



the yellow nineties online

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***THE YELLOW BOOK:* INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 6 (JULY 1895)**

In July 1895 Volume 6, the first *Yellow Book* published without the artistic input of Aubrey Beardsley appeared on the booksellers' stands. Assisted by sub-editor Ella D'Arcy, Henry Harland reviewed manuscripts and made the literary selections. Publisher John Lane took over management of the artistic contents himself, although he relied on Patten Wilson's technical expertise to the extent that Wilson is sometimes considered the de facto artistic editor during the remainder of the magazine's print life (Mix 165-66).

The visual stamp of Wilson's pen-and-ink drawings branded the covers and title page of Volume 6. His back cover design, featuring a medieval ship in the headpiece and underwater plants in the tailpiece, divided the columns listing Literature and Art with the long vertical line of the ship's chain and anchor; this was used for all but the last of *The Yellow Book's* subsequent volumes. Wilson's front cover and title page continued the decorative art-nouveau style Beardsley had established for the magazine's public face, but drained of putatively decadent implications. Instead, referencing a variety of aestheticist tropes including Japonisme, peacock feathers, and single female figures set in lush symbolic landscapes, Wilson's designs allude to the paintings of popular Pre-Raphaelite John William Waterhouse. Offering an appealing aestheticism for the middle-brow household, the overall effect of Volume 6 seemed aimed at being "popular in the better sense of the word"—the original goal for *The Yellow Book* as announced by Beardsley and Harland in the magazine's first Prospectus.

Harland and Lane rallied all their editorial savvy and marketing acumen in putting together Volume 6. On the one hand, the contents needed to demonstrate that *The Yellow Book* was not negatively tainted by the decadence and nonnormative sexuality associated in the public mind with Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Some conservative retrenchment seemed to be in order. On the other hand, with Beardsley and Arthur Symons working that summer on a rival artistic magazine, *The Savoy* (first issued in January 1896), the contents had to reinforce *The Yellow Book*'s reputation as *the* high-quality modern, avant-garde publication of the period. They managed these contradictory demands, with mixed success, by focusing on the new: of its thirty-five contributors (twenty-four writers and eleven artists), nearly half were introduced to *The Yellow Book*'s readers for the first time in Volume 6. This volume also published the most women to date: eleven authors and two artists.

Reproduced in half-tone process by the Swan Electric Engraving Company, Gertrude Hammond's painting *The Yellow Book* brought Lane's publishing strategy for the magazine out of his Vigo Street office (where the artwork hung on the wall) and into the homes of readers. Emphasizing the Bodley Head's reputation for publishing the work of women, the editors strategically positioned Hammond's visual art between the literary contributions of two female authors. "The Captain's Book," George Egerton's first short story to be published in *The Yellow Book* since Volume 1, fronted the painting, while Dollie Radford's lyrical poem, "A Song," followed it. Bookended in this way, the reproduction of Hammond's painting linked New Woman authors, women readers, and *The Yellow Book*.

Hammond set her scene in an aesthetic home in which the artistically arranged fans on the mantelpiece and oriental screen allude visually to the Japanese style of the volume's front cover. This interior domestic space features a seated young man holding out an open *Yellow Book*—notably one with Beardsley's design on the covers—to a standing young woman in aesthetic dress, who looks down at the open pages with shy interest. As Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels

Lasner remark, “the importance of the image lay in its suggestion that even those who might consider the magazine daring would still find it fit to be placed in the most tasteful, distinguished, houses.... Thus, the image domesticated and neutralized whatever threat the buyer might see in *The Yellow Book*’s reputation for the risqué and encouraged sales” (29-30). The young woman’s interest in the open *Yellow Book* seems reinforced by the tenor of Radford’s “A Song,” which celebrates the poetic speaker’s departure from her walled garden, lured by the beauty and laughter of her ungendered beloved. The subtle implication of this editorial sequencing was to suggest that *The Yellow Book* could open new worlds to its women readers.

Other new artists introduced in Volume 6 were Gertrude Prideaux-Brune, William Eden, Wilfred Ball, and William Strang. The latter’s two pictures, “Going to Church” and “Sketch,” were particularly strong contributions by the Scottish artist and poet, who was one of Lane’s early discoveries for The Bodley Head. Of *The Yellow Book*’s regular contributors, three artists published for the last time in Volume 6: Archibald Standish Hartrick, Philip Wilson Steer, and Frederick George Cotman. In addition to the cover designs and title page, Patten Wilson published two pen-and-ink drawings, both referencing literary art: “A Penelope,” whose decorative features pick up marine motifs established in the cover designs; and “Sohrab Taking Leave of his Mother,” a medieval middle-eastern scene crowded with intricate detail. On the whole, Volume 6 maintained *The Yellow Book*’s trademark variety in visual materials, publishing not only the decorative black-and-white work that characterized fin-de-siècle visual art, but also genre paintings, impressionist landscapes, and street scenes. For the first time, the portrait was the least represented genre, and Volume 6 published no Bodley Heads.

With a leading story of 49 pages by Henry James and closing poems by Theodore Watts (later Watts-Dunton), the literary contents were as varied as the artistic in both style and mix of familiar and new contributors. Besides Watts, first-time contributors included Ethel Colburn Mayne, writing under the pseudonym

Frances Huntley. Mayne was an eighteen-year-old Irish girl thrilled to be published and even more thrilled to be invited, later that year, to replace Ella D'Arcy as Harland's sub-editor when the former went to France (Lasner 18). Also appearing in *The Yellow Book* for the first time was Rosamund Marriot Watson, who became one of the magazine's regular contributors. Enoch Arnold Bennett, Murray R. Gilchrist, Edgar Prestage, and Rose Haig Thomas, meanwhile, appeared only in Volume 6. Although perhaps not as cosmopolitan as Volume 5 had been, the July issue also published non-British writers, including Canadian poet Charles G.D. Roberts, American author Charles Miner Thompson, and Serbian prince Bojidar Karageorgevitch. The latter's story, "Lilla," appeared in French. All told, there were eleven stories, nine poetic contributions, and four essays in Volume 6.

Richard Le Gallienne's "Four Prose Fancies" constitute one of the most forceful contributions in the issue, including marked attacks on status-quo thinking with regard to sex, gender, and nation. Le Gallienne's writing, along with various other works and editorial innovations, make this volume far from dull or conservative. Nevertheless, *The National Observer* declared that "a dull gray" was "the prevailing tone" of Volume 6, adding that *The Yellow Book* in general had, as first indicated in the *Observer's* review of the previous issue in April, "continued to sober down" ("*The Yellow Book*" 385). Ignoring the artistic content entirely, this reviewer declared the poetry "mediocre at best" and the rest of the literary contents of little value. "If it were not for Mr. Henry James," the critic concluded, "we should not see any reason why the *Yellow Book* should have reached its sixth volume" (386).

Contrary to the critic's accusations of mediocrity, Volume 6 demonstrates an innovative piece of editorial work. Ultimately, it enacts the editorial concerns of *The Yellow Book's* editors, who struggled to address the backlash against Wilde and Beardsley without eradicating the decadent bourgeois-baiting that had served as the periodical's hallmark of avant-gardism in the past. Thus in Volume 7 we find Harland, under the pseudonym of "The Yellow Dwarf," taunting the

critics by writing an essay on the inadequacies of British book reviewers. In this respect, at least, *The Yellow Book* editors and publishers were in full agreement with Oscar Wilde: “there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about” (19).

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