

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### ***THE DIAL: AN OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION (1889-1897)***



Figure 1. Charles Ricketts, Headpiece for *The Dial*, vol. 2, p. 11

*The Dial: An Occasional Publication* (1889-1897) occupies a significant place in the history of little magazines. Although joint editors Charles Ricketts and

Charles Shannon brought out only five issues at irregular intervals over its eight-year print run, the *Dial* helped define the emerging genre of the little magazine and contributed significantly to the revival of wood engraving and typography as art forms. Its contemporary impact is evident in the attention it received in artistic circles and the press. Late in 1896, Ricketts and Shannon were interviewed by journalist Temple Scott for *Bookselling* magazine in their shared home in the Vale, Chelsea. The moment was auspicious, as they had just launched the Vale Press, having first heralded this event in the penultimate number of the *Dial* with specimen pages of the type Ricketts had designed. In response to Scott's question about the original aims of the *Dial*, Ricketts replied: "I wished, in conjunction with a few other artists who thought in common, to re-assert certain traditions—to insist on absolute sincerity in art. Chiefly, however, to emphasise and re-emphasise the importance of

design in art. Really, the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ* was its legitimate precursor” (Ricketts, qtd in Scott 339).

By identifying the Pre-Raphaelites and their short-lived organ *The Germ* (1850) as the progenitor of the *Dial*, Ricketts establishes a Victorian lineage for the little magazines that blossomed in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Surprisingly, Ricketts does not mention the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (1884-1894), which had ceased publication only a few years before the interview with Scott. Two of the *Dial*'s main contributors, Charles Shannon and John Gray, contributed to the *Hobby Horse*, the former with a lithograph, “Vallatus Lilis,” and the latter with an important essay on the “woodcut designers of thirty years ago,” which did much to revive interest in Pre-Raphaelite illustration after its publication in 1888. Moreover, unlike the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ*, which was typographically undistinguished, the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* was very interested in design. The organ of the Century Guild founded in 1882 by Selwyn Image (1849-1930) and Charles Heygate Mackmurdo (1851-1942), it was the first magazine to aim for aesthetic unity, expressed through textual ornaments and typographic layout as much as contents. As Simon Houfe observes, “it set a pattern for small circulation, carefully designed magazines, which was to affect their shape and content” into the twentieth century (8). The *Century Guild Hobby Horse* should be seen as the link between the mid-century *Germ*, the fin-de-siècle *Dial*, and the little magazines that followed, such as the *Yellow Book* (1894-1897), the *Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal* (1895-1896/7), the *Savoy* (1896), *The Pageant* (1896-97), the *Green Sheaf* (1903-4), and the *Venture* (1903, 1905).

Like the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ*, turn-of-the-century little magazines featured art and literature produced by a small group of producers who shared artistic and, often, socio-political values. As artist-run ventures, these magazines were directed to niche audiences and tended to have limited circulation and short print runs, usually resulting from their lack of financial viability. This apparent limitation is offset, however, by their profound impact on the genre, which continues to thrive in the digital age. And if these artistic periodicals “owe their late flowering to the seed planted by the *Germ*” (Kooistra),

they are also indebted to the *Dial* as a model for “the importance of design” in the modern little magazine (Ricketts, qtd in Scott 339).

That design was central to the *Dial* is not surprising. With a print run beginning in 1889 and ending in 1897, the magazine’s lifespan is bracketed by defining moments in the arts-and-crafts movement and the revival of fine printing, both of which emphasized the importance of artisanal integrity and harmonious design. Like William Morris’s Kelmscott Press (1891-98), the *Dial* was a material response to the inaugural Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1888. The Exhibition’s display of printed books included copies of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, which Ricketts admired (Watry 4). Most influential of all was Emery Walker’s associated lecture on the relationship between type and ornament in page design. This led to the founding of both the Kelmscott Press and the Vale Press, which emerged from the training ground of the *Dial*. While Morris was near the end of his life when he founded his Press, Ricketts and Shannon, who met in 1882 at the City and Guilds Art School Lambeth, were still in their twenties when they launched the *Dial*. With limited finances but significant expertise in wood engraving and a deep historical understanding of early printed books, they aimed to add book design to the achievements of the arts-and-crafts movement (Pissarro and Ricketts, “Of Typography,” 77). It should be noted that they understood their contribution as commitment to artistic integrity in the making of objects, rather than support for the socio-political ideology associated with the movement.

The *Dial*’s five issues provided an apprenticeship in page layout and typography, wood engraving and ornament, printing and press work, that led directly to the founding of the Vale Press “At the Sign of the Dial” in 1896. In October of that year, Ricketts and Shannon exhibited four Vale Press books at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition that opened just after Morris’s death (Watry 37). Shortly thereafter, Ricketts paid tribute to the achievement of the Kelmscott Press: “in collaboration with his friend [Edward] Burne-Jones, Morris re-cast the art of book-making on such a logical basis that no original effort can be made without conditions of care and technique of at least equal importance, and what he has done will surely remain as the initial effort in this movement” (Pissarro and Ricketts, “William Morris,” 136-37). Although his own efforts

in book design shared Morris's commitment to "integrity in the crafts" (133), Ricketts did not share the older man's socialist politics, being content to make beautiful things for the small group of people who appreciated, and could afford, beautiful things. Ricketts's application of craft to the art of the book also resulted in very different designs from Morris's.

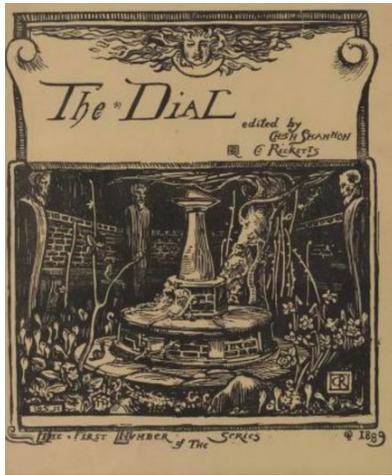


Figure 2. *Dial* front cover, vol. 1 (1889)

Ricketts's cover design for the first number of *The Dial*, which was wood-engraved by Shannon, symbolically conveys their conception for the magazine (fig. 1). As Ricketts put it, "I thought of a garden, and the garden suggested sundial, and finally, *The Dial* was fixed" (Scott 339). The cover image features a walled garden, with a herm presiding in each corner, suggesting a privileged space for masculine creativity. Spring flowers, including daffodils and crocuses, surround the large central sundial, which is positioned in front of a barren tree wrapped in vines. Above the inset image, and overlooking the title frieze, is a Renaissance-style sun with a human face and flaming hair radiating out to the corners, referencing the joint editors' historical models in early printed books. The design announces the *Dial*'s identity as the creative publication of an enclosed masculine coterie devoted to art and nature in equal measure, whose temporal appearance would be governed by quotidian conditions, rather than regulated by pre-set intervals and commercial expectations. When Ricketts redesigned the cover for volumes 2 to 5, the motif of the sundial remained. Moreover, when the Vale Press secured shop premises on Warwick Street, Shannon's "At the Sign of the Dial" signage retained this iconic motif. The sign's iconography was reworked for the frontispiece to the *Bibliography of The Vale Press* published by Hacon and Ricketts when the press closed. Clearly, the emblem of the sundial held great personal significance for Ricketts and Shannon.

The *Dial* featured the work of four men who frequented Ricketts' and Shannon's home in Chelsea and shared their artistic vision: John Gray, T. Sturge Moore, Lucien Pissarro

(who was later to found the Eragny Press), and Reginald Savage. This core group of contributors later extended slightly to include Michael Field (poets Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, vols. 4 and 5, the only women to be published in the magazine), Herbert Horne (vol. 2, editor of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*), Laurence Housman (vol. 5, later to become co-editor of the *Venture*), Emile Verhaeren (vol 5, a Belgian Symbolist poet), and W. Delaplaine Scull (vol. 4, a Sussex-based writer). As Koenraad Claes observes, the magazine “functioned as a circulating portfolio” for its principal artists, Moore, Pissarro, Ricketts, Savage, and Shannon (81). Both its large format—the *Dial* had the biggest dimensions of any of the period’s little magazines—and its prioritizing of art, craft, and design within its brown paper covers give the material impression of an artist’s portfolio. The *Dial*’s price, which ranged from 7s6d to 12s6d, makes it one of the most expensive, especially given its limited size of 36 pages or less per issue. In contrast, the *Evergreen* and the *Yellow Book*, both of which were bound in hard covers and included 200 or more pages of content, cost 5 shillings per volume. And while the *Yellow Book* printed its quarterly numbers in the thousands, the *Dial* brought out only 200 to 270 copies of its occasional issues. Despite the magazine’s small group of contributors and limited immediate audience, however, the artistic contents of the *Dial* influenced the revival of original wood engraving and lithography, and its literature disseminated some of the ideas of continental Symbolism in Britain.

While magazines such as the *Evergreen*, *Pageant*, *Savoy*, and *Yellow Book* used photomechanical line block and halftone process engraving to reproduce the original artwork displayed in their pages, the *Dial* (after its first number) was the first to feature those arts in which artists could control the means of production: original wood engraving and lithography. Throughout the Victorian period, facsimile wood engraving was the manual means by which an illustration was reproduced in the press, a system that not only separated the artist from the engraver, but also alienated the individual worker from the work and its overall meaning. By the end of the century, facsimile wood engraving had been replaced by photomechanical processes of reproduction in mass print culture. By re-introducing wood engraving as an artistic practice rather than a reproductive technology, the *Dial* was in the forefront of the modern woodcut revival exemplified by the Beggarstaff Brothers (William Nicholson and James Pryde), Eric Gill,

and Gwen Raverat, among others. The *Dial's* revival of wood engraving also influenced its use in the *Book Beautiful* produced by commercial printers such as John Lane at The Bodley Head and, especially, by private presses, including Ricketts's Vale Press, Pissarro's Eragny Press, James Guthrie's Pear Tree Press, and Charles Ashbee's Essex House Press. Little magazines such as E. Gordon Craig's *The Page* (1898-1901) and Laurence Housman and Somerset Maugham's *The Venture* (1903-5) later followed the *Dial's* lead and featured wood-engraved images as part of their overall design strategy.

The *Dial's* centrality in the modern practice of wood engraving as an artform has much to do with the magazine's core group of artists, who were all skilled wood engravers. Ricketts, Shannon, Moore, and Savage had studied the craft together at Lambeth, while Pissarro had been trained in France, where original wood engraving had already been revived as an artform (Ricketts, "A Note," 265). Dissatisfied with the unharmonious printing of the *Dial's* first number, which used photomechanical process reproduction and coated paper, Ricketts turned to wood engraving for volumes 2 to 5, designing and engraving each textual ornament as well as some of the illustrations himself, and including original wood-engraved prints by Moore, Pissarro, Savage, and Shannon. Starting with the *Dial's* second issue, Ricketts began working closely with Charles McCall, manager of the high-quality Ballantyne Press in Tavistock Square, to ensure quality printing of the magazine. It was here that he learned the capabilities of the hand press for small editions with wood-engraved ornaments and conceived his plan to establish his own press (Watry 21). By the *Dial's* fourth number of 1896, the magazine was published by the Vale Press, run jointly by artist-printer Charles Ricketts and his financial partner, barrister William Llewellyn Hacon.

In his interview with Temple Scott for *Bookselling* in 1896, Ricketts boldly claimed that *The Dial* had "reinvented wood engraving and revived lithography" (Ricketts qtd in Scott 339). Unlike the woodcut, which had been practiced in Europe since the middle ages, lithography did not emerge as a method of print making until the start of the nineteenth century. A planographic printing method of drawing on a prepared stone surface, lithography works on the principle that oil resists water. Shannon and other artists became attracted to lithography because the act of drawing on stone offered

almost as much artistic control as drawing on paper. Printing, however, was a different matter. As Ricketts observed, “Capricious to print, a lithograph may be put out of tune by careless printing, or spoiled outright; temperature and the unaccountable affect it,” and the number of proofs that can be taken from the stone is limited (“Prefatory Notes,” 149). Some of Shannon’s earliest lithographs were printed in the *Dial* and he stopped practicing in the medium within a few years of its last number, so there is a close association between the lithographic revival and the magazine’s print run (Ricketts, “Prefatory,” 143). With an oeuvre of only about 50 lithographs, Shannon made the *Dial* a significant portfolio of his prints. For example, lithographs such as “Repeated Bend” (vol. 2) and “The Dressing Room” (vol. 5) from the *Stone Bath* series were first seen in *The Dial*. Today Shannon is considered as one of the most successful lithographers of the period (Frankel 44). For Ricketts at the time, what stood out in Shannon’s lithographs was that requisite of all art, design: “One word, the word *design*, . . . will convey much of what I feel pre-eminent in Mr. Shannon’s work....Design; and the faculty through which it appeals to the emotions. . .” (“Prefatory Note,” 144).

The co-editors’ interest in design and emotion in art is also evident in their selection and arrangement of literary contents, which feature art criticism, poetry, and fantastic tales influenced by the Symbolist movement. Unlike the *Yellow Book*, which helped develop the modern short story of contemporary life, the *Dial* presented fairy tales, allegories, parables, and other non-naturalistic forms of creative writing expressing emotion through symbolic design. Also in contrast to the *Yellow Book*, the *Dial* did not segregate literary and artistic contents. Like the Pre-Raphaelite predecessors they invoked, the *Dial* producers were interested in complementary collaborations between the verbal and visual arts. Throughout its five numbers, illuminated initial letters and ornamental borders decorate pages of prose, but not poetry—a design choice that speaks to the editors’ recognition of poetry’s visual effect on the page and its capacity to evoke mental images. Works of fantasy, such as John Gray’s “The Great Worm” in volume 1, or Charles Ricketts’s “The Marred Face” in volume 2, are sometimes illustrated with full-page images, but are more typically ornamented with elaborate wood-engravings by Ricketts. The art criticism in the *Dial*, sometimes written by Ricketts under the pseudonym Charles Sturt, sometimes in his own name, and sometimes unsigned,

usually receive decorative treatment of some kind. Ricketts's art criticism engages with, and in some cases introduces, Symbolist ideas percolating on the continent, particularly in France and Belgium. As Nicholas Frankel has shown, these early pieces by Ricketts formed the basis for some of his later books of art criticism, which deserve to be counted "among the most significant produced in Britain in the period 1890 – 1915" (42).

Ricketts's essay "The Unwritten Book," published anonymously in the *Dial's* second volume, incorporates some ideas of Jean Moréas's "Symbolist Manifesto" of 1888 as well as the work of Jules Laforgue and other Continental Symbolists (Corbett 105; Frankel 42). It also, however, shows his Pre-Raphaelite influences and proclivities. This polemical piece lays out Ricketts's theory of "Document," which guided the *Dial's* editorial policy. Claiming the magazine's apparent eclecticism was actually an expression of editorial selection and aesthetic judgement, Ricketts explained that *Document* is "that monument of moods," conveying "this sense of existence and pre-existence, this sense of time" (26). *Document* is not expressed through the narrative elements of art, but through its "exquisite detail," which connects the artist, the work, and the spectator in its "record of some remembered delight" (25). Ornament and design are for Ricketts what the sonnet was for Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Honouring tradition but "inseparable from the garment of individuality," *Document* is "a moment's monument," memorializing one "dead deathless hour" in human life and art (Ricketts, "Unwritten Book," 25; Rossetti). Ricketts's theory of "Document" infused *The Dial* and its commitment to design because it is in design—or what Ricketts refers to later in the essay as "the old ornamentality" (28)—that past and present meet and mingle, forming patterns of creative expression and human connection.

While Ricketts and Shannon wanted the *Dial* to embody their shared vision that as "Art has been, Art is, so the present touches wings with the past" (Ricketts, "Unwritten Book," 28), contemporary critics were "puzzled" by the magazine (Scott 339). The artwork, particularly Shannon's lithographs, was sometimes admired, but the magazine's literature was almost universally panned throughout its entire print run. "Except grammar, we have found no literary element in the essays and tales of which it is composed," the *Athenaeum* reviewer complained in 1889 (Rev. of *Dial* No. 1, 712).

Seven years later, the *Spectator* critic summed up the common view: “The literary part of the publication is not equal to these illustrations” (Rev. of *Dial* No. 4, 814). In the 125 years that separate the printed *Dial* from this digital edition, attention has likewise focused on the visual art in preference to the magazine’s verbal art. However, recent scholarship has begun to recognize the innovative significance of the magazine’s literature, both in form and content. Boyiopoulos et al, for instance, note that some of the *Dial*’s fragmented and impressionistic short fictions now appear to be proto-Modernist, evoking the later techniques of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf (21). Meanwhile, Nicholas Frankel has drawn attention to the important role this little magazine played as a British bridge to the continent, not only as an importer of French symbolism, but also as a vehicle for disseminating contemporary French art and literature more generally. The *Dial*’s appreciative essays on Puvis De Chavanes, Maurice de Guérin, and the Goncourt Brothers, and its early translations of the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, did much to draw attention to these French artists, writers, and collectors.

It is also important to recognize that the *Dial*’s symbolic tales and poems complement the artistic experiments in their design, aiming to express emotion through gesture and detail. And if it has taken over a century for critics to appreciate its literature, the artwork of the “‘Dial’ or ‘Vale’ artists” claimed interest from the start. Contemporaries justly celebrated Ricketts and Shannon for having “engraved their place securely in the third generation of the pre-Raphaelite line” (“An Exhibition,” 778). Today, their contributions to book design, art, and literature are acknowledged as innovative and influential: no history of British little magazines could be written without reference to the *Dial*. If, as Ricketts told Temple Scott, he and Shannon aimed to emulate the Pre-Raphaelite *Germ*, the five numbers of the *Dial: An Occasional Publication* not only realized that goal, but also established a model for other little magazines to follow.

### **A Note on the Text:**

The *Yellow Nineties* digital edition of *The Dial: An Occasional Publication* is based on material copies held in Ryerson University Library Archives and Special Collections. Each of the five numbers of *The Dial* in this collection include the *Ex Libris* of Campbell Dodgson (1865-1948), art historian, print collector, and Keeper of Prints and Drawings

at the British Museum (1893-1932). These material copies have been supplemented by digitizations of the *Dial* provided by Mark Samuels Lasner from the University of Delaware Library Special Collections, which have been used to markup the magazine's pages for online searching, and to create the flipbook version of the magazine, which gives a sense of the artefact's layout and sequence. The *Dial's* ornaments may be studied in detail on the Y90s Database of Ornament.

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