



the yellow nineties online

edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra

THE YELLOW BOOK: INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 4 (JANUARY 1895)

Volume 4, the final issue of *The Yellow Book's* inaugural year and the last to appear under Aubrey Beardsley's art editorship, was published in January 1895. For the fourth time in a row, Beardsley and Henry Harland included their own work in the issue. The only other contributors to appear in each of the first four volumes are the artist Walter Sickert, the poet John Davidson, and the essayist and caricaturist Max Beerbohm. The uninterrupted appearance of work by Beardsley and Beerbohm in the magazine's quarterly issues ended with Volume 4, but Davidson and Sickert were published again in Volume 5. Only literary editor Harland's work appeared in each of the thirteen volumes.

Harland was delighted with the literary contents he had lined up for Volume 4, boasting to John Lane that *The Yellow Book* standards were so high he had twice refused scientific stories by H.G. Wells who had, according to the editor, tried to fob off second-rate material on the magazine (Henry Harland to John Lane, 22 October [1894]). Authors published in *The Yellow Book* for the first time included Bodley Head poets Edith Nesbit and Graham R. Tomson (a.k.a. Rosamund Marriott-Watson) and fiction writers Victoria Cross, Marion Hepworth Dixon, and Evelyn Sharp. The volume opened and closed with two Bodley Head stalwarts: Richard Le Gallienne and John Davidson. In addition to an essay by Beerbohm, Norman Hapgood contributed a piece on the French realist author Henri Beyle (better known as Stendahl), while James Ashcroft Noble offered an essay on the Scottish writer Alexander Smith as a forerunner of Robert Louis Stevenson and possibly the first British advocate of "art for art's sake." In addition to these three essays, Volume 4 contained a total of seven short

stories, twelve poems and seventeen pictures in its 289 pages, a length and distribution comparable to Volumes 1 and 3. Harland's own story "The Bohemian Girl" is the longest piece in the volume at thirty-three pages, along with Victoria Cross's "A Fragment" of the same length, followed by Hapgood's essay on Stendahl and H. B. Marriott Watson's story "The House of Shame," both twenty-seven pages long. These four works combined constitute roughly half of Volume 4's contents.

The visual materials introduced what became a running series in future *Yellow Book* volumes: portraits of contributors, wittily called The Bodley Heads. Volume 4 contained two of these: "Bodley Head No. 1, Mr. Richard Le Gallienne" by Walter Sickert; and "Bodley Head No. 2, Mr. John Davidson" by William Rothenstein. Portraiture proved the main visual genre of this volume, which, in addition to the two Bodley Heads, included representations of unnamed subjects as well as Beardsley's drawing of the actress Winifred Emery, Sickert's rendering of George Moore, and P. Wilson Steer's sketch of the pianist Emil Sauer. The decorative arts were represented by Charles Conder's "Design for a Fan." And for the first time, a woman artist appeared in the Art list: Margaret L. Sumner, who contributed a pen-and-ink landscape sketch entitled "Plein Air." Volume 4 also introduced the artists Patten Wilson, A.S. Hartrick, and W.W. Russell. In addition to his work for the cover and title page, Beardsley contributed four of his pen-and-ink designs; one of these, "Frontispiece for Juvenal," appeared as a double-page supplement at the end of the volume. This work is followed by the usual pages of publishers' advertisements, including John Lane's own for his Keynote Series.

The critical response to Volume 4 was consistent with that for the previous volumes – mixed. Some reviewers saw the fourth volume as signaling the periodical's end, while others saw its quality as confirming that the venture would have a long run. While noting that "one quickly wearies of [Beardsley's] grotesque drawings" (154), the anonymous reviewer for the *Dial* was relatively positive, singling out the story by M^énie Muriel Dowie and the essays by Noble and

Hapgood for particular praise. Like the *Dial's* critic, the reviewer for the *Bookman* saw Volume 4 as better than previous volumes. He too was "bored by the vulgar eccentricities of Mr. Beardsley's pencil and Mr. Max Beerbohm's pen," but praised the work of Noble and Hapgood, and felt Harland's story was distinctly the best piece of writing. Meanwhile, in "A Yellow Indecency," the *Critic's* reviewer raged against all the literary works in Volume 4, but failed to give a sign of having read any of them. The closest this critic came to a critique was to declare that Sickert's portrait of George Moore would result in more bad dreams than eating a plum pudding at bedtime. The review included a photograph of Beardsley which, the critic noted, was known among friends as "The Gargoyle."

One of the most interesting press reviews was also one of the rare signed works. A short piece by Katharine Tynan Hinkson entitled "London Letter" appeared in *Literary World*. Although herself a poet, Tynan Hinkson's piece focuses entirely on Patten Wilson's drawing "Rustem Firing the First Shot." For Hinkson, the work is one "of great nobleness and stateliness, showing exquisite line drawing as well as great decorative beauty and wealth of detail." It is, Tynan Hinkson declares, the antithesis of Beardsley's work. Her review was published in March 1895. The next month, the fifth volume of *The Yellow Book* would appear, with Beardsley replaced on the cover by none other than Wilson himself.

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Works Cited

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