Farewell, Victoria!
Weintraub, Stanley

Published by ELT Press

Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/14507.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/14507
Beardsley and *The Savoy*

Without Aubrey Beardsley *The Savoy* would not have happened. Yet *The Savoy* itself was an unexpected piece of good fortune for the doomed young artist, provided through the offices of such improbable genies as a dedicated young literary jack-of-all-genres and a pasty-faced pornographer. The writer was Arthur Symons, who was then (it was the spring of 1895) sharing a flat in Fountain Court, London, with a young Irish poet, W. B. Yeats. Unexpected visitors had turned up at the flat one morning at an unexpected hour—just after breakfast. One was Beardsley and the other, Yeats recalled, “a young woman who belongs to our publisher’s circle and certainly not to ours, and is called ‘twopence coloured,’ or ‘penny plain.’” Beardsley was a little drunk, his mind obsessed by his recent dismissal from *The Yellow Book*. Steadying himself by propping one hand against the nearest wall, he stared into a mirror and muttered: “Yes, yes. I look like a Sodomite. But no, I am not that.” And he began railing against his ancestors, back to and including the great Pitt, from whom he claimed to be descended. He might better have railed against Oscar Wilde, then on trial at the Old Bailey.

Wilde, accused by the half-mad Marquess of Queensberry of “posing as a somdomite” (Queensberry was also a bad speller), had unwisely sued for libel, whereupon the Marquess’s solicitors had hired private detectives and offered rewards to informers, coming up with the incontrovertible proof that Wilde had not been posing at all. The fall of Oscar toppled some innocent victims as well, notably Beardsley, whose only connection with Wilde—other than mutual hostility—had been that Beardsley had been commissioned to provide the illustrations for Oscar’s decadent drama *Salomé*. But in the public mind the two were connected, and when Wilde was arrested on morals charges the connection seemed more appalling; for Oscar carried a yellow-covered book as he was taken into custody, and although it was a French novel, the mob assumption was that it was a copy of *The Yellow Book*, the notorious year-old quarterly for which Beardsley was then art editor. When the Vigo Street offices of *The Yellow Book*’s publisher, John Lane, were stoned by a rabble enjoying its righteous indignation, Lane’s associates (he was away...
in the United States on business) decided to jettison Beardsley. In more ways than one it was a cheap way to improve the moral tone of the journal and perhaps save it from extinction. But firing Beardsley only insured *The Yellow Book*’s demise, for it had compromised itself into inevitable dullness. And Beardsley, on top of his world at twenty-two, had hit bottom at twenty-three.

Inevitably, Wilde and Beardsley had been lumped together by critics of modernity in art and literature, Wilde’s conviction and Beardsley’s firing convenient grounds on which to attack tendencies they did not like. One helpful critic, Haldane MacFall, who wrote art criticism in *St. Paul’s* under the name of Hal Dane, declared that Wilde and Beardsley were really unrepresentative of modern tendencies in the arts, for their work was “effeminate, sexless and unclean.” Wilde—in Pentonville Prison—may have never heard of the accusation, and severe letter-writing restrictions placed on convicts would have prevented him from answering MacFall, but Beardsley was furious. Tossing aside dejection for the moment, he dashed off a letter to the magazine’s editor:

114 Cambridge Street, S.W.
June 28th [1895]

Sir,

No one more than myself welcomes frank, nay hostile criticism, or enjoys more thoroughly a personal remark. But your art critic surely goes a little too far in last week’s issue of *St. Paul’s*, & I may be forgiven if I take up the pen of resentment. He says that I am “sexless and unclean.”

As to my uncleanliness I do the best for it in my morning bath, & if he has really any doubts as to my sex, he may come and see me take it.

Yours &c.
Aubrey Beardsley

*St. Paul’s* never published the letter, but Beardsley was satisfied when he was shown MacFall’s answer to it—that the morning bath about which the irate young artist boasted was “a pretty habit that will soon lose its startling thrill of novelty if he persists in it.” MacFall and Beardsley became friends, and the critic from *St. Paul’s* was later Beardsley’s biographer.

One cold winter night a friend, shivering although bundled in furs, had met the intense, brooding Beardsley—who was wearing no overcoat—on the steps of the Opera House, and exclaimed, “Aubrey, you will kill yourself!”

“Oh, no,” said Beardsley. “I never wear an overcoat. I am always burning.” For the feverish Beardsley—a clerk in an insurance office a few years earlier—success had not come too fast, nor too soon, for he was dying of tuberculosis and struggled to remain among the walking wounded. He had
reacted to the numbering of his days with an intensity of creative purpose that excluded almost everything else. Even when not plying his pen he was constantly fashioning drawings in his head.

After his sacking, Beardsley had given way to self-pity for two or three months—the condition in which Symons had found him that morning in Fountain Court. But when Symons was asked by a minor London publisher to develop and edit a new quarterly to pick up the discarded banners left by the retreat of *The Yellow Book* into respectability, he recalled the strange morning visit of Beardsley. Beardsley would have to be the art editor, Symons thought aloud, and Smithers, the publisher, agreed.

Leonard Smithers in 1895 was thirty-four, and had been in publishing for less than five years. He had practiced—with little success—as a solicitor until 1891, when he went into business, dealing in rare and secondhand books and publishing books as a sideline. His best trade was done in under-the-counter volumes—pornography and other exotica. One of his catalogues offered such rarities as two books bound in human skin, with a comment stressing their scarcity: “owing to the severe restrictions and prejudices of medical men, it is extremely difficult to obtain portions of dead humanity....” His bookselling and publishing interests reflected his personal interests, which, if anything, were unhealthier than his book inventory and grew more so as long as his finances permitted. Oscar Wilde’s description of him from memory—he wrote from prison—is unforgettable. “I do not know if you know Smithers,” he wrote Reggie Turner;

he is usually in a large straw hat, has a blue tie delicately fastened with a diamond brooch of the impurest water—or perhaps wine, as he never touches water: it goes to his head at once. His face, clean-shaven as befits a priest who serves at the altar whose God is Literature, is wasted and pale—not with poetry, but with poets, who, he says, have wrecked his life by insisting on publishing with him. He loves first editions, especially of women: little girls are his passion. He is the most learned erotomaniac in Europe. He is also a delightful companion, and a dear fellow....

Smithers was renowned not only for his unconventional tastes in literature and in women, both of which he probably acquired from Sir Richard Burton, whom he knew and whose works he later published, but for his pasty white face, which someone described as “like the death mask of Nero.” This unhealthy aspect was accentuated by eyes sunk deeply into shadowed sockets and long, twitching hands sometimes calmed by drugs or alcohol. Even most of the writers and artists whom he encouraged and published were put off by him, and only Wilde and Ernest Dowson ever thought of him as a person one might want to know. “Smithers,” Dowson broad-mindedly wrote a friend in the early days of *The Savoy*, “is, all round, the best fellow I know, and it is astonishing how many people fail to see this, or seeing it temporar-
ily succeed in quarreling with him.” Dowson’s relationship with Smithers was sufficiently friendly that he could utter the truth about the publisher in jest, as when planning to meet Smithers in Paris, he concluded: “I want to see your classically sin-stained countenance....”

Oscar later called Smithers the “owner of Beardsley,” and it was largely true. Smithers, delighted at the prospect of putting an impecunious genius on his payroll, suggested that the artist be offered £25 a month for his exclusive services and sent Symons out to find Beardsley and woo him to the venture. Finding the artist was an easy assignment. Beardsley’s gaunt frame, decorated in dandified clothes, was not easily hid in artistic London; but the talk of the town was that he was dying. Symons, entering Beardsley’s room, saw him “lying out on a couch, horribly white,” and wondered if he had come too late. But the prospect of an income, and—even more—of arming a rival to set against the Yellow Book enemy, inspired Beardsley to flights of enthusiasm. He was full of ideas for contributors and for drawings and writings of his own; and he even proposed a title for the new magazine, The Savoy, suggesting (after the great new London hotel) modernity, opulence and magnificence. Symons and Smithers were first hesitant about the title, but they rejoiced at their acquisition and began the search for contributors to the initial issues.

Symons’s connections in London literary circles were wide, and he hoped, besides, that writers and artists who had contributed to The Yellow Book but who were disenchanted after the expulsion of Beardsley would find common cause with him. Many did: fourteen of the thirty-five writers who eventually contributed to The Savoy had written earlier for The Yellow Book. Symons, at thirty, earned his living as a critic of music and art, but his closest friends were members of The Rhymers’ Club, such disciples of Pater and Rossetti as Lionel Johnson, Ernest Rhys, John Davidson, Ernest Dowson, W. B. Yeats and Richard Le Gallienne. His own poetry, although influenced by the sense of sin he acquired from his upbringing at the hands of his Wesleyan minister father, was influenced even more by the French symbolists Verlaine, Baudelaire and Villon. For him fin-de-siècle Decadence was intellectual rather than emotional, something his career as a literary critic had already demonstrated. Until he had been tapped for The Savoy’s editorship his claim to literary reputation lay in his book The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1889), which made the term “symbolist”—transplanted from France—fashionable in smart literary circles in England.

In August 1895, Symons met Beardsley in Dieppe to plan the magazine, and they saw each other every day. The seaside atmosphere and the excitement of the venture resulted in what appeared to be improvement in Beardsley’s health. They met mainly in a café, and Symons even wrote what
he later called his “slightly pettish and defiant” editorial note which prefaced the first number there. Dieppe was the meeting place for the younger generation of English writers and artists, and Symons described the Channel resort setting affectionately in an essay written on the scene and also included in the Savoy’s first number. Most of the natural glories of the area were lost on Beardsley. He considered himself a city dweller and felt unable to draw or write out of London. Yet some of his greatest work resulted from his stay at Dieppe, when he was restless for London. “He never walked,” Symons recalled:

I never saw him look at the sea; but at night he was almost always to be seen watching the gamblers at petits chevaux, studying them with a sort of hypnotised attention…. He liked the large, deserted rooms [of the Casino], at hours when no one was there; the sense of frivolous things caught at a moment of suspended life, en déshabillé. He would glance occasionally, but with more impatience, at the dances, especially the children’s dances, in the concert room; but he rarely missed a concert, and would glide in every afternoon and sit on the high benches at the side, always carrying his large, gilt-leather portfolio with the magnificent old, red-lined folio paper, which he would often open, to write some lines in pencil.

The “I never saw him look at the sea” was clearly hyperbole, for one of Beardsley’s most striking drawings, used in the first number of The Savoy, portrayed three women in bathing dress, standing on the pebbled plage with the sea as a backdrop. As an illustration of Symons’s own “Dieppe: 1895” essay in that inaugural issue it is a perfect blending of picture and words. It is also the farthest possible contrast one can visualize to a French beach in our time, each with its own concept of what constitutes elegant artificiality. “A sentimental sensualist,” Symons wrote, “should avoid the French seaside. He will be pained at seeing how ridiculous a beautiful woman may look when she has very few clothes on.”

Although Beardsley stored up his ideas for drawing later in London, he experienced far less difficulty attempting some literary experimentation. He filled his red-lined folio paper with pencilled jottings of ideas and impressions for poems and stories, epithets, passages of dialogue, and newly coined words, agonizing over the right turn to a phrase, piecing together a puzzle of overpolished sentences, making them fit often where they made the right verbal music to his ear, without worrying overmuch about making the sound match the sense. His major effort during the month at Dieppe, worked at—in Symons’s words—“with an almost pathetic tenacity,” was “his story, never to be finished, the story which never could have been finished, Under the Hill, a new version, a parody (like Laforgue’s parodies, but how unlike them, or anything!) of the story of Venus and Tannhauser.” Most of it was done at
The Bathers  1895
the concerts, or in the “little, close writing-room” where visitors wrote letters home extolling the bracing sea air.

Beardsley assumed for himself the guardianship of the tone of the new periodical and while in Dieppe wrote letters to potential contributors about it. Artists Charles Conder and Walter Sickert were there, and Conder wrote to another young artist, Will Rothenstein: “There has been a great deal of excitement about the new quarterly here and discussion. Beardsley is very pompous about it all.” In August Conder wrote to Rothenstein again from Dieppe to tempt him into drawing for the new magazine and into joining him there. The sea was “like some drug,” and life was “so beautiful that one thinks it must end soon,” he enthused, “but ambition only comes in and interferes.” Symons had taken rooms in the same maison, he added, and had “just written a poem as to the Dieppe sea being like absinthe—original, n’est-ce pas?” In another letter to Rothenstein, Conder noted that Symons, Beardsley and Smithers were all in Dieppe together, but he hoped that their imminent departure would induce Rothenstein to come. The publisher, he said, was “too awful for words but very good hearted. He has decked himself out in a whole suit of French summer clothing from the Belle Jardinière, and although it suits his particular style very well one is not exactly proud of his companionship.” Far from looking forward to being seen with Smithers, Conder admitted to being particularly happy that day, probably because he had spent the day successfully “dodging” the bizarre publisher.

Unaware that Rothenstein found Smithers so unappetizing that he would cease contributing after The Savoy’s first issue, or that Conder would be writing in a far different tone, Beardsley wrote to Rothenstein about the delights of Dieppe and proselytized for The Savoy. “Petits Chevaux and everything most pretty and amusing,” he observed. “Symons has written to Meredith to ask if he would sit to you for a portrait [for The Savoy].” Conder found sitting in on the planning sessions for The Savoy at Dieppe, where the unlikely triumvirate managing the enterprise aired their hopes and dreams, exhilarating, and he looked forward to the magazine as a mighty gallery for the new art. Beardsley’s enthusiasm had affected him, but neither he nor Beardsley could stir Rothenstein, who could see only the repellent image of Smithers in The Savoy.

When Smithers left Dieppe for London, Beardsley began writing to him to reinforce in his publisher what he expected of The Savoy. Primarily, he wanted no writings or drawings accepted from those mediocrities whom he felt had damaged, from the beginning, the reputation of The Yellow Book. “The thing must be edited,” he wrote Smithers afterwards, “with a savage strictness, and very definite ideas about everything get aired in it. Let us give birth to no more little backboneless babies. A little well-directed talent is in
Beardsley and *The Savoy*

a periodical infinitely more effective than any amount of sporadic and desultory genius (especially when there is no genius to be got).” Not worrying about what his literary editor might have to say on the subject he decided that “impressionistic criticism and poetry and cheap short-storyness” were to be avoided. “On the art side,” he added, “I suggest that it should attack untiringly and unflinchingly the Burne-Jones and Morrisian medieval business, and set up a wholesome seventeenth- and eighteenth-century standard of what picture making should be.” He was, of course, defining the direction of his own artistic development. Part of Beardsley’s genius lay in his rapid assimilation of influences, from his early interest in Burne-Jones, the Pre-Raphaelites and Japanese art to later medieval and eighteenth-century influences. “Fate,” Max Beerbohm wrote,

had given him a prematurity of power that was in accurate ratio to the appointed brevity of his life, and in the exercise and development of his genius, Aubrey Beardsley never rested. He worked on always, with a kind of desperate courage, and a degree of force and enthusiasm that is given only to the doomed man. He knew that he had no time to lose. At the age when normal genius is still groping for its method, he was the unerring master of his method.

Through the autumn of 1895 the editors assembled materials for the first issue, relying heavily on their own work and that of Symons’s friend Yeats. The first number was scheduled to appear in time for Christmas and gift-book purchasers, but Beardsley’s cover design in black on the pale pink paper of the boards expressed his contempt for his former employer, and Smithers had mixed emotions about the touch of pique. He had no love for his rival John Lane, whose *Yellow Book* had then completed seven quarterly issues; still the cover was not for a book to be sold over the counter. Beneath the outspread legs of a bare-bottomed cherubic figure in the foreground lay a copy of *The Yellow Book*.

Beardsley may have been overly proud of his malicious little touch, for word of it got around, and the matter quickly would have been taken out of Smithers’s hands. Smithers ordered the nasty details expunged, and the artist removed the *Yellow Book* as well as the cherub’s genitals (and carefully preserved his unemasculated original drawing). But the delay in revising the cover meant putting off the first *Savoy* until after the new year. It was a severe prenatal financial setback for the magazine.

The softening of the tone of Beardsley’s contributions had been spurred by an even earlier storm over the beleaguered first issue, for the drawing intended first for the Prospectus and then for an inside cover had run into violent criticism. Robert Ross, whose only rival as chief Wilde disciple was the comparative latecomer Lord Alfred Douglas, was hardly able to render objective judgment in the matter, but observed after the death of both Beardsley and *The Savoy* that “Quite wrongly Beardsley’s art had come to be regarded as
the pictorial and sympathetic expression of an unfortunate tendency in English literature.” The unfortunate tendency no doubt existed, and Beardsley often echoed it only to mock it, but stories had quickly circulated about London concerning the insinuations Beardsley was going to inject into his drawings for the new magazine. According to Edgar Jepson, one argument causing Smithers’s writers to take sides was the Beardsley prospectus drawing, in which John Bull was represented in a state of sexual excitement, perhaps to suggest to readers the daring nature of the contents of the first issue. Several prospective Savoy contributors met in Jepson’s rooms to discuss what they considered to be Beardsley’s self-defeating devilishness, and then went as a delegation to Smithers’s office in Effingham House, Arundel Street, to insist that the offensive drawing be replaced. Smithers, the story goes, confessed that he was delighted with the original, but Bernard Shaw, Selwyn Image and Herbert Horne put up vigorous protests, and Smithers was forced to ask Beardsley to make his John Bull less objectionable. When the drawing appeared as an elaborate title page for two additional pages of contents, John Bull was sensual-lipped, but nothing marred his profile other than a magnificently distended paunch. Still, word of the battle only added to the rumors that The Savoy would be a very “advanced” publication.

Beardsley was probably the one who had landed a contribution from Shaw for the inaugural issue, for he was a great admirer of G.B.S., and had gone to the first night of Arms and the Man at the Avenue Theatre, where he and Will Rothenstein had laughed so heartily and so frequently that they attracted attention. Beardsley’s enthusiasm was only slightly suspect—he had drawn a poster for the play. Later Shaw confided that he had used his memories
of Beardsley in creating the artist side of his rogue-hero, Louis Dubedat, in *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (1906); and St. John Ervine, in his *Bernard Shaw*, comments: “There is a little of Aubrey Beardsley, an artist with a delicate sense of line and morbid, almost macabre imagination, in Dubedat. It was Beardsley, no doubt, who gave Dubedat his profession.” One might add that he also gave Dubedat his mortal illness, for both young artists were to die of tuberculosis.

To celebrate the birth of *The Savoy* Smithers gave a supper party at his home, and invited all the contributors to the first number. It was one of the few occasions that his wife was permitted the society of Smithers’s professional associates, and Max Beerbohm recalled that she was “small, buxom and self-possessed. She did the honours. She dropped little remarks. It did not seem that she was nervous; one only knew that she *was* nervous.... The walls of the little room in which we supped were lined with bamboo instead of wallpaper. ‘Quite original, is it not?’ she said to Yeats. But Yeats had no ready reply for that; only a courteous, lugubrious murmur.” Max disliked Yeats and what he thought were petty pomposities on the part of the young Irishman. And he disliked, too, Yeats’s portentous dinner-table discussions about his favorite subject (and no one else’s), Diabolism—“Dyahbolism” in the Yeatsian pronunciation.

Like Max, Yeats considered his pornographer host a disreputable and scandalous person, but Symons explained that after accepting one invitation from Smithers one need not go again. Various friends of some of the contributors protested with moral earnestness about the questionable ethics of being in the pay of such a person as Smithers, Yeats recalling in *The Trembling of a Veil* his getting a letter from fellow Irish poet “A.E.” He had passed it, along with a similar one from T.W. Rolleston, to Symons, who read the one from A.E. under his breath as the guests stood about the supper table waiting for the signal to be seated. The new magazine, A.E. declared passionately, was the “Organ of the Incubi and the Succubi.” Overhearing, Smithers shouted: “Give me the letter, give me the letter, I will prosecute that man.” Symons quickly tucked Rolleston’s letter into his pocket, but read aloud the one from A.E., while Smithers and Beardsley listened. When Symons finished, Beardsley came to Yeats and confided: “Yeats, I am going to surprise you very much. I think your friend is right. All my life I have been fascinated by the spiritual life—when a child I saw a vision of a Bleeding Christ over the mantelpiece—but after all, to do one’s work when there are other things one wants to do so much more, is a kind of religion.”

Beardsley, sensing that his earthly passage would be brief, had drifted more and more in the direction of the Catholic Church, soon accepting help from a friend who already knew the way, the poet-priest John Gray. Some
months before, in France, Beardsley had mentioned the boyhood vision to Symons. That September they had spent two days at Arques-la-Bataille, Beardsley working on verses he later printed in The Savoy as “The Three Musicians.” Afterwards, on the balcony of the Hotel Henri IV at Arques, Symons had the only “serious, almost solemn” conversation he had ever had with Beardsley. Looking up at the stars, they wondered “whether they were really the imprisoning worlds of other creatures like ourselves; the strange ways by which the soul might have come and must certainly go; death, and the future.” And Beardsley spoke of his dream-vision, remembering waking up at night in the moonlight and seeing a great crucifix, with a bleeding Christ, falling off a wall where there was not and had never been any crucifix. He spoke of it in a tone of awe utterly unlike the irreverent young artist of the legend already created about him in his own young life. His partner in the Savoy venture, who outlived Beardsley by nearly fifty years, never forgot it.

Smithers’s inaugural supper party for The Savoy was an exhausting experience for Beardsley, who was suffering from severe lung hemorrhages, and after the meal he alternated between a chair in which he slumped, gray and wilted, and a nearby room to which he went to spit blood. Everyone listened to Smithers—or, rather, watched Smithers—as he cranked the handle of his greatest pride, a hurdy-gurdy piano. Perspiration poured from his face, and it was obvious that he had demonstrated his toy enough for both himself and his audience; but if one did not listen to Smithers’s piano, one would have to listen to his conversation. Thus Beardsley pressed him to labor on, urging “The tone is so beautiful. It gives me such deep pleasure.” It was his method, Yeats confided, of keeping his publisher at a distance.

“After the supper we sat up rather late,” Max recalled. Beardsley was the life and soul of the party, till, quite suddenly, almost in the middle of a sentence, he fell asleep in his chair. He had overstrained his vitality, and it had all left him. I can see him now, as he sat there with his head sunk on his breast: the thin face, white as the gardenia in his coat, and the prominent, harshly-cut features; the hair, that always covered his whole forehead in a fringe and was of so curious a colour—a kind of tortoiseshell; the narrow, angular figure, and the long hands that were so full of power.

Symons wrote the Editorial Note which prefaced the January 1896 issue, a note reminiscent of the prospectus for The Yellow Book issued two years earlier, but at the same time an announcement that the new magazine was counting on quality rather than on name-dropping for its success:

It is hoped that “THE SAVOY” will be a periodical of an exclusively literary and artistic kind. To present Literature in the shape of its letterpress, Art in the form of its illustrations, will be its aim. For the attainment of that aim we can but rely on our best endeavors and on the logic of our belief that good writers and artists will care to see their work in company with the work of good writers.
and artists. Readers who look to a new periodical for only very well-known or only very obscure names must permit themselves to be disappointed. We have no objection to a celebrity who deserves to be celebrated, or to an unknown person who has not been seen often enough to be recognised in passing. All we ask from our contributors is good work, and good work is all we offer our readers. This we offer with some confidence. We have no formulas, and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view. We are not Realists, or Romanticists, or Decadents. For us, all art is good which is good art. We hope to appeal to the tastes of the intelligent by not being original for originality’s sake, or audacious for the sake of advertisement, or timid for the convenience of the elderly-minded. We intend to print no verse which has not some close relationship with poetry, no fiction which has not a certain sense of what is finest in living fact, no criticism which has not some knowledge, discernment, and sincerity in its judgment. We could scarcely say more, and we are content to think we can scarcely say less.

The magazine was immediately denounced in the expected quarters, Punch attacking it with the most ironic praise its editors could muster: “There is not an article in the volume which can be put down without feeling the better and purer for it…. it should be on every schoolroom table; every mother should present it to her daughter, for it is bound to have an ennobling and purifying influence.” The Sketch was equally sarcastic: “I am glad to notice ... that Mr. Aubrey Beardsley has discovered a new type of woman. Unlike her predecessors in his artistic affections, she is almost pretty, and does not suggest that her nose is frequently in a trough.” There was one point on which both advocates and detractors agreed: The Savoy was not an imitation of The Yellow Book. The Sunday Times thought it was “a ‘Yellow Book’ redeemed of its puerilities,” and went on to praise much of the contents, balking only at the short fiction, which although respectable, “somehow after Guy de Maupassant and Catulle Mendes, one feels that the English short story is never quite a success.” The Athenaeum also pointed out that “‘The Savoy’ declines to be considered an offshoot of the ‘Yellow Book’” and that it was “free from some of the offences of the older periodical.” The “offences” went unspecified, probably because the only real offence was The Yellow Book’s declining interest in the avant-garde.

The lead contribution was the one The Times singled out as the best, Bernard Shaw’s “On Going to Church.” It would remain the most personal statement of his feelings about religion, and his best-shaped essay, foreshadowing ideas he would later put into his plays. “Any place where men dwell,” he wrote,

village or city, is a reflection of the consciousness of every single man. In my consciousness there is a market, a garden, a dwelling, a workshop, a lovers’ walk—above all, a cathedral. My appeal to the master-builder is: Mirror this cathedral for me in enduring stone; make it with hands; let it direct its sure and clear appeal to my senses, so that when my spirit is vaguely groping after an
elusive mood my eye shall be caught by the skyward tower, showing me where, within the cathedral, I may find my way to the cathedral within me.

It was an expression of mysticism which never left Shaw, as a passage in a play he wrote nearly half a century later made clear. In his *In Good King Charles’s Golden Days* (1939), the sagacious king tells the Quaker George Fox:

“Pastor: it is not given to every man as it has been to you to make a religion for himself. A readymade Church is an indispensable convenience for most of us. The inner light must express itself in music, in noble architecture, in eloquence: in a word, in beauty, before it can pass into the minds of common men. I grant you the clergy are mostly dull dogs; but with a little disguise and ritual they will pass as holy men with the ignorant. And there are great mysteries that must be symbolized, because though we feel them we do not know them....”

Shaw’s eventual successor as *Saturday Review* drama critic, Max Beerbohm, who was contributing delicious satires to *The Yellow Book*, made several token offerings to *The Savoy*, but he found Smithers unpalatable and remained loyal to John Lane. In the first Savoy was his caricature of actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm-Tree, his half-brother, and a short mock-serious essay, “A Good Prince.” The young prince was Edward of York (“Though it is no secret that he prefers the society of ladies, not one breath of scandal has ever touched his name”), later Prince of Wales, Edward VIII, and Duke of Windsor. In 1896 he was a toddler.

Symons published his own translation of a poem by Verlaine, an original poem, and the piece on Dieppe he had composed on the scene the summer before. His friend Yeats contributed two poems and a story, “The Binding of the Hair,” an overheated piece of Celtic legendry. Another Symons crony, Ernest Dowson, was also represented by both verse and fiction, both clearly inspired by the author’s failing health and failures in love. The poem bore the pompous title “Impenitentia Ultima,” and the story, “The Eyes of Pride,” was dedicated to “A.F.” (Adelaide Foltinowicz, or “Missie”), for whom his love was of as long standing as it was ineffectual. The double contribution, each work in a different medium, was the rule rather than the exception for the issue. Joseph Pennell also appeared twice, with an impressive pen-and-ink evocation of Regent Street and a piece of art criticism, “A Golden Decade in English Art.” Another close friend of Symons, Havelock Ellis, contributed a piece of literary criticism, “Zola: the man and his work,” and there was art by Conder, Shannon, Rothenstein and Whistler.

Beardsley continued the pattern of complementary contributions, publishing not only the cover and title-page art and illustrations for Symons’s Dieppe piece but also striking illustrations of his own literary work, the first writing he had ever committed to print. Beardsley, said Symons, wanted desperately to be a great writer, but “his plans for writing changed even more
quickly than his plans for doing drawings and with less profitable results in the meantime.” Once Symons acted as his reference for admission to a library, and on the form Beardsley had to complete he identified himself as a “man of letters.” Almost literally, letters represent the bulk of his extant writing, for aside from his scantly correspondence, he left no prose except his novel fragment and no verse but the three pieces published in *The Savoy*. Because he was so anxious to excel, Symons observed,

his patience over a medium so unfamiliar, and hence so difficult, to him as verse, was infinite. We spent two whole days on the grassy ramparts of the old castle at Arques-la-Bataille, near Dieppe; I working at something or other in one part, he working at “The Three Musicians” in another. The eight stanzas of that amusing piece of verse are really, in their own way, a *tour de force*; by sheer power of will, by deliberately saying to himself, “I will write a poem,” and by working with such strenuous application that at last a certain result he had willed, did really come about, he succeeded in doing what he had certainly no aptitude for doing.

Beardsley’s art was the result of similar pains, and the peevishness in Symons’s reminiscence (written in 1898, close after the fact) may have reflected a little of his annoyance at his art editor’s audacity in attempting to insinuate himself into dominance over the literary aspects of *The Savoy*. Literature was a dominant force in Beardsley’s artistic inspiration, and this spillover was almost inevitable. And although his drawing appeared to come more easily than his writing, his painstaking method was the same in each case. According to Robert Ross (*Aubrey Beardsley*, 1900), Beardsley “sketched everything in pencil, at first covering the paper with apparent scrawls, constantly rubbed out and blocked in again, until the whole surface became raddled from pencil, indiarubber, and knife; over this incoherent surface he worked in Chinese ink with a gold pen, often ignoring the pencil lines, afterwards carefully removed. So every drawing was invented, built up, and completed on the same sheet of paper.” Beardsley, whose art training consisted of two months at art school, found that the only lasting influence upon his art was literature. Holbrook Jackson (*The Eighteen Nineties*, 1913) considered him “the most literary of all modern artists; his drawings are rarely the outcome of pure observation—they are largely the outcome of thought; they are thoughts become pictures. And even then they are rarely if ever the blossoming of thought derived from experience; they are the hot-house growths of thought derived from books, pictures and music.” His uses of language and of line were from parallel perspectives, and the “hot-house” image might equally apply to his writing as to his draftsmanship. It was—as Osbert Burdett (*The Beardsley Period*, 1925) said of his art alone—“as if the forms of nature in plant and spray had been given their revenge. Human imagination had evoked them for a delight of its own, for an alien
purpose, and now it was to mete the same treatment to its kindred. If we possessed drawings of human beings, or any representation of them by flowers or beings of sub-human or superhuman life, we might expect something like Beardsley’s vision of us.”

Beardsley’s verse and illustration (again a drawing rendered less offensive before publication) for “The Three Musicians” were, for him, only faintly naughty and relatively quiet in tone, unlike his prose piece and the drawings for it. The three were “a Polish pianist,” a “soprano, lightly hocked,” and “a slim, gracious boy” who worships her:

The gracious boy is at her feet,
    And weighs his courage with his chance;
His fears soon melt in noonday heat.
The tourist gives a furious glance,
Red as his guide-book grows, moves on, and offers up a prayer for France.

Unfinished and fragmentary as is the intended novel *Under the Hill*, Beardsley’s combination of pictures and prose for it represents one of the great creative achievements of the period. Not every critic has thought well of Beardsley’s erotic tale. Haldane MacFall, Beardsley’s own biographer, considered it “fantastic drivel, without cohesion, without sense, devoid of art as of meaning—a sheer laboured stupidity, revealing nothing—a posset, a poultice of affectations.” To MacFall its opulently tortuous language was only “pedantic phrasing” combined with “housemaid’s use of English,” and it was gross error to call it satire: “A satirist does not gloat over evil, he lashes at it. Beardsley revelled in it.”

The first three brief chapters of *Under the Hill* were the concluding contributions to the first *Savoy*; the fourth chapter closed the second number. After that there were no more: the effort had cost him too many lung hemorrhages. It was to be Beardsley’s mannered version of the Venus and Tannhäuser story, told as the tale of the visit of the mysterious and elegant Abbe Fanfreluche to the pleasure palace of Venus. Beardsley’s narrative—called (by W. Y. Tindall) “the climax, in England at least, of elegant artifice”—conceals only faintly the suggestion that his hero, in entering the Venusberg of the legend (his “Hill”), is really somewhere else. For Beardsley’s Venusberg—particularly its shadowy, weed-covered entrance—is the *Mons Veneris*, and concealed in the lush artifice of the prose are descriptions which combine the sensual and the anatomical and a considerable acquaintance with seventeenth-century pun.  

The legend of Tannhäuser Beardsley intended to follow—at a distance—is that of a handsome knight who, after many wanderings, finds the Venusberg. He enters the cave where the Lady Venus (the Frau Hulda of German folklore) holds her court and abandons himself to a life of sensual plea-
Venus and Tannhäuser  1895
sure. Eventually he is overcome by remorse and, invoking the aid of the Virgin Mary, he obtains permission to return temporarily to the outer world. He then goes as a pilgrim to Rome and entreats Pope Urban to secure for him the forgiveness of his sins. The Pope declares, knowing the extent of the knight’s sins, that it is as impossible for him to be pardoned as it is for the staff he has in his hand to blossom. In despair, Tannhäuser departs and returns to the Venusberg, beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. In three days the abandoned staff begins to put forth green leaves, and the Pope orders messengers to ride in all directions in search of the penitent, but the knight is never seen again.

Beardsley’s aborted tale clearly had a long way to go, as the four early chapters show; for the lines of that part of Under the Hill we have indicate that the author intended numerous digressions and elaborate conceits in the form of footnotes, going wherever his overheated fancy would take him. The story line, a Beardsley biographer commented, “was without consequence, without cohesion, without unity; it was the laboured stringing together of little phrases, word pictures of moods, generally obscene moods and desires such as plague a certain type of consumption whose life burns at fever heat in the troubled blood.” There are passages, another critic observed, “which read like romanticized excerpts from the Psychopathia Sexualis of Kraft-Ebing.” Yet Under the Hill opened deceptively with a lengthy Machiavellian pseudo dedication to a fictitious Cardinal Pezzoli. “The dedication,” Osbert Burdett said, “with its elaborate compliment and ornate grace, would have pleased Congreve and delighted Pope.” The book, Beardsley wrote in his epistle dedicatory, “will be found to contain matter of deeper import than mere venery, inasmuch as it treats of the great contrition of its chiefest character, and of canonical things in certain pages.” Thus he was “not without hopes that your Eminence will pardon my writing of a loving Abbé, for which extravagance let my youth excuse me.”

The line contained clues to Beardsley’s own chief interests—amorous passion and religious ritual—but his own youthful extravagances were mainly on paper, and were verbal as well as linear. Under the Hill’s rococo style is at least the equal of Wilde and Beerbohm. There is a pictorial glamor only a painter’s eye could conceive. In “The Toilet of Helen” episode, for example, although there may be echoes of Max’s “The Toilet of Sabina” in “The Perversion of Rouge” (the Oxford precursor to The Yellow Book’s “A Defence of Cosmetics”), there is an economy of phrase amid the rococo. There is Helen “in a flutter of frilled things” at “taper-time” before her mirror; there is the “depraved” young Sporion, with his “slight stoop” and “a troubled walk.” So the characters are realized. And the settings of the unfinished fairy tale are, in Bernard Muddiman’s phrase, “unrolled before us like priceless tapestries.” The pictorial texture of Beardsley’s prose can only be described as
“a Beardsley drawing transfused into words.” Muddiman finds this equally true of the description of the woods of Auffray and “the wonderful supper served on the terrace to Helen and her guests” as of the toilet scene: “To find another such supper in literature one has to turn to some French author, or better still, to the ‘Cena Trimalchonis’ of Petronius himself. From this it will be seen that Beardsley’s literary work, like his black-and-white, though the embodiment of the spirit of his age, is also of the noble order of the highest things in art.”

The French model for Beardsley’s arabesque was clearly Laforgue, whose witty and bizarre preciosity in the Moraines legendaires the author of Under the Hill admired. Although the subject matter was not as important as its treatment, since Laforgue burlesqued Salome, Lohengrin and Hamlet, Beardsley chose a parallel theme, and simultaneously played with language and with legend. He smuggled in foreign words and used them as if they were English; and he spoke the simplest trifles with portentous gravity. There are “little mutinies of cravat and ruffle,” “intelligent curls,” “blonde trousers,” eyes “sated with perfection,” and a “wan hill.” Shoes are pantoufles; the ladies’ maid (Mrs. Marsuple) who assists with the cosmetics is a fardeuse, and hair is chevelure. But all the borrowings are unitalicized and are used as matter-of-factly as the many incongruous details. The work is allusive with a vengeance, with references to obscure (and often nonexistent) books, technical (and often invented) minutiae, fantastic (and sometimes accurate) knowledge. Beardsley’s literary skill is Joycean in his use of common words in uncommon contexts, and recondite words like spellicans, pudic or valiance. There are flashes of Wildean wit, as in the description of the banquet in which “mere hunger quickly gave place to those finer instincts of the pure gourmet,” and in the footnote which explains why it was remarkable for St. Rose of Lima, at the age of four, to vow herself to perpetual virginity. The footnotes themselves are as preciously pungent as the text, and almost as substantial. Imaginative references are invented, such as A Plea for the Domestication of the Unicorn. And the artificial texture of the language is complemented by Beardsley’s drawings, similar in tone, meticulous in draughtsmanship, detail-crowded with half-hidden, grotesque wit. The illustration for “The Toilet of Helen” has such density of detail and diversity of activity that Beardsley could have mined it for thousands of additional words for his text. And the servitors at the banquet fill another lush tapestry.

After the original three chapters of the entrance of the Abbé, the toilet of Helen, and her banquet, Beardsley continued with a single, footnote-embellished chapter in the second number, in which the Abbé awakens and prepares for his first full day in Helen’s elaborate lair. There were also two weaker drawings accompanying it, one a Wagnerian illustration unrelated to the chapter but hurriedly thrown in as filler. Unquestionably the author-
illustrator had intended to develop the story further in that issue, and could not, something Smithers admitted in an appended publisher's note: “It is regretted that owing to Mr. Beardsley’s illness he has been unable to finish one of his full-page drawings to chapter IV of Under the Hill, i.e., ‘The Bacchanals of Sporion,’ and that its publication in consequence has to be postponed to No. 3 of The Savoy.” The drawing never appeared. When the third number of The Savoy was published in July 1896, there was no continuation of Under the Hill, but instead an editor’s note: “In consequence of Mr. Beardsley’s severe and continued illness, we have been compelled to discontinue the publication of ‘Under the Hill,’ which will be issued by the present publisher in book form, with numerous illustrations by the author, as soon as Mr. Beardsley is well enough to carry on the work to its conclusion.” He was never able to, although during the spring he wrote twice to Smithers to promise more material for the novel. He had “a good idea for a story to be told by Mrs. Marsuple, in which Hop on my thumb is the hero,” he wrote on April 26. And on June 7 he wrote that “the Juanesque continuation of Under the Hill begins to take form bootifully.” But this was more self-reassurance than anything else, and only indicates how far thought-out in details his serial novel was when debilitating lung hemorrhages closed his brief literary career. Probably not even Beardsley knew how Under the Hill might have ended. 4

Apart from the novel fragment, Beardsley’s contributions to the second Savoy, published in April, were cover and title-page drawings, and a pen-and-ink sketch destined to be one of nine illustrations for a Smithers edition of Pope’s The Rape of the Lock, which was one of Beardsley’s most distinguished achievements, one he had completed before he had had to leave England for his health the previous winter. It had even earned the approbation of the acerbic Whistler. Like many others, Whistler had transferred his distaste for Wilde to Beardsley and publicly announced his dislike for Yellow Book art during Beardsley’s editorship. With Whistler there was often something personal about his artistic tastes which had little to do with objective criticism, and in Beardsley’s case it was not only the brief Salomé connection with Oscar but also the fact that the young artist had drawn caricatures of both Whistler and Mrs. Whistler. But one night when Whistler was visiting Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell (as they relate in their Life of the painter) Beardsley turned up, as usual with his portfolio under his arm. When he opened it, apparently unabashed at the great Whistler’s presence, and began to show them his new drawings illustrating The Rape of the Lock, “Whistler looked at them at first indifferently, then with interest, then with delight. And then he said slowly: ‘Aubrey, I have made a very great mistake—you are a very great artist.’ And the boy burst out crying. All Whistler could say, when he could say anything, was ‘I mean it—I mean it—I mean it.’”
Beardsley and *The Savoy*  

*The Rape of the Lock*  1896
For a man of genius, who was at the same time an expert self-publicist, Beardsley was often paradoxically diffident about showing off his work in progress, or even admitting that there was any in progress. When he was at home in London, and alone, he must have worked on his drawing until he had worked himself into the easy exhaustion of the near-invalid; for almost without exception his visitors never found him at work, or saw any of his rough sketches, or even any evidence of pen, ink and paper. But there were always books. It was his pose to appear as the gentleman dwelling amongst his books, and his conversation had the charm, but not the affectation, of scholarship. In the years when his illness was—however debilitating—relatively stable, he shared a house in Cambridge Street with his mother and sister and jointly with them held a weekly Thursday afternoon salon, “encouraging, at the least not actively hostile and harassing, when they go out into the black night to follow their own sullen will-o’-the-wisps.” Frankness in literature and art was not then defended on legal grounds but on scientific grounds, but it took writers like Havelock Ellis to carry the war into the enemy’s camp. The new fiction had been called “morbid,” “neurotic,” and “diseased,” but Ellis made the point that the more accurate a writer’s perspectives were, the more profound was his art as an instrument of morality, for the chief enemy to civilized behavior was ignorance, not knowledge. O’Sullivan found wit a better weapon than Ellis’s high seriousness and made fun of the philosophy of fiction for which preachers and purveyors of three-volume novels were beginning to fight a losing rear-guard action. Hilario-ously summarizing their idea of a novel’s plot—which he titled “the history of Miss Perfect”—he found that such fiction was nourishing our morals on “the thinnest milk and water, with a good dose of sugar added, and not a suspicion of lemon at all.”

The financial success of the first two numbers prompted Smithers to take a risk which Symons announced for him in an editorial note in the third issue:

A new volume of “The Savoy” commences with the July number, and it has been decided, in consequence of the interest which has been taken in the two numbers already issued, to make the Magazine a Monthly instead of a Quarterly.

The policy of “The Savoy” will remain precisely what it has hitherto been, but the opportunities of monthly publication will permit of the issue a serial, and arrangements are being made with Mr. George Moore for the serial publication of his new novel, “Evelyn Innes.”

It is not unreasonably assumed that those who have welcomed “The Savoy” as a Quarterly will welcome it with at least equal interest as a Monthly, and it is confidently hoped that the large public, to which a Quarterly comes with too occasional an appeal, will appreciate the monthly publication of a Periodical
whose only aim is to offer its readers letterpress which is literature, and illustrations which are art.

The move was disastrously timed, although neither Smithers nor Symons realized it early in June 1896 when it was made. Initially there was enthusiasm from some of the contributors. Dowson, for example, wrote from Brittany that *The Savoy* had become “a great & admirable institution,” and added the wish: “May the hair of John Lane grow green with Envy!” And *Evelyn Innes* was a novel good enough to possibly have prolonged *The Savoy*’s life when Beardsley’s failing health cut off his crucial contributions. But Moore’s only effort for the magazine would be a brief translation from Mallarmé he produced for the third number. Moore, after the great success of *Esther Waters* in 1894, hardly needed *The Savoy*, and the over-hasty promise of *Evelyn Innes* remained unfulfilled.

There was still another blow, as readers discovered from Smithers’s note, which brought up the rear of the issue. On the fifth of June Beardsley was at 17, Campden Grove, Kensington, writing to Smithers that Dr. Symes Thompson had pronounced very unfavorably on his condition that day and had ordered absolute rest and quiet. Beardsley was frightened, and began his last restless journey in search of health. By the time the third *Savoy* was released, he was at the Spread Eagle Hotel in Epsom, snatching at moments of strength between hemorrhages to work at illustrations for *Lysistrata* and *Ali Baba*. His condition seemed belied by his contributions to the July number, but they had been produced long before. He had done the drawings for the paper cover and the title page and illustrated the sprightliest piece in the issue, his own long-completed “The Ballad of a Barber,” about Carrousel, the barber of Meridian Street, who could “curl wit into the dullest face”—at least until something happened to cause his fingers to lose their cunning.

The auguries of disaster were still—but for Smithers’s note—invisible in the third number, and there was fulfillment as well as promise. The realistic “Anthony Garstin’s Courtship,” one of Hubert Crackanthorpe’s best short stories, was the chief prose fiction; and there was the first of three articles by Yeats on “William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy,” which provided—through the reproductions of Blake’s drawings—a means of filling the art gap left by Beardsley. Ironically, though, it was the long-dead Blake whose drawings were to create even more distribution problems for *The Savoy* than the dying Beardsley, who for once was not at the center of the storm, but might have been—but for a catastrophic case of mistaken identity. The bookselling firm of W. H. Smith had long been behind the effort to keep from the growing public being educated to read such books as might injure its morals or its religious beliefs, and Smith’s controlled the bookstalls at the railway stations, a proliferating and profitable octopus. The
The Bookseller’s manager, no doubt looking for a design of Beardsley’s, pitched upon Blake’s *Anteus setting Virgil and Dante upon the verge of Cocytus* as grounds of refusal, and when Arthur Symons pointed out that Blake was considered “a very spiritual artist,” replied, “O, Mr. Symons, you must remember that we have an audience of young ladies as well as an audience of agnostics.” However he called Symons back from the door to say, “If contrary to our expectations the Savoy should have a large sale, we should be very glad to see you again.”

The hypocrisy dumbfounded, then enraged Yeats, whose article was illustrated by the offending drawing of Blake’s. He wrote a letter to the editor of “a principal daily newspaper” reporting the “remarkable saying” of the bookseller. But he had mentioned the notorious Beardsley, and was told “that the editor had made it a rule that his paper was never to mention Beardsley’s name.” Later Yeats met the editor and asked him, “Would you have made the same rule in the case of Hogarth?” The editor, realizing that the same objections made about Beardsley could have been made about Hogarth, replied with “a dreamy look, as though suddenly reminded of a lost opportunity—‘Ah, there was no popular press in Hogarth’s day.’”

The first monthly number suffered also from a poor press. The best encomium Symons could locate for self-advertising was the faint praise of the *Saturday Review*, which reflected, “We do not know that ‘The Savoy’ can claim any extraordinary merit except on the score of Mr. Beardsley’s drawings; but his *coiffeur* in this issue, and three at least of his contributions to the last, must clear away any doubts there may have been as to his supreme position as a draughtsman.” But this was a source fast drying up. In fact Beardsley was missing entirely from the fourth number (August), except for the use of one of the more modest *Lysistrata* designs for cover and title-page art, and *The Savoy* was clearly faltering from his absence. The best of the thinning contents of the August issue may have been Dowson’s short story, “The Dying of Francis Donne,” and three sonnets by Lionel Johnson—both writers, like Beardsley, due for early deaths.

Dowson, living much of the time then across the Channel in Brittany, was often either too despondent or too ill to write and tried to forget his troubles through alcohol, prostitutes and meditations upon suicide. Once he acquired, as a result of a particularly potent drink, a consuming desire for the wife of the town baker. He had admired her at a considerable distance, but armed with liquefied courage he entered her house through a window and declared his passion. There was a fight with the baker, and Dowson was sentenced to two weeks in jail, sufficient time to cool his ardor. Yeats tells the best, if not the most accurate, story of those days, including how Dowson had written a letter to Smithers from Brittany describing his industri-
ous writing schedule and his plans for contributions to each issue of *The Savoy*. But before the letter arrived, a telegram was delivered to Effingham House from Dowson: “Arrested, sell watch and send proceeds.” But before Smithers could turn the watch into ready money (apparently Dowson had prudently left his jewelry in London), a second wire arrived: “Am free.” Ten years later Yeats heard some of the alleged circumstances surrounding the Gallic justice which freed Dowson. He “had got drunk and fought the baker, and a deputation of villagers had gone to the magistrate and pointed out that Monsieur Dowson was one of the most illustrious of the English poets. ‘Quite right to remind me,’ said the magistrate, ‘I will imprison the baker.’”

“The Dying of Francis Donne” was a product of Dowson’s loneliness, illness and despair, a study in the psychology of the contemplation of death probably derived from considerable self-study on Dowson’s part. “Alas!” he wrote his friend Henry Davray during the months when he was probably composing the “Donne” story, “we are a degenerate and maladive race.” To Smithers he complained that “one malady, more or less, makes no difference in the museum of my ailments.”

Ford Madox Ford’s contribution was a poem, “The Song of the Women: a Wealdean Trio.” In *Savoy* days Ford—then still Ford Madox Hueffer—worked a Kentish farm, and his contacts with the arts were more limited than they had been when he was a child. He was twenty-two and had published several fantasies for children, notably *The Brown Owl*, while still a teenager, and had been writing—on commission from Longmans—a biography of his grandfather, the pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown. As a result his first literary acquaintances in London were made through his artist friends, and while young Hueffer was writing for the *Studio* and the *Artist*, he was able to place a poem in *The Savoy*, his first really literary breakthrough.

The fifth *Savoy*, in September, used an apparently long-completed Beardsley black-and-white for its cover (signed “Giulio Floriani”) and a sketch of similar vintage borrowed from Frederick H. Evans, *The Woman in White*, in order to give some Beardsley tone to the “illustrated monthly.” There were the inevitable poems by Symons and Yeats, the third of Yeats’s Blake series and short fiction by Ernest Rhys and Theodore Wratislaw, both more Romantic than Decadent. The sixth—in the use of a Beardsley cover drawing once meant to illustrate *Under the Hill*—again maintained the facade of Beardsley impact upon *The Savoy*. There was also a second Beardsley, the dramatic “Death of Pierrot,” which the artist had captioned: “As the dawn broke, Pierrot fell into his last sleep. Then upon tip-toe, silently up the stairs, noiselessly into the room, came the comedians Arlecchino, Pantaleone, il
Dottore, and Columbina, who with much love carried away upon their shoulders, the white frocked clown of Bergamo; whither, we know not.”

Death further stalked the pages of the failing Savoy, but the artistic standard remained high. There were the strikingly illustrated Villon “Epitaphe in Form of a Ballade,” in Wratislaw’s translation, and a poem by Edith Thomas, “A Soul at Lethe’s Brink.” But there were also a humorous watercolor by Phil May, the Cockney artist from Punch, and substantial prose pieces, among them Havelock Ellis’s “Concerning Jude the Obscure.” Hardy, wrote Ellis about this disturbing and controversial novel, “was less a story-teller than an artist who has faithfully studied certain phases of passion, and brings us a simple and faithful report of what he has found.” The charge against Jude, Ellis said, was not that it was bad art but that it was a book with suspect moral purposes, and “It would not be pleasant to admit that a book you thought bad morality is good art.... So are most of our great novels.” It was a deliberately hasty generalization, but there were enough shockers he could name (Tom Jones, Madame Bovary, Les Liaisons Dangereuses—and even Jane Eyre) to make the reader think about reassessing his critical criteria.

One of the major works of fiction to appear in the entire run of The Savoy was the leading contribution in the sixth number, Joseph Conrad’s long short story, “The Idiots.” On the strength of Conrad’s small output up to then Symons had indirectly solicited a story from him through his friend and editor Edward Garnett. Garnett relayed the offer, and Conrad replied: “Thanks for your hint about the ‘Savoy.’ I shall wait yet.” But something happened on a visit to Brittany, and a brooding Hardyesque tale resulted, “The Idiots.” Its bleak realism was as typical of The Savoy as was—in contrasting contributions—the sickly sweet atmosphere of decay. In a memoir of her husband, Jessie Conrad recalled the genesis of the work in a drive they had taken “on the mainland,” when they came across the idiot-children who became the subject of the only short story Conrad wrote “on the spot. It was unusual for my husband to use material so close at hand and at the time of finding it, spread out as it were, before him.” The tale telescoped the number of unfortunates, Conrad’s wife pointed out to him when he had finished it: there were at least two more. She was startled by the unexpected violence of his answer, not realizing how strongly he had felt the impact of his own story and its background: “Good God, my dear, I’ve put enough horror into that story in all conscience. Two more! More than enough of them without, to my mind.” He was a perceptive judge of artistic values, even his own, and “The Idiots” is one of his most effective pieces of short fiction, yet paradoxically little known, perhaps because its setting is un-Conradian. Writing to Edward Garnett, Conrad—full of misgivings about the story—confided: “I do not know whether it is worth anything.” Neither did the literary editors who first looked at it, for The Savoy only had its chance after a maga-
zine called *Cosmopolis* had twice refused it, and *Cornhill Magazine* once. The rejections only convinced Conrad of its worth. “I am not ashamed of it for all that,” he insisted to Garnett. “Bad or good I cannot be ashamed of what is produced in perfect single-mindedness—I cannot be ashamed of those things that are like fragments of my innermost being produced for the public gaze.” Garnett finally offered the story to Symons, who paid forty guineas for it—two guineas a page—and it became one of the few times before 1912 that Conrad earned a respectable fee for a piece of fiction.

On 30 October 1896, when the November number was in press, Hubert Crackanthorpe wrote to Grant Richards: “I have just heard from Arthur Symons that the *Savoy* is to cease in December.” If Richards would take over the publication from the unsavory Smithers, Crackanthorpe suggested, and he replace Symons as editor, the magazine might be saved. Since Symons would be out of the job anyway when *The Savoy* foundered, Crackanthorpe felt no sense of immorality in proposing himself, but Richards cautiously rejected the idea. The “reaction” against what the reading public associated with Wilde and his disciples “had not spent itself,” he thought. Back in Fountain Court, Symons and Yeats, who were closer to the situation, had similar impressions.

In an opening editorial note in the seventh issue, dated November, Symons announced the forthcoming death of *The Savoy*. It was far from a whimpering, defeatist valedictory:

I have to announce that with the next number, completing a year’s existence, the present issue of “The Savoy” will come to an end. It has done something of what I intended it should do: it has made warm friends and heated enemies: and I am equally content with both. It has, in the main, conquered the prejudices of the press; and I offer the most cordial thanks to those newspaper critics who have had the honesty and the courtesy to allow their prejudices to be conquered. But it has not conquered the general public, and, without the florins of the general public, no magazine such as “The Savoy,” issued at so low a price, and without the aid of advertisements, can expect to pay its way. We therefore retire from the arena, not entirely dissatisfied, if not a trifle disappointed, leaving to those who care for it our year’s work, which will be presented to you in three volumes, in a cover of Mr. Beardsley’s designing....

In the issue Beardsley returned not only with a cover drawing of spectacled old-age boring youth, but with a brief literary effort with illustration. The artist’s literary offering was a striking translation of Catullus: “Carmen Cl,” in which the poet announced that he had come to the “sad grave-side” so that he could “give the last gifts to the dead.” It was, literally, his literary hail-and-farewell to *The Savoy*. As Beardsley had matured, according to Max, he had “gradually” (although *gradually* hardly fits the compression of Beardsley’s development) become “more human, less curious of horrible
things.” Of this tendency, Max thought, the best example was the “Ave atque Vale”: “Nothing could be more dramatic, more moving and simple, than the figure of that Roman who mourns his friend.... These lines ... seem to me no less beautiful than the drawing itself....” They were written just before Beardsley left England for what he correctly anticipated would be the last time. On the eve of his embarkation he had been received by Father Sebastian into the Roman Catholic Church, completing a course to which he had been inclining all his adult years.

One of the last to see him in London was C. Lewis Hind, whom he had asked to call at his apartment in St. James’s Place. Although it was a day of brilliant summer sunshine, the curtains were drawn and the room lit by tall candles. On the walls hung framed reproductions of Mantegna drawings. It was a Beardsley sketch come to life. In the room the artist sat in a yellow dressing gown, wearing red slippers turned up at the toes, and as Hind entered, Beardsley lifted a hand in a gesture of welcome and laughed his gay laugh—which turned into a terrible cough. It punctuated the unspoken finality of the meeting.

The poem “Epilogue,” in the same penultimate number, was Dowson’s last contribution. Perhaps it was only coincidentally applicable to the imminent death of the magazine and so many of its ill-starred contributors, but certain lines seem almost like a judgment upon the literary set who represented so large a part of the pages of The Savoy:

... vain things alone
Have driven our perverse and aimless band.

Not all in the penultimate number was valedictory, nor was there a slackening off in anything but the issue’s thickness. Although Symons was responsible for at least a quarter of the contents himself, indicating both editorial
frugality and the diminishing manuscript submissions inevitably following diminishing appeal and rumors of approaching death, the quality of the literary contributions remained high. The prose included tales of Scotland and of Ireland by “Fiona Macleod” and Yeats and an essay on Casanova by Ellis. (“Fiona Macleod” was the pseudonym of William Sharp, whose relationship to the publicity-shy Scottish authoress only became known after his death in 1905.)

Number eight, dated December 1896, brought the venture to a close. More out of Symons’s stubborn pride than because there were few contributions to the dying journal left on his desk, he and his art editor played the roles of captains going down with their ship: the whole of the literary contents was by Symons and the art—all fourteen drawings—supplied by Beardsley from long-completed work, mainly from illustrations for The Rhinegold and other works he had been illustrating. He had struggled to get something new into—or at least onto—the issue, writing to Smithers on 25 October 1896: “Here is the last of No. 8 cover nearly done.” Symons boldly used the occasion of the last issue for a demonstration of his literary range, publishing a poem of his own, a translation of a Mallarmé poem, a short story, a critical article, and a travel essay. His final “Literary Cause-ríe” piece was his epilogue, ascribing The Savoy’s demise not to an unfavorable press—for he believed that the critics were being won over—but to the “too meagre support of our friends.” The expected rationalizations might have reasonably been given for burying The Savoy, its first and last editor thought, but none of them was really crucial. It had been a mistake to give “so much for so little money” and to abandon the quarterly for monthly publication. It had been a misfortune that Messrs. Smith and Son—out of hostility to Beardsley—had turned The Savoy out of their bookstalls. Still, it had been a miscalculation on the part of the editors and publisher when they had assumed nevertheless “that there were very many people in the world who really cared for art, and really for art’s sake.” This last error was the blow to The Savoy that really killed it, Symons concluded, the assumption that a broad base of artistic appeal would bring popularity and sales, for “Comparatively very few people care for art at all, and most of them care for it because they mistake it for something else.” The half crown charged for each issue was well within the range of a numerous cultured class, but there was no public whose purse strings The Savoy could seize, at least partly because its criteria for acceptability of contributions did not go beyond artistic merit to the issues which touched a broad base of buyers. It espoused no religion or party, took no stand on war, peace, taxation, socialism, imperialism, suffrage or other problems directly meaningful to a public; nor did it print reviews of current books, plays, concerts or appeal to other tastes that formed a public for a periodical. Neither was its appeal to Decadence, or
Naturalism, or Aestheticism. *The Savoy* published many writers who could be modern without being Decadent or otherwise restrictive—Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, Havelock Ellis, and Edmund Gosse among them. Artistic merit had no public.

Logically then, *The Savoy* had to fail, yet the experiment might have been commercially successful for the wrong reasons. For the one appeal *The Savoy* did make, perhaps unwittingly, was to the cult of personality, and the magnetic Beardsley attracted as well as repelled. If there was one thing about which critics and readers agreed, it was the excellence and the drawing power of Beardsley’s contributions and the popular interest in Beardsley as a personality. (The unintentionally cruel jest that “even Beardsley’s lungs are affected” had wide currency.) The public might have bought a *Beardsley*, but lost interest in a *Savoy* with an ever-thinning Beardsley facade. He was the base of popular appeal as well as the magnet which drew many of the top contributions. As Hesketh Pearson had so neatly put it, *The Savoy* “might just as well have been called *The Beardsley*, for he was, if not the life and soul, at least the body and death of it.”

If Smithers’s literary editor did not realize the value of Beardsley in forming a public, Smithers himself did, and he supported the artist even after his failing health prevented all but the most occasional and intermittent work. When Smithers faced a new financial crisis in 1897, he contrived somehow to pay Beardsley’s salary at the expense of other contributors and creditors and even accepted work from Beardsley when he had no means of publishing it. Yet Beardsley found reason to complain, writing to his sister Mabel about the awkwardness of his position: “… it’s the annoyance of sitting down to a drawing and not knowing if it will ever get published or paid for. I fancy that not only does Smithers find it impossible to pay me for work, but also that he cannot meet the expenses of block-making, printing and binding....” But the pasty-faced pornographer was loyal to his resident genius.

*The Savoy* had meant everything to Beardsley. It had restored and increased his reputation after Wilde and *The Yellow Book* debacle had nearly ended it, and it had provided a public for his pictures and a chance to test his awakening literary talent. In a review of *Le Mouvement Esthetique et Decadent en Angleterre*, *Savoy* contributor Vincent O’Sullivan recalled an incident which revealed to him “rather strangely” what *The Savoy* had meant to Beardsley. In the year after the magazine’s demise, Beardsley, frail and wan, was sitting one evening in a Parisian restaurant, the *Foyot*, with O’Sullivan. It was very quiet, and they were all alone but for a drowsy waiter “when the door opened and a little woman came in and sat down at a table facing us. She was dressed in the style of 1850. Out of a huge reticule she drew a snuff-box, took a pinch of snuff and set herself to examining a bunch of papers by the
aid of a candle in a silver candle-stick which she had told the waiter to set on the table.” Beardsley could not keep his eyes away from her; he said she had come walking out of a book by Balzac. “Now if The Savoy were going,” he added wistfully, “there would be a picture.”

Beardsley failed rapidly toward the end of 1897, and as he sensed the end coming grew remorseful about the strong element of the ribald and risque in his work. As he lay dying on 7 March 1898 in the Hotel Cosmopolitan in Mentone, he scrawled an appeal to Smithers:

Jesus is our Lord & Judge.

Dear friend, I implore you to destroy all copies of Lysistrata & bad drawings....
By all that is holy—all obscene drawings.

Aubrey Beardsley
In my death agony.

On 16 March 1898 Beardsley died. He was twenty-five years old.

Smithers’s career as a publisher was nearly as brief, lasting only nine years. When he died on 19 December 1907, there was no furniture in his house in the Fulham district of London, aside from the bed in which he died and two empty hampers. In the days of The Savoy he had once kept the faltering magazine going by raising money on his furniture. Clearly it had not been the last time for that expedient. The parish authorities buried him in the Parsons Street Cemetery.

The Yellow Book, which not only preceded The Savoy in origin but was its cause, outlasted its rival by surviving into 1897. Together, despite their weaknesses, they marked, in Osbert Burdett’s words, one of those “hours that might have been and might not be.” They were so rare in England, Burdett went on, that both

won a repute, as it were, in excess of their contents.... With hardly an exception, the contributors to both believed with Gautier that the perfection of form was virtue, and the lesson that they have bequeathed to us today is that the desire for perfection is an end to aim at because this desire gives to work, however limited in scope, a worth beyond its own nature that survives the mode in which it is done. This quality, like the desire that went into its making, is rare in our periodical literature, and it is the rareness of a body of men intent upon it that has given to The Yellow Book and The Savoy their historical place among literary reviews.

Whether The Savoy’s contents were exceeded by its reputation has been difficult to assess, for rarely has it been accessible outside rare book collections. Like The Yellow Book, it was briefly the object of scorn, as its reputation suffered from the reaction against the “aestheticism” and the “decadence”
Beardsley and *The Savoy*

it was said to represent. Asked if he had read the newest book by a former contributor to one of the nineties quarterlies, an Edwardian critic said, contemptuously: “Oh, I put my hand up its pages.” But, except for the remark, the critic is forgotten, while *The Savoy* may outlast as a landmark the famed hotel of the same name in the Strand.