



## the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

### **THE YELLOW BOOK: INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2 (JULY 1894)**

Volume 2 of *The Yellow Book* appeared in July 1894, published in London by John Lane and Elkin Mathews at The Bodley Head and in Boston by Copeland and Day. Signaling the expansion of *The Yellow Book's* readership, the publisher listed Robt. A. Thompson & Co. as “Agents for the Colonies” for the first time. Four months earlier the appearance of the first volume had resulted in a number of vitriolic attacks in British and American periodicals. With marketing bravura, Harland and Beardsley used excerpts from these reviews as a cheeky lure in the Prospectus for Volume 2. Harland followed this up in Volume 2 itself by soliciting a lengthy review of the first volume from the highly regarded conservative critic Philip Gilbert Hamerton. Entitled “The Yellow Book, Criticized” in the Table of Contents, and “The Yellow Book: A Criticism of Volume 1” at the head of the essay itself, the review was positioned as the centerpiece of the volume. In the Prospectus to Volume 2 (reprinted in the publishers’ supplement at the back of Volume 3), the editors highlighted Hamerton’s critique as one of the publication’s original features. Predictably, critics responded to this innovative self-reflexivity with a mixture of hostility and enthusiasm.

In keeping with the magazine’s separation of letterpress and pictures, Hamerton divided his essay into two sections, the first devoted to “The Literature” and the second to “The Illustrations.” He found much to criticize in *The Yellow Book's* inaugural volume, but balanced his criticism by concluding that, “On the whole,” the literature is “adequately representative of the modern English literary mind, both in the observation of reality and in style” (185). Hamerton also recognized the avant-garde nature of the visual contents overall in his summative

observation that “these illustrations decidedly pre-suppose some artistic culture in the public. They do not condescend in any way to what might be guessed at as the popular taste” (190). Such a conclusion could only flatter the discerning purchasers of *The Yellow Book*, making the editors’ outlay of £15 for Hamerton’s essay a sage investment in marketing the magazine (Henry Harland to John Lane, 15 June [1894]).

Showing themselves receptive to constructive criticism, the editors took heed of Hamerton’s argument against distinguishing *The Yellow Book*’s contents by the terms “Letterpress” and “Pictures.” Hamerton pointed out that the former “is usually considered to mean an inferior kind of writing, which is merely an accompaniment to something else, such as engravings, or even maps” (179). This, the critic noted, contradicted their editorial principle “that one kind of contribution should *not* be made subordinate to another; the drawings and writings are, in fact, independent” (179). In Volume 2, Harland and Beardsley quietly replaced their earlier division of contents into “Letterpress” and “Pictures” with “Literature” and “Art.”

Having achieved a *success de scandal* with Volume 1, the editors’ main task with Volume 2 was consolidating their readership by offering contents as richly varied and provocative. They significantly increased the visual contents to twenty-three pictures (compared to the first volume’s fifteen), and focused the bulk of the verbal contents on a new wave of authors, including women writers such as Ella D’Arcy, Katharine de Mattos, Charlotte Mew, Dollie Radford, and Netta Syrett. The verbal contents include four essays, ten short stories, and eight poems. In avoiding serialized fiction, Harland may have erred in publishing some exceptionally long pieces, although Henry James for one appreciated the liberty (James 219). His 70-page “The Coxon Fund” is the longest piece ever published in the magazine. Other particularly long works include stories by D’Arcy and Syrett (at 20 and 31 pages respectively), and an essay by Charles Willeby on Georges Bizet, the composer of *Carmen* (at 36 pages).

At 361 pages, Volume 2 was almost 100 pages longer than Volume 1, and Harland had great difficulty getting John Lane to agree to the costs of the list he proposed, which significantly exceeded the £200 the publisher was willing to invest. In a letter dated 12 June 1894, Harland gave Lane an itemized account of costs for each individual author. Payment for established prose writers was at the magazine rate of £3.3 per thousand words; lesser known writers could be satisfied with less than a guinea per thousand. Poets, of course, could not be paid by the word. Payments for poetry ranged from one guinea for Katharine De Mattos's "In a Gallery"—which Lane didn't like, but which Beardsley and Harland appreciated for its associational value, given the fact that Mattos was Robert Louis Stevenson's cousin and the *Pall Mall Gazette* critic's sister—to £5.5 for Austin Dobson's "Sat est Scripessa." (Henry Harland to John Lane, 12 June 1894). Reminding Lane that he paid D'Arcy as sub-editor himself, and that he also covered numerous out-of-pocket costs for postage and letter paper, Harland pressed Lane for an additional £50 by offering to lend his (unpaid) editorial fee of £25 to the publisher, interest-free, for six months (Henry Harland to John Lane, 15 June [1894]).

Volume 2 opened and closed with two prestigious writers. Frederick Greenwood, founding editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, contributed an essay on "The Gospel of Content," and Henry James published another novella, "The Coxon Fund," which echoes his story "The Death of the Lion" that appeared in Volume 1 in its consideration of the modern writer's reliance on the admiration of readers and whims of market trends.

In comparison to Volume 1, the contents of the second volume differ most notably in the increase in number and variety of visual works. Beardsley linked Volume 2's Prospectus directly to the new volume itself by using the same cover design for both, an effective image-branding manoeuvre for the magazine he repeated in subsequent Prospecti. Inside the covers, Beardsley contributed another striking title-page design and a total of six pen-and ink drawings in his distinctive style. Despite the editors' announced determination to eschew the

illustrative and topical, Beardsley's "Portrait of Madame Réjane" had a clear connection with Dauphin Meunier's essay on the French actress who was enjoying a sensational debut on the London stage in Victorien Sardou's *Madame Sans-Gêne*, which opened on 23 June 1894 at the Gaiety Theatre (Lasner fn14). Beardsley's portrait of Réjane joined another six in the volume, three of them featuring *Yellow Book* contributors: P. Wilson Steer's "Portrait of Himself" and "Portrait of Henry James"; and Walter Sickert's "Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley." Headed by Walter Crane's "The Renaissance of Venus," Volume 2 also included two drawings by E. J. Sullivan, a landscape by Alfred Thornton, and Aymer Vallance's art-nouveau designs for playing cards, among other things. Perhaps Beardsley's most effective editorial innovation in Volume 2 was his decision to group all works by the same artist together, so that they formed a series of mini galleries within the magazine. This move also reaffirmed the status of the magazine's art as equivalent to that of its literary contents.

On the whole, Volume 2 of *The Yellow Book* fared better with the press than Volume 1 and, although negative criticism continued, this was tempered by some enthusiastic praise, as well as some professed boredom. Inevitably, there was comparison to the magazine's inaugural number. While the *Literary Digest* asserted that "The second [volume], just issued, bids fair to create no less stir by its radicalism and its outspoken defiance of the old novelists" than the first ("The Yellow Book' on Modern Literature," 458), the *National Observer* claimed to see a cautious retrenchment to a more traditional approach: "If *The Yellow Book* holds to its present path it will soon be amongst the most respectable and the most insignificant of our magazines" ("Dulness in Yellow," 359). The *Pall Mall Gazette* critic cautioned the editors that "new" and "good" were not synonymous and found the work tedious. "Considering the pretensions of the publication and its reputed sale," the critic wrote, "there is far too much for yawns in the book" ("The Second *Yellow Book*," 4). In contrast, the *Chicago Daily* called the second volume "thoroughly enjoyable." Arguing that "the ridicule heaped on this novelty in periodical literature seems to have been earned by its originality," the reviewer claimed that "the best thing about the *Yellow Book*, apart from its brave spirit of

contemporaneousness, is that the pictures are not intended to illustrate the text and the text is not a letterpress for the pictures” (“Two Original Periodicals,” 10).

While the praise must have been gratifying, Lane, Harland, and Beardsley also recognized that *any* attention—good, bad, indifferent—from the press heightened *The Yellow Book’s* profile and contributed to its sales on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, according to Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner, “The coalition of writers, artists, and businesspeople who launched *The Yellow Book* did more than the creators of any earlier magazine had done to influence public opinion about their enterprise” (29). Their modern marketing and promotion methods proved themselves when, once again, the full print run of 5000 copies was sold out in the first edition, and a second issue was immediately required.

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