



the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

THE YELLOW BOOK: INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 3 (OCTOBER 1894)

At the end of September 1894 the partnership between Elkin Mathews and John Lane dissolved. In the division of assets, Lane kept *The Yellow Book* for The Bodley Head, now under his sole proprietorship. The fall Prospectus announced that *The Yellow Book* “will in future be published by JOHN LANE,” and when Volume 3 was published in October, Lane alone was named the British publisher, with Copeland and Day of Boston remaining the American co-publisher. For the first time, the publishers’ advertisements at the back of the periodical promoted *The Yellow Book’s* previous volumes, noting that Volume 1 was into its fourth edition and Volume 2 was into its third. The advertisement for the magazine brings particular attention to Philip Hamerton’s “frank criticism” of the inaugural volume, which had appeared in the second.

As he had for the previous volume, Beardsley advertised the publication by using the same distinctive cover design for both the Prospectus and Volume 3 itself. In a sly visual reference to the first volume’s publication of Max Beerbohm’s tongue-in-cheek essay “In Defense of Cosmetics,” which had borne the brunt of much of the first wave of criticism, Beardsley’s cover depicts a woman applying powder at a toiletry table. In Volume 2, Beerbohm had himself published a rebuttal to the critics who took his essay so seriously, asking readers to “do homage to a new queen,” *Artifice* (284); with his cover for Volume 3, Beardsley wittily obliges. Characteristic of his editorship is this sort of deliberate self-reflexivity and meta-commentary of format and contents, both within and across volumes.

The critics met the quarterly's third appearance with a mixture of resignation, critique, and cautious praise. In the United States, the *Critic* complained that "this strange compound of insolence and the commercial spirit has now, with the third number, become little less than a bore" ("A Yellow Bore," 316). The *New York Times* named the volume "Another Yellow Nuisance" (23). In England, the *National Observer* gave a sour review "in the key of yellow" ("A Xanthopiate," 23), and even the *Dial* hinted that the "third of the series impresses us as not quite equal to the preceding two" ("One year of 'The Yellow Book,'" 154). Nevertheless, the *Dial* also praised *The Yellow Book* for its quarterly introduction of new authors and artists, acknowledging "a dim sense of wonder that the editors should have unearthed so many acceptable writers and artists hitherto unknown to the public" (154).

The editors kept Volume 3 to about the same length as the first volume, making it, at 279 pages, roughly 100 pages less than Volume 2. This reduction kept costs within Lane's contributor payment limit of about £200 per volume, including a total of about £50 for visual contents (Henry Harland to John Lane, 12 June 1894). The bill for literary contents Harland sent Lane from Dieppe on 20 August 1894 came in at £135.90. The verbal contents include three essays, nine short stories, thirteen poems, and two plays; the visual contents total fifteen pictures – more in line with the first volume than the second, which has significantly more visual material. While no contribution matched the length of Henry James's forty-six-page story in the first volume or seventy-page piece in the second, Volume 3 did include long prose works by Beerbohm (twenty-two pages), Hubert Crackanthorpe (thirty-four pages), and Kenneth Grahame (twenty-two pages).

In a significant departure from their previous practice of leading with their most prestigious author and artist, the editors chose apparent unknowns to head the Table of Contents for both Literature and Art. At the head of the Literature list was the provocative essay "Women—Wives or Mothers," seemingly penned "By a

Woman,” but actually written by Frederick Greenwood (Mix 114), the established journalist and past editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *St. James Gazette*. The pseudonymous Philip Broughton (the masquerading Aubrey Beardsley) led the Art list with “Mantegna” (Lasner xx). Beardsley also contributed “From a Pastel” under the pseudonym Albert Foschter. After critics had a chance to criticize Beardsley yet again, while generally being more positively disposed to Broughton and Foschter, the artist let it be known that he was the man behind the two other names (Mix 127).

Once more, the editors contradicted their own policy of absolute separation between *The Yellow Book’s* literary and visual contents, fronting Beerbohm’s “Note on George the Fourth” with his caricature of the portly monarch looking like Oscar Wilde. Beerbohm is the only person to have published in each of *The Yellow Book’s* distinct sections, Literature and Art. In addition to Volume 3, Beerbohm also contributed both visual and verbal work to Volume 11. The other visual works in Volume 3, none of them by women, included a lithograph by George Thomson; four designs by Beardsley grouped together; a set of three pieces by Walter Sickert; a pair by the respected painter P. Wilson Steer, and a contribution from the American-born painter and illustrator William Hyde, best known for his extensive work for *Harper’s Magazine*. Of the fifteen pictures, only Hyde’s “A Landscape” is a representation of nature, the rest being indoor studies, figure studies, and a notable number of portraits.

The poetic contents of Volume 3 increased dramatically, in both quantity and quality, from the two previous volumes. The diversity of sources is also notable. The volume includes, for example, a contribution by the Pre-Raphaelite poet and composer Theo[phile] Marzials, now best known for his parlour song collection *Pan Pipes* (1883), illustrated by Walter Crane, and for the poem “A Tragedy,” which continues to be discussed as possibly the worst poem ever written (Howse). Harland also published *The Yellow Book’s* first work in French, Cuban-

born José Maria de Hérédia's "Fleurs du Feu," followed by an English translation of the verses by Ellen M. Clerke. Bodley Head poets appearing in the volume include Olive Custance, John Davidson, Arthur Symons, and William Watson. In prose, The Bodley Head was represented by Crackanthorpe, Grahame, Ella D'Arcy, and Ernest Dowson, in addition to Harland. Thus the volume's literary contents asserted Lane's continued hold of The Bodley Head's leading writers after his split with Mathews.

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