the yellow nineties online
edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

THE YELLOW BOOK: INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 13 (APRIL 1897)

There is nothing in Volume 13 of *The Yellow Book* that addresses the fact it marked the end of the publication's run. The issue even includes its standard guidelines for submissions, implying an intention to continue publication. The number of first-time contributors to this volume, moreover, suggests the literary editor Henry Harland was not lacking for submissions, and that he continued to seek and encourage new talent. None of the reviewers hinted at knowing that they were looking at the final issue and, when the time for the next issue rolled around in July, the press offered little discussion of its absence (Mix 272-74). Various conjectures have been made about why the periodical ceased publication, but the decision probably came down to money. In conversation with Katherine Mix in 1930, a director of The Bodley Head, the company through which John Lane published the periodical, observed "it had ceased to pay dividends" (qtd. in Mix 274). With *The Yellow Book* never including general advertising in its issues, income was based almost solely on the popularity of the publication alone. Always a canny judge of his brand, Lane may also have recognized that *The Yellow Book* had completed its mission as a trend-setting modern magazine. As Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner comment, "being 'modern' also meant acknowledging that, as soon as a magazine had fulfilled to the limit its function within a cultural moment, it was time to end its run" (46).

A related factor in *The Yellow Book*'s termination was its overarching marketing strategy. Laurel Brake observes that, with the periodical, Lane had successfully packaged scandal "as a new journalism technique of enhancing sales" (59-60). By the thirteenth issue, however, the use of notoriety to popularize *The Yellow Book* was working less effectively, even potentially undermining the reception of each new issue.

The frequent appearance of familiar authors such as Harland and assistant literary editor Ella D'Arcy, and the reiteration of topics such as dandy aesthetes and new women, would have made other aspects of the magazine such as its stylistic innovations and fresh approaches to gender politics and other topics seem less original than they were.

After three yellow years, reviewers were finding it difficult to be either surprised or shocked with each new issue. When Volume 13 came out a month late for no apparent reason, the London *Times* mockingly proposed that *The Yellow Book*, "though it has outlived its youthful 'wildness,' keeps up a reputation for eccentricity by producing its April number … in May" (Rev. 15). A somewhat dismissive tone is also apparent in commentary from *Literary World*, which lumps together all the prose works (save Harland's and Ada Radford's) with the vague generalization that they are "more or less of the order common to the *Yellow Book*" ("Yellow"). The poems, meanwhile, are "none of them worth much," with Steven Phillips's "The Question," a dialogue poem between a son and his father, especially criticized as appearing to be "the result of a prolonged course of Ibsen and Nordau reading." Of the artwork, the critic admires Ethel Reed's and Patten Wilson's contributions and notes Mabel Syrett's "startling" art-nouveau image for the cover. Syrett's bold graphic design of two decorative fighting cocks is one of the most striking covers among all thirteen volumes.

The New York Times was so underwhelmed with the visual art in *The Yellow Book* that its critic imagines the editors informing potential submitters that "'Most anything will do.' . . . 'We always can find room for absolute mediocrity'" ("Bad Art"). While dismissing the majority of the visual works as "rubbish," the reviewer describes as "excellent" the artistic contributions by Wilson, Muirhead Bone, Katharine Cameron and E. Philip Pimlott. This commentator also notes – as does the critic for *Publishers' Circular* (Rev.) – that Reed's material is not up to her usual standard. The prose in Volume 13, however, is found to be better than usual, with Harland's and J.A. Blaikie's stories particularly singled out for praise.

The Academy is relatively detailed in its response but seemingly disengaged, managing

to misspell two of the authors' names. The reviewer finds Evelyn Sharp's prose "clever," Sidney Benson Thorp's "very well done," and Gabriela Cunningham Grahame's "interesting," all synopses distinguished by their vagueness ("From Crowded"). The poetry by Henry W. Nevinson, Rosamund Marriott Watson, Douglas Ainslie, and J.A. Blaikie is collectively described as "scholarly, but what we might call *cul-de-sac* verse." The artwork in *The Yellow Book*, this critic concludes, continues the periodical's downward slide, although the contributions by well-known illustrators Cameron, Wilson, and E.J. Sullivan are "worthy of their reproduction," while "Mabel Syrett has manipulated two fight cocks very deftly."

Volume 13 includes 17 artworks (including the title page and front cover, the latter being repeated on the back) by ten artists. The title page by Wilson is one of his 13 contributions to *The Yellow Book* during its full run. Muirhead Bone and Amelia Bauerle (aka Amelia Matilda Bowerley) are the only artists who appear for the first time. The 21 year-old Bone, who attended the Glasgow School of Art, is represented by two ink studies from extremely early in his career. They offer examples of the type of architectural landscapes for which he would become well known. In 1916, on the advice of William Rothenstein, Bone was appointed Britain's first Official War Artist (Cohen). Illustrator and water colourist Bauerle contributed an art-nouveau drawing of a child in a feathered hat posing before a tapestry woven with images of peacocks. A student at the South Kensington School of Art and Slade School of Art, Bauerle's work would be shown at the Royal Academy within a year of her appearance in *The Yellow Book*. The other female artists represented in Volume 13 – Reed and Cameron – offer respectively two line drawings of children and a pen-and-ink full-length profile of a woman in a large hat.

Of the ten poets in the issue, A. Myron, Henry W. Nevinson, and W.B. Yeats appear for the first time, with Yeats's poem taking pride of place at the head of the magazine's contents. Myron's "April in England" is a nostalgic lyric written, a note informs us, in South Africa. Nevinson's "The Rose" is a medieval-style ballad, where the rose represents a form of unimaginable, albeit real-world, desire. The rose symbol also appears in Yeats's "The Blessed," where it represents pagan wisdom. Yeats's ballad pursues a narrative that he also engages in other poems, a symbolic exploration of a

struggle between pagan and Christian knowledge/belief (Putzel 47-51). The *Academy* critic complains that the word "rose" for Yeats has "many meanings that are strange to the nonpolitical mind" ("From"). Other poetic contributions in Volume 13 include Ainslie's elegy to the French Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine (who had died in January 1896) and Marriott Watson's "Oasis," which depicts sexual fulfillment as a lush landscape: "joy comes once more; once more through the wet leaves / swinging" (212). F.B. Money-Coutts is represented by a comic tale set in the realm of King Arthur, while Richard Garnett translates seven sonnets by the Portuguese poet Anthero de Quental.

Volume 13 contains contributions by 14 prose writers, nine of whom had published in *The Yellow Book* previously. The first story, and the longest, is "Merely Players," by Harland himself. The other repeat contributors are Ella D'Arcy, Marion Hepworth Dixon, Richard Le Gallienne, Ada Radford, R.V. Risley, T. Baron Russell, Evelyn Sharp, and Francis Watt. Among first-time contributors, the Chilean-born Gabriela Cunninghame Graham (listed as "Mrs. Cunningham Grahame" in the table of contents, but "Mrs. Cunninghame Graham" at the start of her contribution) offers the story of a miracle-working picture of Christ in a Castilian monastery. American actress Jennie A. Eustace, desperately in need of money, successfully submitted "Kit: An American Boy" (Languish). The Scottish journalist John M. Robertson is represented by a rumination on preciosity in authors such as William Shakespeare, Algernon Swinburne, and Walter Pater—a stylistic mode he describes as "an attempt to deviate widely and willfully, waywardly, from the normal forms of phrase in a given language," thereby consummately expressing the individual personality (81-82). Dora Greenwell McChesney, known in her time for her historical romances, contributes "At Old Italian Casements," a stylistically innovative story providing a series of different outlooks from the windows of people who never meet or speak. A gothic character dominates both "An Immortal," by Sidney Benson Thorp, and "On the Toss of a Penny," by Cecil D. Thierry, a close acquaintance of W.E. Henley.

The Yellow Book lasted three years and three months, but it came to characterize a much longer cultural movement. A 1914 advertisement in the London *Times* for "Mr. John Lane's New Books" announces the launch of the Vorticist periodical *Blast*, with

great fanfare: "*NO PERIODICAL SINCE* **THE FAMOUS YELLOW BOOK** *HAS SO COMPREHENDED THE ARTISTIC MOVEMENT OF ITS DECADE*. THE ARTISTIC SPIRIT OF THE EIGHTEEN-NINETIES WAS **THE YELLOW BOOK**. *THE ARTISTIC SPIRIT OF TODAY IS* **BLAST**" ("Mr. John" 31). Despite the fact that *Blast*'s editor Wyndham Lewis envisioned Vorticism as a violent break from the past, the first issue of his periodical – with its shocking pink cover – inevitably recalls its predecessor's infamous colour choice. Lane published both *The Yellow Book* and *Blast*, and one can see some continuity in the periodicals' aims and aspirations. In his introduction to the first of *Blast*'s two issues, Lewis announces that his publication "will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and distinction of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL" (11). The introduction's language and mission echo those in the 1894 prospectus to the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, which declares its aim to be "popular in the better sense of the word," characterized by a "fresh, brilliant, varied, and diverting table of contents" and "the courage of its modernness" (Prospectus 1-2). *The Yellow Book* ceased in 1897 but – thanks in no small part to Lane – its goal to propagate an aesthetic of the popular arising through a diversity of individual voices continued as a principal vision of the historical avant-garde of the twentieth century.

© 2014, Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

Works Cited

"Bad Art in the Yellow Book." *The New York Times*. 17 July 1897: BR5. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Web. Ryerson University, 2010. Access: 19 March 2014.

Brake, Laurel. "Endgames: The Politics of *The Yellow Book*, or Decadence, Gender and the New Journalism." *The Endings of Epochs*. Ed. Laural Brake. Cambridge: Brewer, 1995. 38-64.

Cohen, David. "Sir Muirhead Bone: Artist Biography." Tate Gallery. Web. Accessed: 17 March 2013. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sir-muirhead-bone-778.

"From Crowded Shelves." *The Academy*. 5 June 1897: 590. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Web. Ryerson University, 2010. Accessed: 19 March 2014.

Languish, Lydia. “About Soubrettes and Big Stars and Just Plain Actors.” *The San Francisco Call* 87.23 (23 June 1901): 18.

Lewis, Wyndam. “Long Live the Vortex.” *Blast*. London: The Bodley Head. 1.1 (20 June 1915): 7-8.

“Mr. John Lane’s New Books.” *The Times*. 12 June 1914. 4. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2014. Web. Accessed: 26 March, 2014.

Prospectus: *The Yellow Book* 1 (Apr. 1894). Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library, Newark. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2011. Web. Accessed: 22 March, 2014.

Putzel, Steven. *Reconstructing Yeats: The Secret Rose and the Wind Among the Reeds*. Dublin: Goldenbridge, 1986.

Rev. of *The Yellow Book*. Vol. 13. *Publishers' Circular* 1614 (5 June 1897): 680. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2010. Web. Accessed: 19 March 2014.

Rev. of The Yellow Book. Vol 13. *The Times*. London. May 28, 1897: 15. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2014. Web. Accessed: 26 March, 2014.

Stetz, Margaret D. and Mark Samuels Lasner. *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*. Cambridge: The Houghton Library, 1994.

"The Yellow Book." Vol. 13. *Literary World* 24 July 1897: 245. *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Ed. Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. Ryerson University, 2010. Web. Accessed: 19 March 2014.