Miller.

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