



the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

THE YELLOW BOOK:

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 7 (OCTOBER 1895)

While the seventh volume would prove to mark only the midpoint of *The Yellow Book's* 13-volume print run, a number of critics responded to it with premature declarations of the publication's decline. They panned it as "shorn of its yellowness" ("The Lounger," 371) and "sadly fallen from the estate in which it was created" ("The Yellow Book," 152). Despite these allusions to both the decadence and the brilliance associated with departed art editor Aubrey Beardsley, the decadent thread that had run through past volumes continued through the latest issue, albeit in somewhat muted form.

Most notably, Volume 7 introduced the British reading public to Baron Corvo (aka Frederick William Rolfe) and his homoerotic narratives and camp writing style. The issue contains two of his decadent stories – part of the linked sequence that would continue in volumes 9 and 11, before being gathered together in book form as *Stories Toto Told Me* (John Lane, 1898). In addition, watercolourist Henry Meynell Rheam (listed as Henry R. Rheam throughout Volume 7) offers a drawing entitled *Merlin and Vivien* that takes Edward Burne-Jones's painting *The Beguiling of Merlyn* (1874) and subsumes it in a scene of dementia and decay. All the foliage in the Pre-Raphaelite's painting is now dead, while the seductive authority of Burne-Jones's magician shifts, in Rheam's piece, to the woman who now dominates a scene suggestive of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*.

Even Beardsley maintained a strong presence, albeit in the advertising supplement. Lane's "List of Books in *Belles Lettres*" at the back of the volume continued to foreground Beardsley's title pages for works in the Bodley Head Keynote series, while its

most elaborate book description was for Beardsley's forthcoming *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*. This outraged some Bodley Head writers, such as William Watson, who wrote Lane to voice his disappointment in seeing "Beardsley in full force in your catalogues." "After all that has occurred I think this almost a breach of faith," Watson told Lane, adding: "I foresee disaster for you—a steady decline in credit and esteem—if you are so blind as not to see the folly of continuing to represent the old Yellow Book sort-of tradition" (William Watson to John Lane). Lane eventually concluded that he could not publish *Tannhäuser* without upsetting a number of other authors in his roster, and so instead sections of Beardsley's illustrated erotic novel first appeared in 1896 in the rival magazine, *The Savoy*, founded by Leonard Smithers and edited by Arthur Symons (Reade 9).

Volume 7 contained a variety of high quality material and, as some reviewers did recognize, the editorial approach to literary and artistic contents continued to be innovative. *The Bookman's* reviewer declared that the new issue "lays more serious claim than any of its previous numbers, perhaps, to our studious attention" (Rev. of *The Yellow Book*, 372). While praising the contributions of Hubert Crackanthorpe and Richard Le Gallienne, the reviewer singled out Ella D'Arcy's "Web of Maya" for special commendation, stating that this work placed her "among the masters of the short story." Both *The Bookman's* celebration of D'Arcy's writing and its silence about the volume's visual contents were typical of the reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. Noting that *The Yellow Book* had never received fair and balanced criticism, the reviewer for *The Sketch* articulated two geographically distinct responses to the magazine, claiming that "in the provinces it is received with upraised hands and quite solemn moral lecture by way of criticism; in town it has been regarded as a huge joke, and made a subject of cheap and facile satire" ("The Latest Yellow Book," 5). While neither moral outrage nor derision denote positive reception, *The Sketch's* opposition of the rural and the urban contains an insight that *The Yellow Book* to date had been very much seen as a magazine speaking to an urban, cosmopolitan base. Perhaps with a view to extending his market by deliberately cultivating the provincial, Lane embarked on a new strategy in Volume 7 of having the entire visual contents produced by a distinct regional group of artists.

All of the visual works in Volume 7, including the cover and title page, are by members of the Newlyn School of Cornwall. This volume is the first to have been explicitly associated with a single artistic group and one, moreover, affiliated with neither aestheticism nor decadence. Patten Wilson, as advising art editor, seems likely to have made this choice. His former teacher, William Mouat Loudan (Beare), was a member of the New English Art Club (“W. Mouat Loudan”), as were many artists of the Newlyn School including one of its central figures, the Irish artist Stanhope A. Forbes, who is himself represented in *The Yellow Book’s* seventh volume. It is also possible that Bodley Head author Alice Meynell played a role in having an issue of the magazine dedicated to their work. In an article in *The Art Journal* in 1889, she declared the “Newlynners” to be “the most significant body of painters now in England” (137). Impressed by the artists’ use of light and the directness of their style, she became a major advocate (Clarke 72).

The Newlyn School flourished during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Motivated by a desire to paint *en plein air*, its artists were influenced by French realism and impressionism. Reflecting the school’s common theme of fishing life, J.D. Mackenzie’s cover design for Volume 7, “Newlyn Boat and Lighthouse and Evening Primrose,” depicts two boats known as Cornish luggers and a lighthouse. McKenzie also created the image on the title page. A rectangular frame of entangled fish, the image echoes the style of Newlyn Industrial Class’s cooper work to which Mackenzie had contributed designs. Primarily a philanthropic institution, the Class trained the fishermen of Newlyn village, in Cornwall, in a second trade, copper work, which is now recognized as part of the Arts and Crafts movement (see Bennett and Pill).

Newlyn artists often emphasized in rather melodramatic fashion the hardships and risks of life by the sea, as in the two pieces in this volume by Forbes: “By the Fireside” and “Their Daily Bread.” Forbes’s wife, Canadian Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes, is the only Newlyn School artist who would appear again in a later issue of *The Yellow Book*. In Volume 7, she is represented by two studies of girls on the threshold of womanhood. “Marie” is an especially skilled sketch that captures the theme of a pensive heroine in a nautical setting. Frank Bramley and Albert Chevallier contributed impressionistic pieces

– the former a figure study entitled “The Bride” and the latter a village landscape in an effective blocky style, entitled “On the Yealm,” referring to the Yealm River in southern Devon. Frank Richards’s “A Pastoral” has a notably strong art nouveau style, while Fred Hall’s light-spirited oil “Fairplay” (which Volume 7 titles “Fair Play” throughout) is representative not of his realist paintings but of the cartoons, usually of fellow artists, that became his focus in the 1890s.

With 22 writers and 17 artists represented, Volume 7 had roughly the same amount of material as previous issues, giving readers 11 short stories, 12 poems, 2 essays, and 23 images (including the covers and title page). The cost, however, was considerably less than those of any other volume to date: in total, Volume 7’s expenses came to only a little over £128, in comparison to Volume 5’s, which were double the cost at some £255 (John Lane Company Records). Harland and Lane were possibly able to keep expenses down by commissioning a relatively large number of new or lesser known contributors, who could not command high fees. In addition to every one of the visual artists, 7 of the 22 writers were first-time contributors.

With his 42-page story “The Queen’s Pleasure” and a 15-page review essay under the pseudonym of “The Yellow Dwarf,” literary editor Henry Harland is the main contributor of written materials to this volume. Taking personal offense at Harland’s evident “dislike [of] *The Saturday Review* and its present editor,” Frank Harris (1894-1898), the periodical’s critic unmasked Harland as The Yellow Dwarf in an early review, declaring him to be “as peevish, malicious, and sickly as any dwarf of romance” (Rev. of *The Yellow Book*, 567). Other responses to the meta-editorial Yellow Dwarf were in similar vein. The American *Bookman*, noting that Harland is “The Yellow Dwarf,” concludes that his literary judgment runs counter to that of most readers (Rev. of *The Yellow Book*, 372). Harland himself accuses the press as a whole of not being critical enough in its assessment of literary works, and then proceeds to review recent publications by seven authors, all except for Hall Caine being *Yellow Book* contributors. Of the first five he observes: “From the leaden pretentiousness of Mr. Hall Caine[’s *Manxman*] and the glassy pretentiousness of Mr. John Oliver Hobbes[’s *The Gods*,

Some Mortals, and Lord Wickenham], it was restorative to turn to the naturalness, the honesty, and the simplicity of Miss Menie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia*, Miss Ella D'Arcy's *Monochromes*, and Mr. Kenneth Grahame's *Golden Age*" (137-38). He declares D'Arcy – who was assisting Harland with the editing of *The Yellow Book* – to be one of the top two short-story writers in England, and compliments Grahame for his melodious voice and tender humour. Notably, Volume 7 also includes advertisements for D'Arcy's and Grahame's books, both published by Lane. Harland questions Dowie's *Gallia* – published by Methuen – for its heavy moral tone and lack of the personal voice she had used so effectively in "Wladislaw's Advent," a story that he notes had appeared in *The Yellow Book* (see Volume 4). He does praise *Gallia* for its direct style, however, as well as its original, daring theme and well-demarked characters. "I have no prejudices in favour of the New Woman," states the 34-year-old Harland, "I proclaim myself quite brazenly an Old Male" (140), but he goes on to acknowledge his respect and admiration for the novel's heroine. Harland ends with a mixed review of *Sentimental Studies*, by Hubert Crackanthorpe, and stronger praise for George Moore's *Celibates*. Although reviewers did not respond positively to Harland's Yellow Dwarf pose, he was to resume this mask in two subsequent volumes (9 and 10).

Volume 7's first verbal work is Richard Le Gallienne's prose piece "A Seventh-story Heaven," a short parable of two Bohemians, Love and Beauty, sharing a loft. Katherine Mix suggests that the piece received this position as an honour to Le Gallienne and a delicate tribute to his wife Mildred, who had passed away the year before, and to whom the story is dedicated (178). Other familiar contributors connected with *the Yellow Book* and Bodley Head circle include Rosamund Mariott Watson, Leila Macdonald, Richard Garnett, Netta Syrett, and Dauphin Meunier; in a nod to the magazine's cosmopolitanism, the latter once again published his verses in French.

Lena Milman – a first-time contributor who had also published the first English translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* for the Keynote series – offers an insightful article entitled "A Few Notes upon Mr. James." In it, she challenges the English "contempt for the short story" and demand for art always fulfilling a practical

purpose rather than simply offering “a beautiful suggestion” (71). Echoing Walter Pater, she encourages readers to appreciate authors who present “those passing emotions, those elusive impressions” (72), before going on to praise Henry James for his “vividly impressionist” prose (76) and his skill at both subtle humour and supernatural atmosphere.

The most distinctive trait of Volume 7 is its cohesion of the visual works around the Newlyn School. However, the themes of impressionism and suggestion permeate not only the images but also the literary works and the essays, reflecting the cultural currency of *The Yellow Book*. Meanwhile, cutting-edge work by Baron Corvo and Ella D’Arcy demonstrates that, with this issue, editor and publisher sustained their vision of the publication as a fresh and daring venture.

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