



The  
Yellow  
Zine

#1

from Carcosa, the Hyades,  
Hastur, and Aldebaran

Have you found it?

# Welcome to The Yellow Zine

During the 2020 lockdown, I read **The King in Yellow** for the first time. Since I've never been good at heeding warnings and I figured I was already insane enough to negate the risk, I immediately started looking for attempts to write and recreate the play, which quickly expanded into a fascination with adaptations of all kinds. The Yellow Zine is a personal passion project exploring the many worlds that have seen **the Yellow Sign**.

This issue offers an introduction to Robert W. Chambers' collection, the play within, and what we can learn of the 'yellow mythos' from the stories that started it all: 'The Repairer of Reputations' and 'The Mask'.



# The King in Yellow (the book)

The King in Yellow is an 1895 collection by American writer Robert W. Chambers, containing nine short stories and a sequence of poems. The first four stories are explicitly tied to the fictional play *The King in Yellow*, rooted in the genres of horror and weird fiction. The collection progressively shifts towards a more lighthearted and romantic tone and sheds some of its supernatural elements throughout the latter works.

Chambers' horror stories were and still are highly esteemed and went on to influence many other writers, including H.P. Lovecraft.



The text is in the public domain, and can be read for free on sites like [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).<sup>1</sup>

## The King in Yellow (the play)

Chambers' book is named after the eponymous play within the stories, which is an explicitly recurring motif throughout the first four. Reading it—specifically the second act—drives people to insanity. The play itself is never fully described, but short excerpts and references hint at its contents. It has at least two acts, and at least three characters: Cassilda, Camilla and the Stranger. The two excerpts in the book come from Act I, Scene 2, being an exchange between the characters<sup>2</sup> and Cassilda's song (p.4). A reference to 'Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa'<sup>3</sup> is also likely an event within the play. Other quotes within the stories may be from the play itself, but this isn't explicitly confirmed: notably, 'The scolloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever'<sup>4</sup> and 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!'<sup>5</sup>. The latter quote is also from Hebrews 10:31.<sup>6</sup>

Cassilda's Song in "The King in Yellow,"  
Act I, Scene 2.<sup>7</sup>

Along the shore the cloud waves break,  
The twin suns sink behind the lake,  
The shadows lengthen  
In Carcosa.

Strange is the night where black stars rise,  
And strange moons circle through the skies  
But stranger still is  
Lost Carcosa.

Songs that the Hyades shall sing,  
Where flap the tatters of the King,  
Must die unheard in  
Dim Carcosa.

Song of my soul, my voice is dead;  
Die thou, unsung, as tears unshed  
Shall dry and die in  
Lost Carcosa.

## Where Are The Suns?

There is a small difference found between versions of **Cassilda's song**. The original 1895 printing and most subsequent versions say that 'The **twin suns** sink **behind** the lake', but others use the line 'The **twin suns** sink **beneath** the lake'. According to The Yellow Site, a **King in Yellow** wiki, the discrepancy, as noted by Graeme Phillips, may have originated from the Project Gutenberg online edition.<sup>8</sup> As of now, July 2025, the Gutenberg edition says 'behind'.

My physical copy of The King in Yellow, the 2022 Second Heathen Edition, places the suns 'beneath the lake'.<sup>9</sup>



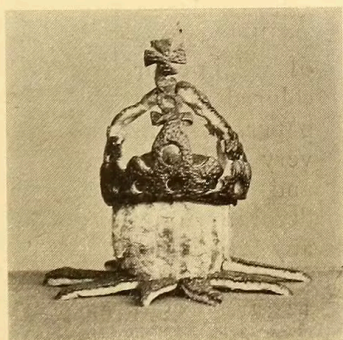
An error? Almost certainly. But one that I think has the potential to spark some great creative ideas and interpretations.

## 'The Repairer of Reputations'

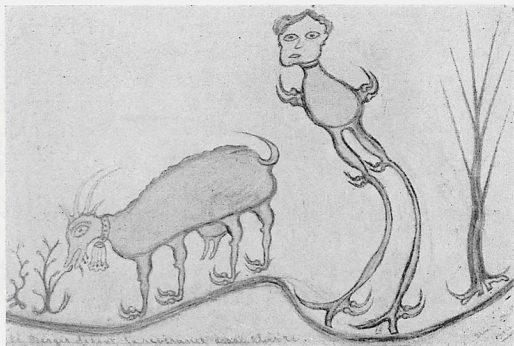
In the first story in *The King in Yellow*, narrator Hildred Castaigne reads the play during his stay in a private asylum, after falling from his horse and sustaining a head injury. He comes to believe that the play — 'terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth'<sup>10</sup> — has revealed to him his birthright: a position in the line of succession for 'The Imperial Dynasty of America'<sup>11</sup>.

With the enabling and encouragement of Mr. Wilde, the titular repairer of reputations by trade, Hildred plots to sabotage his cousin Louis, who unknowingly stands between him and the throne.

The story introduces many of the themes, concepts and terms associated with *The King in Yellow*, such as the Yellow Sign, Carcosa, and Hastur. Hildred suggests that the titular king is an actual entity, and one that he will serve, even when a king himself.



Hildred's narration suggests that the play is set in **Carcosa**: 'where **black stars** hang in the heavens; where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the **twin suns** sink into the lake of **Hali**'.<sup>12</sup> It may be a city, or country, as he recalls 'Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of **Carcosa**', presumably an event or events in the play.<sup>13</sup>



Fall 116. Abb. 51. Le berger faisant la révérence à sa chèvre (Buntstift).

44×30

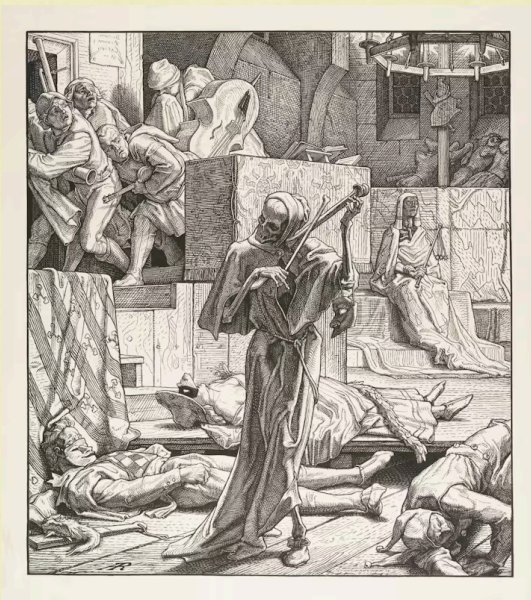
**Hastur** may also be a location, although Chambers also uses it as a name in the later story 'The Demoiselle d'Ys',<sup>14</sup> and borrowed the name from Ambrose Bierce's short story 'Haïta the Shepherd', in which **Hastur** is the god of shepherds.<sup>15</sup> In 'The Repairer of Reputations', Hildred calls himself 'King by my right in **Hastur**',<sup>16</sup> and mentions 'the lakes which connected **Hastur**, **Aldebaran** and the mystery of the **Hyades**'.<sup>17</sup>

## 'The Mask'

**Camilla:** You, sir,  
should unmask.

**Stranger:** Indeed?

**Cassilda:** Indeed  
it's time. We all  
have laid aside  
disguise but you.



**Stranger:** I wear no mask.

**Camilla:** (Terrified, aside to **Cassilda**.)

No mask? No mask! 18  
**The King in Yellow**, Act I, Scene 2.

The second story in the collection, 'The Mask', follows a painter named Alec, his sculptor friend Boris Yvain, and the woman they both love, Geneviève—who has chosen to be with Boris, though she loves them both. Notably, Boris is named in the previous story, as the short-lived artist who carved the sculpture of the Fates in Washington Square.

Alec remains friends with both of them, hiding his pain at Geneviève's decision, committing to the continued friendship and happiness between the three of them.

Chambers never makes explicit that Boris and Geneviève read *The King in Yellow*, but Alec finds the book in their home after a series of odd and unnerving events. It seems that the play is behind much—or all—of what happens, from Boris discovering a solution that turns living things to marble, to Geneviève becoming ill and depressed, and choosing to submerge herself in it.

Upon reading the text, Alec falls ill and is haunted by visions of its contents. His narration provides another presumed quote from the play: 'that bitter cry of *Cassilda*, "Not upon us, oh King, not upon us!"'<sup>19</sup>. He sees also 'the towers of *Carcosa* behind the moon', and makes another reference to 'the scalloped tatters of *the King in Yellow*'<sup>20</sup>, similarly to 'The Repairer of Reputations'.

## Places Out of Space



Various stars and constellations are evoked in **The King in Yellow**, particularly the real-world **Hyades** cluster and **Aldebaran**. In 'The Mask', Alec envisions how '**Aldebaran, the Hyades, Alar, Hastur**, glided through the cloud-rifts'<sup>21</sup>. This line enables one interpretation: that **Alar** and **Hastur** themselves are celestial bodies. Some interpretations and adaptations of the book or play lean into science-fiction as a theme or setting, framing places like **Carcosa** and **Hastur** as planets rather than earthly kingdoms or cities.

## Further Reading

Naturally, the first book I have to recommend is The King in Yellow itself! For fans of the horrifying and weird, Chambers' own influences are also great to read. Works by Ambrose Bierce such as An Inhabitant of Carcosa, Haita the Shepherd, and The Death of Halpin Frayser can be found in his collection, Can Such Things Be?. Edgar Allan Poe's The Masque of the Red Death and Théophile Gautier's Arria Marcella are also cited as influences.

Early adaptations of and homages to The King in Yellow can be found in H.P. Lovecraft's The Whisperer in Darkness and August Derleth's novella, The Return of Hastur. Anthologies such as The Spawn of Cthulhu and The Hastur Cycle also take inspiration from the yellow mythos.

The first attempts to adapt the play itself I have found so far are The King in Yellow by Thom Ryng and The King in Yellow: A Spectral Tragedy by Raymond Lefebvre. I also recommend Simon Butcher-Jones' Le Roi en Jaune.

## Endnotes

1. 'The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers', Project Gutenberg, 23 August 2017 <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8492>>.
2. Robert W. Chambers, 'The Mask', in *The King in Yellow*, 2nd edn (Heathen Editions, 1895), pp. 38-58 (p. 38).
3. Robert W. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', in *The King in Yellow*, 2nd edn (Heathen Editions, 1895), pp. 1-37 (p. 24).
4. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 30).
5. Robert W. Chambers, 'In the Court of the Dragon', in *The King in Yellow*, 2nd edn (Heathen Editions, 1895), pp. 60-70 (p. 70).
6. 'Hebrews 10:31', Bible Gateway, n.d. <<https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Hebrews%2010:31>>.
7. 'The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers', Project Gutenberg.
8. 'Cassilda's Song', The Yellow Site, n.d. <[https://kinginyellow.fandom.com/wiki/Cassilda's Song](https://kinginyellow.fandom.com/wiki/Cassilda's_Song)>.
9. Robert W. Chambers, *The King in Yellow*, 2nd edn (Heathen Editions, 2022), p. xxviii.
10. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 4).
11. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 14).
12. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 4).
13. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 24).
14. Robert W. Chambers, 'The Demoiselle d'Ys', in *The King in Yellow*, 2nd edn (Heathen Editions, 1895), pp. 94-112 (p. 100).
15. Ambrose Bierce, 'Haïta the Shepherd', Wikisource, 28 April 2007 <[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Collected\\_Works\\_of\\_Ambrose\\_Bierce/Volume\\_3/Haïta\\_the\\_Shepherd](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Collected_Works_of_Ambrose_Bierce/Volume_3/Haïta_the_Shepherd)>.
16. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 36).
17. Chambers, 'The Repairer of Reputations', pp. 1-37 (p. 30).
18. Chambers, 'The Mask', pp. 38-58 (p. 38).
19. Chambers, 'The Mask', pp. 38-58 (p. 50).
20. Chambers, 'The Mask', pp. 38-58 (p. 51).
21. Chambers, 'The Mask', pp. 38-58 (pp. 50-51).

## Images

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- P. 1: Chap-books of the Eighteenth Century, 1882, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/f3a28930-5825-415d-aaf0-9d09756ddab3/>>.
- P. 2: Louis le Breton, Bael, 1863, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/495a8d73-d9ea-4b2f-8d47-8f5e1039f8d7/>>.
- P. 4: Paraselenae, Or Mock Moons, 1883, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/046d82c3-14e4-45a1-ac3b-72d64f437ee6/>>.
- P. 5: Charles-François Daubigny, Nightpiece, 1862, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/90b264eb-d6e7-4a04-889c-0fda9eb57de6/>>.
- P. 6: Fig. 6 represents a crown with the greater part of the fruit left bare, while the crown is carved out of the peel at the top., 1910, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/7639be58-c757-4ee2-933c-44da6ff18ead/>>.
- P. 7: Hans Prinzhorn, "The shepherd making reverence to his goat" (Crayon), 1922, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/ab2b894e-42b7-4c3b-b9c7-fel762a63116/>>.
- P. 8: Alfred Rethel, Death the Strangler, The First Outbreak of Cholera at a Masked Ball in Paris, 1831, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/983e171c-0cec-49ec-8482-f8fd73044417/>>.
- P. 9: Thomas Smillie, Untitled Image, 1890, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/b4507406-0f36-4767-ba91-676f2ad62159/>>.
- P. 10: Anonymous, Comets, 1835, image <<https://pdimagearchive.org/images/98f3bc4e-2371-4730-9c9e-11239fd15876/>>.

# Thank you for reading!

For updates on this zine series, keep an eye on my website:

[www.strangerincarcosa.neocities.org](http://www.strangerincarcosa.neocities.org)

You can also get in touch via email at:

[strangerincarcosa@proton.me](mailto:strangerincarcosa@proton.me)

The Yellow Zine is the result of five years ~~(five years!?)~~ of researching and collecting **King in Yellow** adaptations and media, and I can't wait to share my favourites, and lesser known and underrated gems in future issues. I'm also attempting to set up an archive on the website to record and catalogue the 100+ entries on my poor, overburdened spreadsheets.

While this is currently a solo project, I'm also open to collaboration and including essays, artwork or other pieces by fellow fans and creatives. Also, if you know of or have made any yellow mythos projects, I would love to hear about them, and discuss potentially featuring them in a future issue!



Now you have...