



Letterpress and Picture in the Literary Periodicals of the 1890s

Author(s): Linda Dowling

Source: *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 16, Literary Periodicals Special Number (1986), pp. 117-131

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3507769>

Accessed: 09/03/2011 14:30

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=mhra>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Yearbook of English Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Letterpress and Picture in the Literary Periodicals of the 1890s

LINDA DOWLING

Albuquerque, New Mexico

It is not, I think, a mere Wildean paradox *manqué* to say that the characteristic literary periodicals of the 1890s are important for their pictures. Certainly a number of these periodicals published important pictures: one thinks of the Blake engravings in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, the Whistler lithograph in the *Albemarle*, and pre-eminently, of course, Beardsley's designs in the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy*. Of no less importance, however, is the relationship that picture establishes to text within such periodicals, for in this relationship we see expressed a double resistance or struggle for autonomy: the resistance, first of all, on the part of graphic artists to the hegemony of literature and to their own resultant subordination as mere illustrators; and secondly the larger resistance of both graphic and literary artists, struggling in the name of an autonomous Art, to the utilitarian incursions of commerce. It is a characteristic *fin de siècle* irony that the success of the first resistance (for the resistance of visual artists to literature was successful) partially but distinctly compromised the success of the second, but indeed this was the case, for the decorative motives (specifically, the harmonious integration of picture and print) originated by *fin de siècle* graphic artists became the basis for the arresting and appealing typographical effects essential to the advertising displays of twentieth-century commerce.

Letterpress and picture: the pairing in my title comes from the two contents-pages of the first number of the *Yellow Book* (April 1894). By the second number of the *Yellow Book* this pair had been replaced by 'Literature' and 'Art,' the directors of the *Yellow Book* having apparently taken note of such objections as P. G. Hamerton's that "'letterpress" is usually understood to mean an inferior kind of writing, which is merely an accompaniment to something else, such as engravings, or even maps'.¹ Arthur Symons emphasized the importance of the *Yellow Book*'s change from 'Letterpress' to 'Literature' when he remarked as editor of the *Savoy* (and later reiterated the remark) that the only aim of his own periodical was to 'present Literature in the shape of its letterpress, Art in the form of its illustrations'.² The *Yellow Book* will serve as a central text here because it was commercially the most

¹ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, 'The *Yellow Book*: A Criticism of Volume 1', *Yellow Book*, 2 (1894), 179-90 (p. 179).

² 'Editorial Note', *Savoy*, 1 (1896), p. 5.

ambitious and typographically the most important of the 1890s periodicals. Though the *Savoy* easily surpassed its editorial and literary achievements, the *Yellow Book*, for the four issues preceding the retrenchment consequent upon the Wilde débâcle of April 1895, gave the fullest expression to the double resistance of graphic artists against literature, and Art against commerce, the double struggle symbolized by the paired words on the contents-pages of the *Yellow Book*: Letterpress and Pictures, Literature and Art.

Although evidence about specific editorial decisions at the *Yellow Book* is notably sparse, we may fairly say that the choice of 'letterpress' to describe its literary contents expresses effectively if not intentionally an effort to make equal or independent of each other the magazine's two forms of content. As P. G. Hamerton's reaction suggests, 'letterpress' reduces writing to the same relation to pictures as pictures in Victorian books and periodicals ordinarily assumed to text, that is, a secondary, derivative, and dependent relationship based on explanation, accompaniment, or illustration. Even though the picture-block preceded the letterpress historically in Western Europe (the date of the famous St Christopher block is 1423), by the nineteenth century printed texts exerted primacy over pictures in books and periodicals, dictating their content if not their actual mode of treatment. Victorian illustrators could regard their derivative relationship to literary texts simply as one of the conditions of economic life: texts prescribed pictures and not the other way round. As Joseph Pennell put the matter to his Slade School students in 1892, 'an illustration really is a work of art . . . which is explanatory'.³ Pennell then sweetened the fact of artistic subordination a little by declaring that all graphic art, in fact all art, was explanatory, 'explanatory of some story, sentiment, emotion, effect, or fact', and concluded: 'It would be very difficult indeed to point out when art is not illustrative.'

Many Victorian artists, however, were becoming impatient with this merely 'explanatory' role. Their restiveness under the hegemony of literature may be indicated in connexion with the *Yellow Book* by recalling some well-known stories. There is, for example, Walter Sickert's much-applauded toast at the inaugural dinner given for *Yellow Book* contributors, Sickert declaring that he 'looked forward to the time when authors would be put in their proper places by being compelled to write stories and poems round pictures which should be supplied to them ready-made by their taskmasters, the artists'.⁴ And there is D. S. MacColl's testimony that the

³ Joseph Pennell, *The Illustration of Books: A Manual for the Use of Students, Notes for a Course of Lectures at the Slade School, University College* (London, 1896; reprinted Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), p. 7.

⁴ Quoted in Katherine Lyon Mix, *A Study in Yellow: The Yellow Book and Its Contributors* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1960), p. 82. Compare [Henry Harland], 'A Birthday Letter from the Yellow Dwarf', *Yellow Book*, 9 (1896), 11–22 (p. 20): 'And — abolish your "Art Department"! What on earth can any one want with pictures in a Literary Magazine? Believe me, they only interrupt. It ain't the place for them. They don't hang sonnets and stories between the paintings at the Royal Academy.' In saying this Harland is, presumably, attempting to hide his own authorship of the letter.

germinating idea for the *Yellow Book*, that is, for a periodical composed of literature and art independently, arose from the rather unsatisfactory collaboration of the artist Charles Conder and the writer Henry Harland during the idyllic Normandy summer of 1893.⁵

Beardsley, who visited the artists' Normandy settlement at some time during this summer, stressed that the 'drawings will be independent' of the literary contributions in the *Yellow Book* when he wrote proudly announcing the birth of the new magazine to Robert Ross in January 1894.⁶ This theme was struck even more emphatically when the two editors, Harland and Beardsley, were interviewed by a writer for the *Sketch* a few days before the first number of the *Yellow Book* appeared:

'About the illustrations: they are, I understand, to be entirely distinct from the text?' 'There is to be no connection whatever; text and illustrations will be quite separate. This has never been done before — never attempted, so far as we know; but the advantages are obvious. Many magazines — perhaps most — would not publish a picture unless it related to some of the reading matter. What does that mean? Why, that art is made the handmaid of literature — that art is placed on a lower level. Occasionally an author may have to write so that he may be illustrated; but that would be a less frequent hardship. We want to put literature and art on precisely the same level.'⁷

The *Yellow Book*, then, was meant to redress the imbalance between the literary and graphic arts. If Joseph Pennell was dissatisfied with the artistic conduct of the magazine, it was not because the *Yellow Book* subordinated pictures to print, but because Beardsley (who perhaps preferred the medium in which he himself could shine so brilliantly) used only process blocks instead of the lithographs and coloured wood-engravings that Pennell had hoped for.⁸ Other contemporary periodicals had already made some effort to treat articles and illustrations with an equal attention. For example, the *Butterfly* (May 1893–February 1894; new series, March 1899–February 1900) was founded by a group of young writers and artists on what in the event proved to be the delusive premise that 'one day our magazine would remunerate us so far as to enable us ultimately to give our whole time to its preparation and production'.⁹ Although the *Butterfly* included the conventional sort of illustrations for its stories and humorous sketches, it self-consciously aimed at 'pictures of a really superior class'.¹⁰ It devoted considerable space to humorous drawings with captions in which the artwork stood more or less on its own, though hectic juxtapositions of picture by picture often vitiated the aesthetic effect.

⁵ 'Memories of the 'Nineties: Two Summers with Charles Conder', *London Mercury*, 39 (1939), 287–96.

⁶ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, edited by Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan, and W. G. Good (Rutherford, New Jersey, 1970), p. 61.

⁷ 'What the "Yellow Book" Is To Be: Some Meditations with Its Editors', *Sketch*, 5 (1894), 557–58 (p. 557).

⁸ See John Spaulding Gatton, "'Much Talk of the Y. B.': Henry Harland and the Debut of *The Yellow Book*", *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 13 (1980), 132–34.

⁹ A[rnold] G[olsworthy], 'Vale!', *Butterfly*, 2 (1894), 248–49 (p. 248).

¹⁰ 'Apology', *Butterfly*, 1 (1893), 5–7 (p. 5).

Hubert Crackanthorpe's commitment to fine graphic art in his short-lived monthly the *Albemarle* (January–September 1892) was even more striking. Though chiefly devoted to literary and political essays, the *Albermarle* offered its readers an extraordinary artistic bonus in the form of an original lithograph with each monthly issue for the irresistible (and heavily subsidized) price of sixpence. Whistler's 'A "Song on Stone"', a work which the *Artist* considered the best black and white production of the year, led off the series, followed by lithographs by Sickert, Charles Shannon, Frederick Leighton, Fantin-Latour, and Wilson Steer. In a sense the *Albemarle* carried the notion of the 'independence' of picture from letterpress to an extreme, for the lithographs were not bound in but were merely slipped in after the contents-page. But even though the pictures were not meant to form an integral part of the magazine, the *Albemarle* treated them with evident respect: a full-page fly-title with the title of the work and the artist's name followed each lithograph, and readers were informed that Whistler's own frame-maker stood ready to execute their orders should they wish to have their bargains mounted.

A third way of treating the imbalance between the literary and graphic arts was that proposed by the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (April 1884, January 1886–October 1892; new series, 1893–94), a handsome quarterly particularly important to the *fin de siècle* Revival of Printing and one to which we shall return. The *Hobby Horse* was directed by men whose first commitment was to the visual rather than the literary arts. Far from having pictures supinely illustrating prose, the *Hobby Horse* published works of graphic art which, though called 'illustrations,' usually did not pictorially represent an accompanying text. Indeed, the magazine occasionally reversed the conventional relation of picture to text by having text elucidate picture, a motive that became stronger in the conduct of the *Hobby Horse* as its editor Herbert Horne increasingly devoted himself to art history and scholarship. Although the editors of the *Yellow Book* did not follow this approach in treating the relation of letterpress to picture, it is likely that they learned from the contents-page of the *Hobby Horse*, which always listed separately and with equal headings its essays, poems, and 'illustrations'. By contrast, the first number of the *Albemarle* did not indicate that Whistler's lithograph was a lithograph, and the *Butterfly* listed neither its literary nor its artistic contents and contributors.

Compared to these earlier efforts, the first number of the *Yellow Book* expressed its attempt to redress the relationship between picture and letterpress in a much more vivid and thoroughgoing fashion. The April 1894 number signals its anti-illustrational bias by its two separate but equal contents-pages, one for letterpress and one for pictures. Moreover, the additional dignity of fly-titles and guard sheets further emphasizes the 'independence' of the artwork by its physical separation from the letterpress. This treatment had the crucial practical advantage of allowing the artwork

to be printed separately on hand presses. The editors' concern to achieve a superior reproduction of the pictures showed itself in their use of a high-finish art paper, and in their especial care that the names of the photo-engravers employed in the reproduction, as Harland told John Lane the publisher, 'shall be accurately reported' in a small line of italic type before each picture.¹¹

An even more unmistakable sign of the *Yellow Book's* effort to reorder the relationship between letterpress and picture is its remarkable disposition of type on the page. As James G. Nelson has shown in his authoritative study of Bodley Head publications, the *Yellow Book*, like most of the other publications issued by the firm of Elkin Mathews and John Lane, largely followed the recommendations of the contemporary Revival of Printing with regard to paper, type, binding, and *mise-en-page*.¹² Typically the leaders of the Revival of Printing, such men as Emery Walker, Charles Jacobi, William Morris, and Charles Ricketts, stressed the primary importance of legibility in the design of the page. But because they felt they could not reform ordinary commercial typography through the ordinary commercial means, their work always and indeed unavoidably tended to treat the block of type as an essentially decorative element, and to that degree as an opaquely formal rather than a transparently apprehensible entity. In Revivalist works, that is to say, the letterpress itself becomes in a sense pictorial.

Yet if the *Yellow Book* took over major elements of the Revivalist programme, it was, as we shall see, open to other influences as well. Typographically its asymmetrically placed titles, lavish margins, abundance of white space, and relatively square page declare the *Yellow Book's* specific and substantial debt to Whistler, most of all to that revolutionary essay in typography, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890).¹³ Beardsley had already experimented with Whistlerian typographical elements in work done for the Bodley Head the previous autumn; and the *Butterfly*, as its Whistlerian title might lead us to expect, had deployed asymmetrical elements and generous white space attractively. So fully have Whistler's innovations been assimilated in twentieth-century typographical styles that it is now a little difficult to assess their impact upon eyes trained to negotiate the anaesthetic clutter

¹¹ Quoted in Gatton, p. 132. This unusual attention was omitted in subsequent numbers.

¹² See James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), pp. 36–76, 298–302.

¹³ See Nelson, pp. 51–52, 69. For the central importance of Whistler as a book designer, see A. J. A. Symons, 'An Unacknowledged Movement in Fine Printing: The Typography of the Eighteen-Nineties', *Fleuron*, 7 (1930), 83–119. It seems to me very likely that Whistler's book was a direct model for the *Yellow Book's* format. Compare Aline Harland's account of the day the magazine was first planned by her husband and Beardsley: 'Books from the study, brought into the gay pink drawing-room . . . were called in consultation; new or rare editions were studied, were discarded, — for a hint, for a suggestion. As a mere piece of bookmaking the Quarterly must be on a par, too, with the quality, the artistic virtue of its pages.' ([Aline Harland], 'The Life and Writings of Henry Harland', *Irish Monthly*, 38 (1911), 210–19 (p. 214)). That Henry Harland owned Whistler's *Gentle Art* seems probable because by the end of 1890 Harland could write that 'Whistler is the best friend we have made here [that is, in London]'. See Karl Beckson, *Henry Harland: His Life and Work* (London, 1978), p. 48. Whistler, however, disliked the *Yellow Book*, largely because at this time he disliked Beardsley.

of the typical Victorian page. But we may say that the bold *mise-en-page* of the *Yellow Book* represents one of the most striking of *fin de siècle* black and white designs, for here, much as in Beardsley's own graphic art, the white space is no longer a passive or suppressed background but a positive material element, a 'figure' in its own right.

We cannot leave the question of letterpress versus picture without considering Beardsley's role more closely. Though it appears that he enthusiastically supported the effort to display the 'independence' of artwork from prose and poetry in the *Yellow Book*, it is also clear that he was not programmatically committed to it. Certainly Beardsley did not care enough about the principle of 'independence' to break up piquant juxtapositions of picture and print when they occurred, most notably in Volume 1, where Arthur Symons's poem 'Stella Maris', a travesty-prayer to a prostitute, is 'illustrated' by Beardsley's own 'Night Piece', with its image of a bare-breasted woman stalking Leicester Square, and its lewdly punning allusion to Whistler's 'Nocturnes'.¹⁴ Moreover, in the *Savoy*, of course, Beardsley's designs were not only called illustrations but in fact frequently did represent accompanying texts pictorially, most often illustrating Beardsley's own literary works.

The variance between Beardsley's policy and practice here is perhaps less marked than it might first appear. First of all, Beardsley felt less animosity than other artists did towards the hegemony of literature because he regarded himself, as Annette Lavers has described, as a 'man of letters'.¹⁵ And secondly, Beardsley was, as his critics have often remarked, a highly 'literary' artist, not simply because he took so many of his subjects from literature but because he was so fond of constructing his pictures as texts to be read hermeneutically, deciphered for their secrets and jokes and allusions. If Beardsley did not programmatically insist upon the 'independence' of art from literature, then, it is because he perceived his own artistic ground to lie somewhere between the two, in the space where 'brilliant story painters and picture writers' worked (*Letters*, p. 61): that is, in the problematical area where literature becomes purely decorative, and graphic design thoroughly linear and literary.

In much the same way, Beardsley's characteristic designs of the *Yellow Book* period, all those peculiarly disturbing images of too-knowing maidens and innocent demi-mondaines, occupy a problematical middle ground between Art and commerce. It is never quite clear what such figures may be displaying or selling, but, at once unsettling and enticing in their ambiguity, they represent the compromising of Beauty by commerce. Beardsley's witty

¹⁴ It is interesting to see how such juxtapositions create a new context for succeeding designs, so that the drawing immediately following Symons's poem (Leighton's 'A Study', in which a nude female and a smaller male figure cavort with considerable abandon amidst a nimbus of transparent draperies) appears to participate in Symons's theme of sexual ecstasy.

¹⁵ 'Aubrey Beardsley, Man of Letters', in *Romantic Mythologies*, edited by Ian Fletcher (London, 1967), pp. 243-70.

blending of Art and commerce, however, mocks the conventional and rather sternly maintained opposition between the two that was common during the period. The high claims of autonomous Art, and particularly those of literature, were urged with varying degrees of seriousness, for example, in Volume 1 of the *Yellow Book*, in such works as Henry James's 'The Death of the Lion' ('Say what one would, success was a complication and recognition had to be reciprocal. The monastic life, the pious illumination of the missal in the convent cell were things of the gathered past'), Edmund Gosse's 'Alere Flammam' ('The Poet holds the sacred door, | And guards the glowing coal of song'), and Arthur Waugh's 'Reticence in Literature' ('Literature is, after all, simply the ordered, careful exposition of the thought of its period, seeking the best matter of the time, and setting it forth in the best possible manner'). Even 'The Fool's Hour: The First Act of a Comedy', by John Oliver Hobbes [Pearl Craigie] and George Moore, demonstrates its belief in the redemptive powers of Art when it liberates a young prig from his oppressive mama by sending him to the dress rehearsal of 'The Dandy and the Dancer' at the Parnassus, a 'theatre much favoured by young men who wish to be thought wicked, and by young ladies who *are*'.¹⁶

The conventional defence of autonomous Art conducted by the literary contributors to the *Yellow Book* is seconded by a less explicit but none the less highly interesting defence of Art expressed through the formal and, particularly, the typographical elements of the *Yellow Book* format. It is a defence that is interesting not least because it simultaneously admits elements subversive or hostile to autonomous Art. Clearly, the directors of the *Yellow Book* were aware of many, though not all, of the expressive implications of their chosen format; theirs, after all, was 'an Illustrated Quarterly' that took care not to publish any illustrations *per se*. So, too, the editors' sense of the *Yellow Book* as pre-eminently a book, 'a book' (as was said in the somewhat over-urgent prose of the publishers' announcement) 'to be read, and placed upon one's shelves, and read again; a book in form, a book in substance; a book beautiful to see and convenient to handle; a book with style, a book with finish; a book that every book-lover will love at first sight; a book that will make book-lovers of many who are now indifferent to books', draws upon the vocabulary of autonomous Art (albeit in the rhythms of commercial prose) in order to keep commerce at bay.¹⁷

As Ian Fletcher has pointed out, the *Yellow Book* makes play with conventional assumptions about format, frequently doing so self-parodically.¹⁸ The *Yellow Book*, that is to say, presented itself in the midst of flimsier publications as a hard-covered book, but its lurid black and yellow

¹⁶ *Yellow Book*, 1 (1894), 'The Death of the Lion', 7–52 (p. 27); 'Alere Flammam', 153–54 (p. 154);

'Reticence in Literature', 201–19 (p. 206); 'The Fool's Hour: The First Act of a Comedy', 253–72 (p. 260).

¹⁷ Quoted in the 'Introduction' to *The Yellow Book: An Anthology*, edited by Fraser Harrison (New York, 1974), pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ 'Decadence and the Little Magazines', in *Decadence and the 1890s*, edited by Ian Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury (London, 1979), 172–202.

boards claimed acquaintance with such suspect forms and formats as the yellow-backed railway novel and the similarly bound but lubricious French *roman*; it aspired to the measured dignity of quarterly publication at a time when periodicals were becoming increasingly frequent and ephemeral, but its own cover changed with every issue and its contents featured that most alarming of the new shorter forms, the short story. This play with the elements of format assumes a more clearly anti-commercial aspect in the matter of typography. The *Yellow Book* was printed in Caslon old-face, the type-style used in both the *Century Guild Hobby-Horse* and in Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

To understand the expressive significance of Caslon old-face in the 1890s, it will be useful to recall how limited the range of type-faces in use at this time was. Short of designing a wholly new type-fount (the recourse of the very well-to-do like William Morris or the very patient like Charles Ricketts) publishers had little choice in type-styles before the turn of the century. Bernard Newdigate, for example, who in 1890 joined his father at a small press, found to his dismay that 'the only founts in general use were just the "old style" and the "modern"'.¹⁹ The 'modern' meant Baskerville or Didot or what Morris called 'the sweltering hideousness of the Bodoni letter',²⁰ with their vulgar and eye-vexing thickening and thinning of strokes; the 'old style' was a composite and relatively characterless type introduced in 1852, and one that was unable to assert itself adequately in an illustrated or decorated page, as J. M. Dent's *Morte Darthur* (1893), its pallid 'old style' overwhelmed by Beardsley's exuberant borders and designs, makes abundantly clear. Thus Newdigate, like Whistler and the editors of the *Hobby Horse* and the *Yellow Book*, chose the Caslon fount.

Itself an eighteenth-century revival of a seventeenth-century typographical style, Caslon old-face was revived by the Chiswick Press in 1844. Because it was comparatively black and irregular, it became the type-face of deliberate and principled reaction or anachronism. Specifically, it was the type favoured for use in many devotional and, especially, Tractarian works. From this religious or ecclesiastical use, Caslon old-face, like so many other elements of the late-Victorian 'Religion of Beauty', made its way into the Aestheticist canon. The agent in this translation may have been Selwyn Image, a disciple of Ruskin and an Anglo-Catholic priest, who relinquished his orders in 1883 to become a member of the Century Guild and, indeed, the designer of the title-page of the *Hobby Horse*. Image's appropriation of biblical and liturgical formulae in aesthetic discussions (for example, '*Credo in unam Artem, multipartitam, indivisibilem*')²¹ was both habitual and influential, and as such accounts

¹⁹ Quoted in P. M. Handover, 'British Book Typography', in *Book Typography 1815-1965*, edited by Kenneth Day (London, 1966), pp. 139-74 (p. 155).

²⁰ 'The Ideal Book', *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 1 (1893), 179-86 (p. 181).

²¹ Selwyn Image, 'On the Unity of Art', *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, 2 (January 1887), 2-8 (p. 2).

for a good deal of the mannered and forlorn mustiness that adheres to much Aestheticist writing.

To the vaguely religious or devotional aura surrounding Caslon old-face, the printing Revivalists added related associations of anti-commercialism. Emery Walker and Charles Jacobi, for example, urged that 'modern' type-faces be used for newspapers and pamphlets and other practical or utilitarian work, while the revived old-face types like Caslon would be reserved, as James Nelson has said, for 'book work of a higher character' (Nelson, p. 40). These higher or nobler associations are part of the expressive meaning of Caslon in the 1890s, and the canonical authority of the type did not displease G. B. Shaw when he adopted it for *Plays Unpleasant and Pleasant* (1898) and later works.

The canonical and antiquarian aura of Caslon old-face was heightened in the *Yellow Book* by the use there of catch-words on every page. The catch-words in the *Yellow Book* represent a deliberate anachronism: they are of no practical use but their expressive function is to link the periodical to the world of fine books and the history of printing, specifically, the eighteenth-century world of William Caslon. At the same time, the catch-words in the *Yellow Book* align the the magazine in a partial but curious way with such insistently non-commercial or anti-commercial publications as the *Hobby Horse*, the *Pageant*, a short-lived annual (1896–97) modelled on the *Hobby Horse*, which used catch-words on every page), and Ricketts's *Dial* (five numbers published during 1889–97), a publication so infrequent as to elude the usual definition of a 'periodical'. For catch-words insist upon, indeed body forth, the materiality of type and the independent processes of typography and printing. If their ultimate purpose is to ensure a coherent succession of pages, their immediate effect is to interrupt, however slightly, that very coherence. Hence all the objections to the catch-words in the *Yellow Book* made by contemporary critics.²² To the degree that the catch-words remain obtrusive and opaque, they impede the process of cognitive clarification, the making-transparent of the physical sign which constitutes the act of reading; and in doing this, catch-words participate in the 'pictorialization' of typography that is inherent, as I have said, in the premises of the Revival of Printing.

This pictorialization of print is most clearly seen in the *Hobby Horse* numbers of 1888–91. Earlier issues of the periodical, which were published by Kegan Paul, Trench, at the Chiswick Press, used fairly heavily leaded lines of type and placed titles in a relatively detached relationship to the block of print; correspondingly, later numbers of the *Hobby Horse*, particularly after Horne assumed control from Mackmurdo and transferred the printing to Folkard and Son, presented a comparatively watery or

²² See, for example, Hamerton (p. 182) on 'the detestable old custom of printing catchwords'. It is worth noting that Whistler used catch-words in *The Gentle Art*, though their use there is occasional and always functional.

unemphatic letterpress, though Horne's disposition of print on the page was, if anything, even more extreme than the usual Revivalist *mise-en-page*.²³ The *Hobby Horse* numbers of the middle period 1888–91, however, show the good effects of the proprietors' decision to take over the publishing themselves at the Chiswick Press: the letterpress, though still set in Caslon, is heavier and blacker, the leading between the lines is substantially reduced, the initial letters become correspondingly heavier and blacker, and the titles, particularly of essays, are greatly lengthened so as, one suspects, to allow them to be formed into blocks of type harmonious or, indeed, decoratively united with the blocks of print below. In short, with the redesign of the *Hobby Horse* the leaders of the Century Guild created a densely integrated although not an especially accessible page.

It is at this point that the typographical divergence of the *Yellow Book* from its handsome predecessor becomes most interesting. For it is here that the suppressed commercial allegiances of the *Yellow Book* begin to surface. As we have said, the *Yellow Book* adopted the anti-commercial bias of the *Hobby Horse*. The *Hobby Horse* admitted no advertisements to its pages except for a chaste notice describing the availability of Century Guild crafts, and it made clear its disdain of Mammon by publishing such works as Arthur Galton's 'To the Century Guild': 'Our Queen [that is, Art] is bound; men traffic her for gold, | Base traders hold her royal realms in fee' (*Hobby Horse*, 1 (July 1886), p. 87). So, too, the directors of the *Yellow Book* announced that their magazine 'will contain no advertisements other than publishers' lists' (Harrison, p. 6), and boldly declared on the contents-pages of the *Yellow Book* their allegiance to the higher pursuits of 'Literature' and 'Art'. But typographically the two periodicals diverge.

The typographical density of the *Hobby Horse* (what Emery Walker and William Morris called the 'general *solidity* of [its] page')²⁴ contrasts forcibly with the relative openness and lightness of the *Yellow Book*. The contrast suggests a deeper divergence between the two magazines: that is, the *Hobby Horse* shows itself through its typography to be intent upon resisting what we may call the mechanical consumption of the page by the eye. This is a motive it shares with other works produced by the Revival of Printing. There is, for example, *The Growth of Love* (1890), the book Robert Bridges had printed for himself at the Daniel Press and set in Gothic type in order to impede the reading of the page, the unfamiliar fount creating (or so it was hoped) a meditative interval for the proper apprehension of poetry. And there is Ricketts's famous design of John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893), cut like an Aldine

²³ The Revivalists regarded the two-page opening rather than the single page as the essential unit of typography. Hence their rule of thumb held that the inner margin was to be the narrowest, the head margin wider, the outer margin wider still, and the bottom or tail margin the widest of all, with the increase in width from margin to margin, according to Ricketts, to be twenty per cent. See Charles Ricketts, *A Defense of the Revival of Printing* (London, 1899), p. 23.

²⁴ 'Printing', in *Arts and Crafts Essays* (New York, 1893; reprinted New York, 1977), pp. 111–33 (p. 127).

saddle-book and set throughout in a small italic type that verges, as Ian Fletcher has said, on the deliberately unreadable.²⁵

In opposing the process of consumption by the reading eye through this sort of typographical resistance, however, the *Hobby Horse*, like so many of the Revivalist works it engendered, becomes in effect a visual object, a commodity. Its dense and unconventionally-placed letterpress claims the reader's eye first as a graphic design of black type and black tailpieces artfully arranged upon white, and only secondarily as something to be known intellectually. The most extreme example of this sort of commodification of contemporary printed works is, of course, Morris's Kelmscott *Chaucer* (1894), fabricated as it is of materials that are in themselves precious (Batchelor paper, Burne-Jones designs, and so on) and made even more sumptuous by their artistic combination, but it is a combination, as Ruari McLean has said, 'in fact quite unsuitable for reading'.²⁶

The Kelmscott *Chaucer* is, to be sure, what Morris himself called an 'ideal book', that is, one in which commercial considerations of price had no part. But it is instructive to see how the very sumptuousness of Morris's *Chaucer* and its accepted status as a 'plaything of the rich' disposed of aesthetic objections to it. When Joseph Pennell, for example, did object to Kelmscott assumptions, and Morris angrily asked him, 'And what do you know or understand about the Kelmscott printing?', Pennell answered, 'Enough to have bought the Kelmscott *Chaucer*'.²⁷ Pennell's admiration is expressed not by agreement with Morris's aesthetic principles but by investment in his book. At the same time, the very richness of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* tended to suggest that its achievement was due simply to costliness or material lavishness rather than craftsmanship. This not only exaggerated its status as a *livre de luxe*, a commodity, but compromised its power as an aesthetic exemplar, leading Ricketts to warn that Morris's insistently 'ornamental tendency' in less skilful hands 'becomes unbearable; instead of a revival in the shaping of books we have a new cumbersome trade article' (Ricketts, pp. 11–12), and prompting Holbrook Jackson to remark unkindly, if wittily, that 'Morris produced Chaucer as Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree produced Shakespeare'.²⁸

The typography of the *Yellow Book*, on the other hand, precisely encouraged this process of consumption by the reading eye. Though its *mise-en-page* forms a striking black and white design and is decorative to that degree, its comparatively generous leading of the lines encourages rather than resists the swift perusal of the page by the eye. This is not to suggest that the *Yellow Book* did not in other ways present itself as a commodity. As we have seen, its

²⁵ See Ian Fletcher, 'Book Design and the Total Book 1850–1900', *Journal of the Francis Thompson Society*, 3 (1973), 7–23.

²⁶ *Victorian Book Design and Colour Printing* (New York, 1963), p. 167.

²⁷ Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *The Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell*, 2 vols (Boston, Massachusetts, 1929), 1,

219.

²⁸ *The Printing of Books*, second edition (London, 1947), p. 183.

publishers portrayed it to the public as a desirable object to be possessed, and certainly both Mathews and Lane encouraged the speculation in fine books so characteristic of the 1890s by publishing and trading in limited editions.²⁹ Nor did editors of other contemporary periodicals hesitate to capitalize on the bibliophilic economics of scarcity: the *Albemarle* later offered its Whistler lithograph at an increased price, and the *Butterfly* announced that its first volume would be available bound in a limited edition.

Typographically, however, the *Yellow Book* may be said to cooperate in its own consumption, a motive that is not only commercial in its effect but commercial in its origin, its origin with Whistler. The asymmetry, minimalism, and sparkling legibility of Whistler's characteristic typographical style arose from the experiments he first conducted in the invitation cards, posters, and catalogues he composed for his own exhibitions: that is to say, they arose, as Holbrook Jackson has noted, 'out of that continuous publicity campaign carried on by Whistler the business man in favour of Whistler the artist', for in fact Whistler 'was one of the first artists to realize that it pays to advertise' (Jackson, p. 90). Indeed, Whistler's incentive in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* went beyond simple self-promotion: he meant his book to capture the market from Sheridan Ford's competing pirated edition of *The Gentle Art*, and Whistler took extraordinary, even fanatical care over the book's typographical design to ensure that it did so.³⁰

Those Victorians who found Whistler's radical simplicity shocking did so largely because they thought his works fraudulent as aesthetic commodities. They were affronted not simply by Whistler's 'Cockney impudence' but, as D. S. MacColl hinted, by a suspicion that Whistler's works were not giving them full artistic weight: 'What is the logic of all this "leaving out" that the public objects to and the critic applauds? The public is suspicious, it regards Whistlerism as a form of labour-saving appliance.'³¹ Morris at least delivered palpable substance; but Whistler traded in that notoriously less tangible good called 'style'. Where Morris bound his books in rare vellum from the Vatican, Whistler bound his in plain brown paper and common bookbinder's cloth. In their 'beauty-mongering' (as Holbrook Jackson has called it) Morris's Kelmscott productions may have verged uncomfortably close at times to the plush-covered souvenir albums of the official Victorian parlour; but this likely seemed to many Victorians to be a comfortable and respectable association. In its astringent minimalism and demotic materials

²⁹ Compare William Roberts, 'The First Edition Mania', *Fortnightly Review*, old series 61, new series 55 (1894), 347-54 (p. 347): 'Whereas before the 1890s the first-edition trade dealt in substantial works, [n]ow, every little volume of drivelling verse becomes an object of more or less hazardous speculation, and the book market itself a Stock Exchange in miniature'. For Elkin Mathews's somewhat surprising role in this speculative trade, see James G. Nelson, 'The Bodley Head and the Daniel Press', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 77 (1983), 35-44.

³⁰ See E. R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, revised edition (Philadelphia, 1919), pp. 294-95.

³¹ 'The Logic of Painting', *Albemarle*, 2 (September 1892), 85-90 (p. 88).

Whistler's book, on the other hand, pointed the way to the unfamiliar world of 'democratic' modernism.

Whistler's typographical style is important because it demonstrated how a 'democratic' aesthetic congenial to rapid consumption could be made much more effective. Earlier Victorian advertisers, attempting to catch the fleeting attention of railway passengers, had used bold type-faces, most notably appropriating the sans-serif styles invented during the Greek Revival of the earlier nineteenth century.³² But guided by the Victorian aesthetic credo that 'more is more', advertisers typically crammed their placards and newspaper-inserts with every available type, an evil compositional habit that was continued, Alfred W. Pollard complained, on the title-pages of most Victorian books.³³ Whistler, however, taught his fellow-advertisers not only to reduce the number of type-faces to one or two, but also to reduce their size, thus allowing the surrounding white space to lead the eye irresistibly to the essential message.

The *Albemarle's* designers clearly learned something from Whistler's example, for its contents-page is neatly composed in just two types with a refreshing abundance of white space. Yet the effect is largely vitiated by the oppressive impingement of nearby advertisements for Johannis Water ('Charged Entirely With Its Own Natural Gas') and British Law Fire Insurance. The *Albemarle's* proprietors used a sans-serif type-style for its title, a typographical choice meant to signal their sympathy for new and unencumbered modes of thought. Seen in its actual context, however, the handsome title calls across the page to declare its filial relationship to the sans-serif jobbing faces strewn throughout the neighbouring advertisements.³⁴

Whistler's typography is 'democratic' in another respect as well. Holbrook Jackson has remarked 'a conversational lightness' (Jackson, p. 91) in Whistler's typographical style, noting that it derives in part from Whistler's letters and ultimately from Whistler's speech. And we may apply this notion of a conversational or non-literary typography to the proto-modernist periodicals like the *Albemarle*, the *Butterfly*, and the *Yellow Book* which, as they devote themselves to the shorter literary forms, highlight that

³² See Stanley Morison, *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Graeco-Latin Script from the Sixth Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.*, edited by Nicolas Barker (Oxford, 1972), pp. 323-35.

³³ 'On Some Old Title-Pages, With a Sketch of Their Origin, And Some Suggestions For the Improvement of Modern Ones', *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, 3 (April 1888), 57-63 (p. 63): 'A book published the other day, and printed by one of the best firms of printers, has no less than twelve varieties [of type] on its title-page, and six or seven are not an uncommon number.'

³⁴ Beardsley used sans-serif letters in the title-page of Wilde's *Salome* (1893), but Stanley Morison regards this as 'a singularity of Beardsley's practice, and in no sense a symbol of the "nineties" period' (p. 334). It is worth pointing out that Beardsley used highly stylized serified letters in the *Savoy* title to underline that periodical's intensely anti-commercial and anti-Philistine posture of devotion towards Literature.

devotion against an expanded white space.³⁵ That shorter essays and shorter stories and shorter periodicals were both less 'literary' and more palatable to the reading masses enfranchised by the 1870 Elementary Education Act was, of course, widely assumed during this period. E. Lynn Linton, for example, was convinced that there was a connexion between abbreviated or truncated journalistic forms and 'this day of universal distintegration and the supremacy of fads'; 'the condensation of the shorter reviews', she declared, 'is ruining literature'.³⁶

So, too, Henry Harland in his guise as the 'Yellow Dwarf' could rail that 'with the dissemination of ignorance through the length and breadth of our island, by means of the Board School, a mighty and terrible change has been wrought in the characters both of the majority of readers and of the majority of writers'.³⁷ Yet the format that Harland and Beardsley adopted in the *Yellow Book* has clear affinities with the 'democratic' mode of typography that arose with such mass-orientated periodicals as George Newnes's *Tit-Bits* (1881) and Alfred Harmsworth's *Answers* (1888), the first publications specifically designed for this barely literate audience. In the new 'democratic' typography every thing, as P. M. Handover has said, 'was short. The type was slightly larger than usual. Pages were broken up. The extracts were lively [and] . . . could be read by people who were not used to concentrating on printed matter for more than a few minutes at a time'.³⁸ Indeed, to construct a rough but useful ratio, we may say that typographically the *Yellow Book*, with its use of short pieces, heavy leading, and abundant white space stands in relation to the *Hobby Horse* as *Tit-Bits* stood in relation to *The Times*, with its integral headlines and densely-packed quoins. Thus the expanded white space of margins and especially leadings in 1890s periodicals represents, we may say, the 'sign' not only of a commercial ethic of consumption but of an audience of the 'democratic' masses.

This is not at all to deny that the *Yellow Book* claimed to address itself to a very different sort of audience, to an aesthetic élite. It is, however, to stress the deeply compromised nature of that claim. For in order to secure the number of subscribers needed to sustain the magazine without subsidy, the *Yellow Book* had to undertake to 'make book-lovers of many who are now indifferent to books'. Thus it necessarily addressed itself to a partially unlitrary or partially alien audience. In much the same way, in order to avoid the crass intrusion of non-literary advertisements into the magazine,

³⁵ The *Albemarle* won praise for its low price and its serious but extremely short articles ('A new departure', said the *Guardian*). The *Butterfly* was notable for its unusual and convenient shape, a slim rectangle, which suggests that it was adapted from Ricketts's famous design for *Silverpoints*. Though Beardsley continued many of the features of the *Yellow Book* format in the *Savoy*, that magazine, by virtue of its crown quarto size, treatment of titles, and its elaborate block initials, belongs essentially to the high Revivalist mode of the *Hobby Horse*, the *Pageant*, and the *Dial*.

³⁶ 'Literature: Then and Now', *Fortnightly Review*, old series 53, new series 47 (1890), 517-31 (pp. 529, 523).

³⁷ 'Books: A Letter to the Editor and an Offer of a Prize', *Yellow Book*, 7 (1895), 125-43 (p. 128).

³⁸ *Printing in London: From 1476 to Modern Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960), p. 169.

the *Yellow Book* had to become in effect an aggressively-managed advertisement for itself. Hence the unusual 'advertisement' of its contents on its own back cover. And hence the curiously persistent strain of self-referentiality to be found throughout the magazine but particularly in the earlier numbers of the *Yellow Book* when editorial ambitions ran highest. We see this self-referentiality in the fabrication of the Waugh-Crackanhorpe causerie on literary reticence, in Max Beerbohm's defence in Volume 2 of his 'Defense of Cosmetics' in Volume 1, in Harland's unabashedly promotional 'Yellow Dwarf' essays, and in Gertrude Hammond's picture 'The Yellow Book' (July 1895) in which an 'advanced' yet demure maiden gazes with a certain fascinated reluctance at the inimitable yellow volume, its title clearly legible to the attentive eye.

Yet surely the most striking instance of this essentially commercial motive of aggressive self-advertisement is Beardsley's famous black and yellow colour scheme for the cover of the *Yellow Book*. A quiet mixed tint or white used in the place of yellow would have been, as P. G. Hamerton noted with some regret, much more tasteful. But the glaring yellow, Hamerton conceded, 'contrasts most effectively with black', possessing as it does an 'active and stimulating quality' (Hamerton, p. 186). In fact, black and yellow form the most highly visible combination of all available colours. Beardsley boldly combined them in order to advertise the magazine and so advertise himself. It is a much-remarked-upon yet none the less satisfying irony that Beardsley's very success with the *Yellow Book* covers should have brought about his ultimate failure with the magazine, but it is an irony that illuminates the complex intertexture of commercial and aesthetic motives so characteristic of *fin de siècle* periodicals and artistic life generally.

Beardsley, as has been said, took a boyish delight in 'getting up' the *Yellow Book* in the format of an ordinary scandalous French novel. But so successful was his expropriation that the French original lost its identity in the masterly copy. Beardsley wanted his work to be noticed and, with a vengeance, it was: when Oscar Wilde was arrested with a highly visible yellow book under his arm (in this case the ordinary scandalous novel *Aphrodite* by Pierre Louÿs), the yellow volume was transformed instantly and inevitably in the newspaper reports into the *Yellow Book*, thus precipitating John Lane's panic and Beardsley's dismissal as art editor. Yet what Beardsley in his precocious mockery and divided allegiances understood, and demonstrated with his violent yellow cover, was that the noble resistance of autonomous Art to commerce, championed by the *Yellow Book* and reflected in its expressive format, could finally succeed only by expropriating the crude and unscrupulous vitality of its very enemies, the commercial class and the 'democratic' masses. In short, Beardsley had learned Wilde's own lesson, the lesson that was so thoroughly to instruct the avant-gardists in the commercial and democratic twentieth century to come: nothing succeeds like excess.