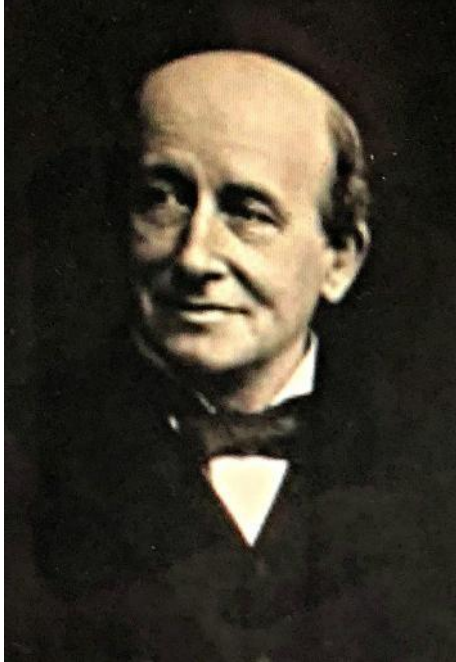


Selwyn Image

Born 1849. Artist, designer, writer and poet.
Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



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1. Introduction

The following introduction was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.

Selwyn Image (17 February 1849, Bodiam, Sussex – 21 August 1930, London) was an important British artist, designer, writer and poet associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement. He designed stained-glass windows, furniture, embroidery, and was an illustrator of books. Image was the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford from 1910 to 1916.

Early life and education

Selwyn Image was born in Bodiam, Sussex on 17 February 1849 to the Reverend John Image (c. 1802–1878), vicar of Bodiam and Mary Maxwell (nee Hinds c. 1807–1857). He attended Marlborough College and the New College, Oxford in 1868 where he studied drawing under John Ruskin. Intending on entering the clergy and following his father as Vicar of Bodiam, Image took Holy Orders at the age of 24. He was ordained deacon in 1872, and priest the next year. He was a curate at Tottenham and later at St. Anne's, Soho. Image began studying art with A. H. Mackmurdo and Ruskin's assistant, Arthur Burgess in 1880. Image eventually abandoned the clergy in 1882.

The Century Guild of Artists

He was associated with the Century Guild of Artists in London, founded by prominent architect and designer A. H. Mackmurdo and Herbert Percy Horne. With Mackmurdo, Image established the Guild's workshops which produced furniture, wallpaper, primarily domestic design such as furniture, stained glass, metalwork, and decorative painting. Image was co-editor of the Guild's magazine, *The Hobby Horse*, from 1886 to 1892. He was an active member of the Art Workers' Guild in London and became a Master of the guild in 1900.

Stained glass designer

One of Image's first stained glass designs, *The Seasons*, manufactured by James Powell & Sons, was exhibited at the Paris International Exhibition in 1878. Image's designs were influenced by the work of William Morris. Image's early designs, composed of individual figures against a floral background, was inspired by Morris's previous work.

The basis of Image's stained glass design was a "simplicity of treatment, not only in figure drawing and ornament—which closely match his contemporary graphic work, such as for the Century Guild *The Hobby Horse*—but also in the use of leading. In an article published in *The Hobby Horse* in 1890, Image expounded his principles of stained glass design, emphasizing that qualities of 'richness and brilliance of effect....in no small measure depend upon the management of the leads'".

Writer, lecturer, and poet

Image was an influential writer on design and the first Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford from 1910 to 1916.

Between December 1887 and February 1888, Image gave a series of four lectures on Modern Art at Willis' Rooms. Oscar Wilde attended at least one of this series, and reviewed the second lecture in the *Sunday Times* on 25 January 1888.[7] Image was also a close associate of Arthur Symons and may have shared his then mistress Muriel (Edith Broadbent).

Image published several essays, contributed introductions and chapters to scholarly publications, and published a poetry collection, *Poems and Carols* in 1894.

2. Stained Glass Artist

The following are examples of Selwyn Image's work as a stained glass artist.



'The Brownies'.



Stained glass 'The Brownies' (above) by Selwyn Image now in the William Morris Gallery, London. It was originally at Soham House, Newmarket, Suffolk. The 'Brownies' depicted are from Juliana Horatia Ewing's children's book of the same title. They are a type of fairy described in the book as 'small editions of men and women; they are too small and fragile for heavy work; they have not the strength of a man, but are a thousand times more fresh and nimble. They can run and jump, and roll and tumble, with marvellous agility and endurance'.

The design for stained glass (left) by Selwyn Image features a tree with small birds flying through branches and is one of a pair of windows for the Century Guild. It was possibly meant for 5 Stratton Street, London W1.

The following account of Selwyn Image's work as a stained glass artist was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.

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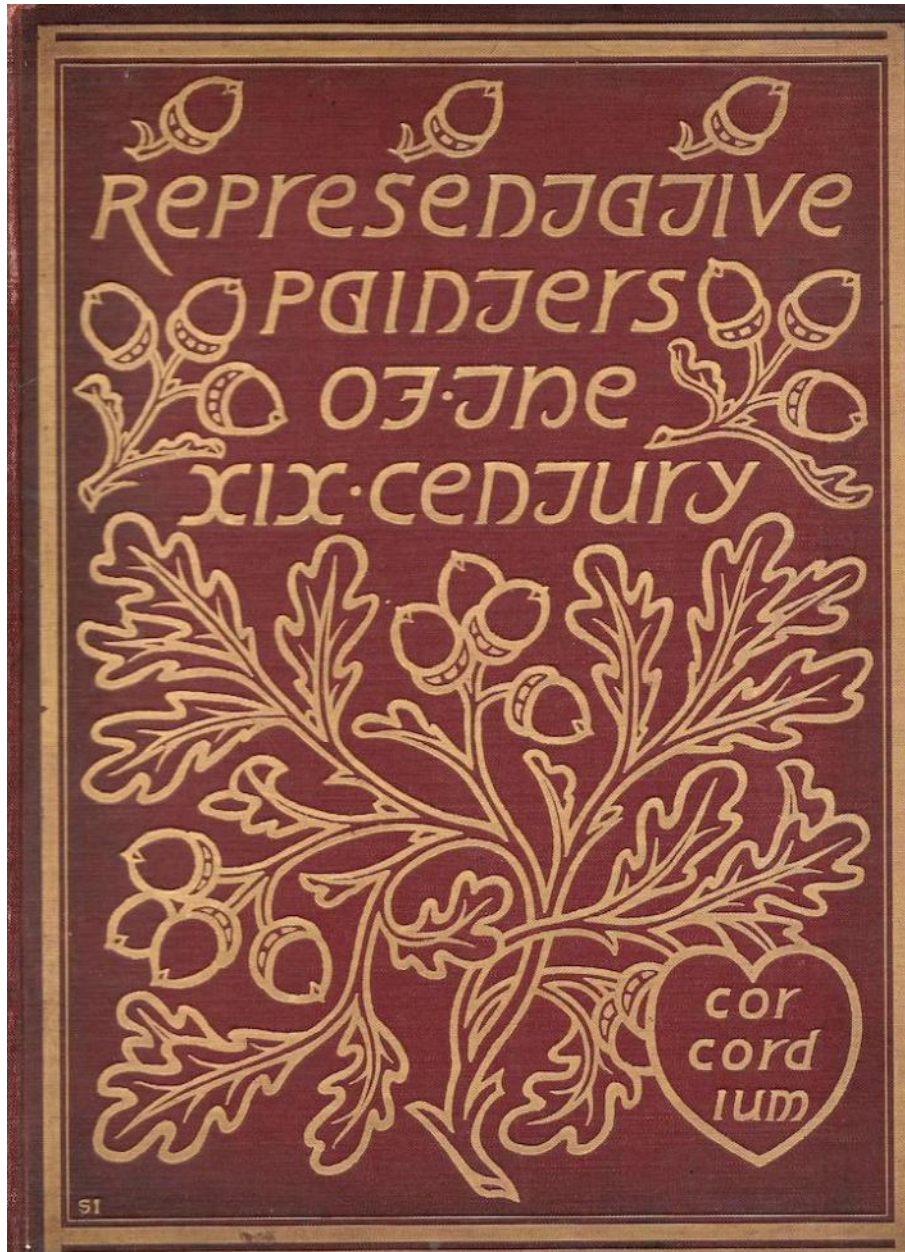
The basis of Image's stained glass design was a "simplicity of treatment, not only in figure drawing and ornament—which closely match his contemporary graphic work, such as for the Century Guild *The Hobby Horse*—but also in the use of leading. In an article published in *The Hobby Horse* in 1890, Image expounded his principles of stained glass design, emphasizing that qualities of 'richness and brilliance of effect....in no small measure depend upon the management of the leads'".

Image and well-known stained glass artist, Christopher Whall met in the 1880s and became lasting friends. Whall and Image were among the earliest pioneers and important contributors to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Image designed fewer than thirty windows during his career, but a number of cartoons (designs) were displayed at Arts and Crafts Exhibitions. Several of Image's designs were illustrated in books and magazines where Image acquired a wide following. Christopher Whall included one of Image's cartoons in his influential manual *Stained Glass Work* (1905), "as an example of the 'simple and severe' style of drawing best suited to the medium."

Image was influential in the work of a number of stained glass artists, including two women: Mary J. Newill (1860–1947) and Helen Coombe (1864–1937). Mary J. Newill was a talented artist-craftsman who trained at the Birmingham Municipal School of Art in the 1880s and 1890s. Helen Coombe (1864–1937) was a student of Image at the Slade School of Fine Art and her design for the Mary and Martha window was displayed at the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition and showed the influence of Image as artistic mentor.

3. Book Cover Designer

This chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Victorian Web website at www.victorianweb.org. It was written by Simon Cooke, PhD.



Selwyn Image's binding for Representative Painters of the Nineteenth Century.

Selwyn Image (1849–1930), one time an Anglican clergyman and later Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, was an accomplished designer and writer. He was heavily influenced by the aesthetics of William Morris; not only a member of the Art Workers' Guild, Image was the co-founder, with Arthur Mackmurdo and Herbert Horne, of the Century Guild (1883–92), and was a key contributor to its periodical, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*.

As one of the many polymaths generated by Morris's example, Image moved seamlessly between fine and applied art, two and three dimensional art, literature and the book arts. Best known for his stained glass, he also designed furniture, painted panels, wallpaper, embroidery, domestic items such as wooden trays, Christmas cards and sundry other objects for the home; a critic of contemporary art, he still found time to publish a small corpus of lyrical verse.

In addition to these activities, he created a series of ornamental schemes for the printed page and a number of distinctive book covers, which were offered not as elite products of the private presses but as trade bindings on cloth.

Scholarship on these aspects of his work is relatively undeveloped; there is no extended analysis of his book-art and his name is often confined to generalist comments in histories of the period. The following sections provide an introduction to a book artist whose work is often eclipsed by the more famous achievements of Charles Ricketts and Aubrey Beardsley.

Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau

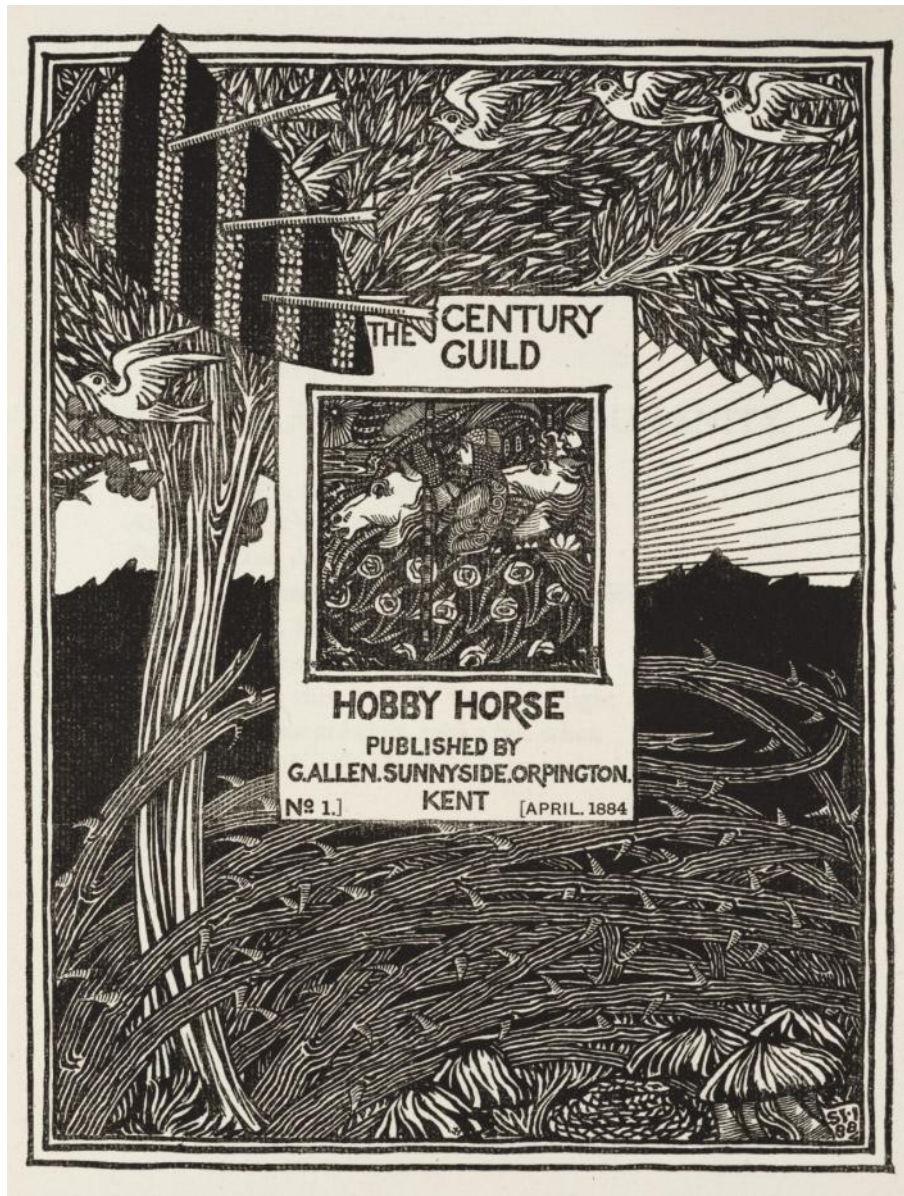
Image's book-covers, like those of Gleeson White, are complex artefacts which reflect the development of overlapping styles in the 1880s and 90s. Though a contributor to the discourse of Arts and Crafts, his bindings move between the conventions of Morris's decorative style and the greater economy of British Art Nouveau. Image probes the relationship between alternatives; exploratory in nature, and apparently unwilling to accept the restrictions of a single style, he finds the genesis of Nouveau within the conventions of Arts and Crafts. These creative tensions can be traced by analysing the tensions and contradictions at work within his bold and imposing designs.

Though Image's applied art is securely based on Morris's principles, his patterns for covers are ambivalent, fusing the polarities of Arts and Crafts decoration; in part naturalistic and in part abstracted, they represent motifs drawn from observation in a stylized way.

Image's particular inspiration is floral, and all of his designs reflect a botanist's view of flowers, vines, trees and varieties of blossoms. As he explains in an essay on stained glass that also reveals aspects of his approach to bindings, the artist should always 'make careful studies from nature ... for there is no fine designing possible [until] we are familiar with the anatomy' of the 'objects' ('Stained Glass', 169) or plants under scrutiny. This close observation is embodied in all of his covers; for example, the blossoming thistles on the binding for *The Tragic Mary* (1890) by Michael Field [Katherine Harris Bradley and Edith Cooper] are clearly based on observation and so are the sprouting acorns and oak leaves on the upper board of *Mrs Bell's Representative Painters of the XIX Century* (1899). Yet these motifs are far from realistic in the strictest sense of the term; while naturalistic, they are simplified to create decorative patterns. This emphasis is explained, once

again, by the artist in his own writing. Though he proclaims the importance of Pre-Raphaelite copying from nature, he simultaneously insists on the need for the artist to interpret and arrange, noting in an article 'On Design' in *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* that

It is the inventive arrangement of abstract lines and masses in such as relation to one another, that they form an harmonious whole, a whole, that is, towards each part contributes, and is such a combination with every other part that the result is a unity of effect, which completely satisfies us. [*Century Guild Hobby Horse*, October 1887].

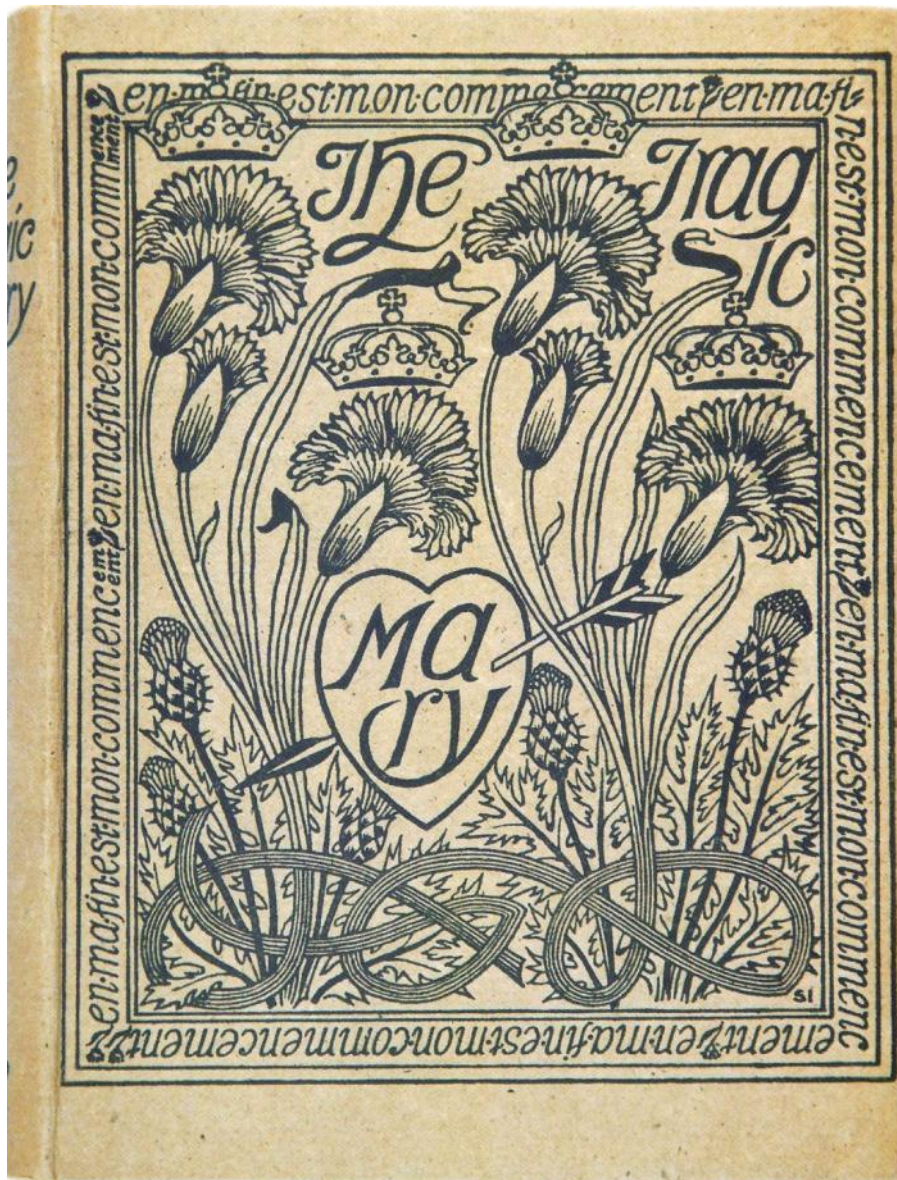


Perhaps the most striking design to appear on the wrappers of a Victorian periodical. Image's bold synthesis of nature motifs and rhythmic simplification closely reflects the instability of styles in the 1880s.

This interpretation of nature informs *The Tragic Mary*, the cover for *Representative Painters*, the binding for Ernest Radford's *Old and New* (1895) and the front pages of *The Century Guild* (1884). The effect, in all cases, is one of energizing the design. Image draws his stems and vines in dynamic,

curvilinear lines which highlight a sort of pantheistic view of nature – of nature made up of observed parts, simplified so as to stress its vitality.

The front cover of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* exemplifies his approach in the swaying form of the abstracted tree and especially in the swirling arabesques made up of barbed and dangerous looking brambles. However, Image's combination of swirling arabesques points in two directions: in part a piece of Arts and Crafts design, which mediates between abstraction and realism, it also prefigures Art Nouveau; though 'quite claustrophobic in its insistent detail' in the manner of Morris's borders for the Kelmscott Press (Taylor, 58), it anticipates the Nouveau decorations of Aubrey Beardsley's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1893).



*Selwyn Image's paper binding for Michael Field's *The Tragic Mary*.*

Image similarly maps a position between two styles in *The Tragic Mary*, combining realistic flowers and congested detail with the pure linearity of its stems and interlaces. This approach was largely original, but Image was

probably influenced by Mackmurdo's restless designs for a chair of 1881 and a title-page for Wren's Churches (1883). William Blake's designs for *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789), which appeared in *The Hobby Horse* were another source, Blake was widely admired, Stephan Tschudi-Madsen observes, by members of the Century Guild (238), and Image fuses Blake's linearity with Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau to create his own, synthetic style.

Bindings, Texts, Reputations, Influence

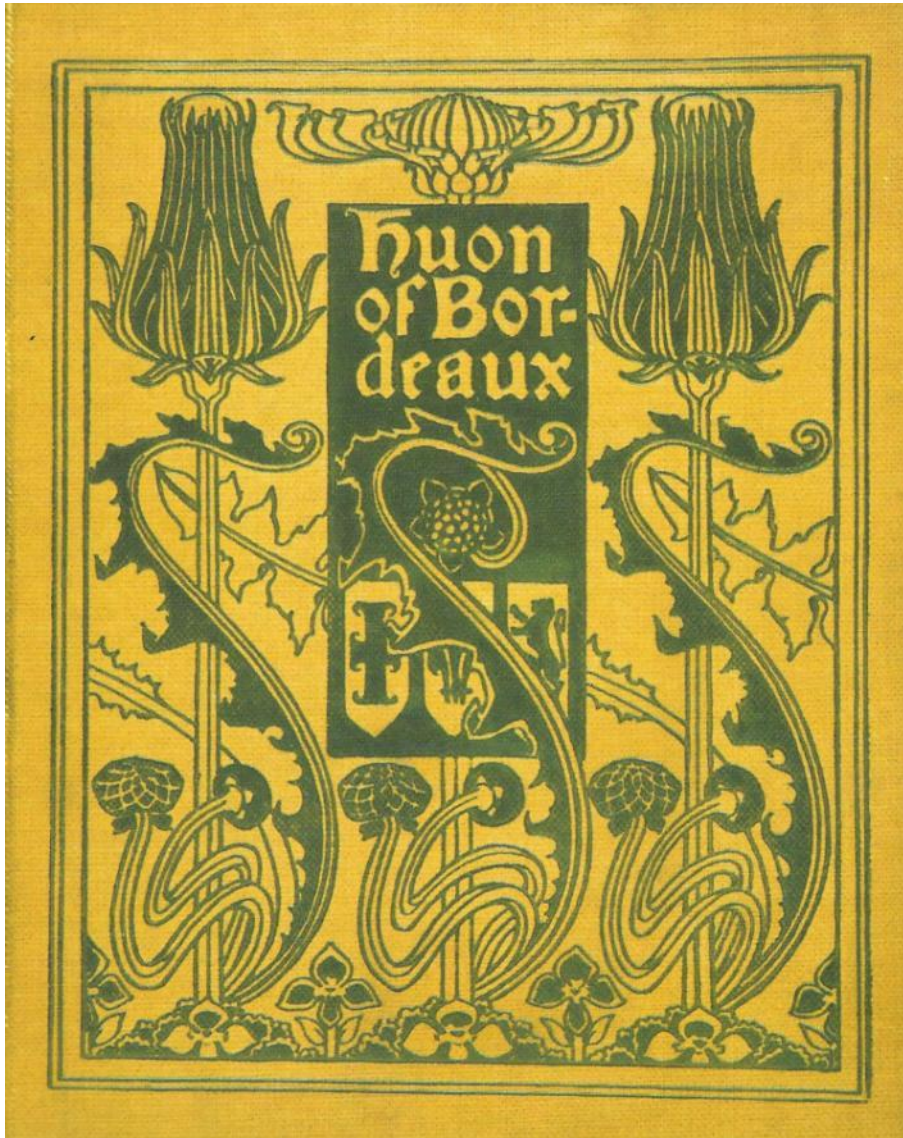
Image adhered to the idea, voiced throughout Victorian book art and emphasised in design of the 80s and 90s, that book covers should be linked to the contents of the texts they enclosed. In keeping with this tradition, Image produced covers which act as proleptic signs, establishing the book's theme or ambience in a symbolic form. The oak-clusters on the front cover of Bell's *Representative Painters* suggest development and growth ('from tiny acorns do mighty oaks grow'); the writhing plants on the wrappers of the *Hobby Horse* similarly convey a notion of fertile inventiveness. However, the artist's most developed and challenging design is the binding for Bradley and Cooper's play exploring the life of Mary, Queen of Scots. For this text he created a dense visual scheme which establishes the drama's key concerns.

Image's design has several levels of signification. Mary's status as a romanticised emblem of Scottish culture is registered by the pattern of thistle stems and flowers, traditional signs of Scotland and one familiar to Victorian readers who would have seen decorative bindings, embellished by a parallel iconography, of popular editions by Walter Scott and Robbie Burns. Image's use of a generic sign frames her in the same terms. Other elements of her story are symbolized by the placing four crowns, emblems of English sovereignty, over a series of thistle-flowers.

This unusual device conveys the idea that the representatives of the house of Stuart became monarchs of England and Scotland; although Mary herself was never to reign, and was executed by Elizabeth (a tragic circumstance suggested by the arrow-pieced heart), her son James I united the two thrones. The metaphorical linking of crowns and thistles acts, in other words, as a visual metaphor for a political arrangement, a piece of mock-heraldry that points to Mary's contribution to the development of British history.

The tenacity of her lineage is also suggested by the dynamic interlaces of stems, which seem to burst out of the frame; working to symbolize the regeneration of the moribund English throne by introducing Mary's son, it offers a highly idealized, emblematic telling of the events which though inaccurate – James being widely regarded by historians as one of the very worst of British monarchs – it is nevertheless entirely faithful to the eulogizing content of the text. The executed Mary becomes in this sense a seed-bed of thriving plants, the mother of future kings and a source of the fertile

continuation that was so obviously lacking in the childless house of Tudor. Should the message be missed, Image inscribes the legend of regeneration in the border: in rough translation from the French, 'in my end is my beginning;' the Celtic intertwining of the stems similarly stresses the idea of regeneration. Image's design for Tragic Mary is thus conceived as a complex inscription of messages, crystallizing the salient facts of her political history while visualizing the text's romanticism.



Fred Mason's binding for Huon of Bordeaux.

At the same time, its visual effect, as a piece of lyrical pantheism, is pleasingly decorative, vibrant, and uplifting. Though intimately linked to the text, it functions as an art-work in its own right, asserting the role of the cover artist as an original creator in pursuit of beauty. Produced as one of several bindings which established the binding designer's status, it bears comparison with the elaborate artifice of covers by A. A. Turbayne, Gleeson White and Charles Ricketts, and is one of the essential imprints of the period. Oscar Wilde considered it one of the most 'beautiful books ... of the century' (Field, Works

and Days, 139), and it is perhaps only surpassed by Ricketts's binding for John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893).

Image's design participates in this discourse of the 'book beautiful' and his work was influential in shaping covers of the last twenty years of the century. *Tragic Mary* was especially important and was much quoted and sometimes imitated. There is a direct relationship, for example, between *Mary* and Fred Mason's binding for Robert Steele's version of *Huon of Bordeaux* (1895). Ricketts, likewise, drew heavily on the example of *Tragic Mary*, creating his own, modified version of floral imagery in his *Poems for Oscar Wilde* (1893) and *In the Key of Blue* for J. A. Symonds (1892).

Image also had a significant impact on Gleeson White, whose compositions recreate the older artist's organic imagery and emphasis on muscular simplification; his binding for Burne-Jones (1894), notably, combines a bramble-motif which is directly lifted from the cover of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*.

In short, Image made a significant contribution to the art of fine binding. Aiming, like all of the late Victorian cover designers, to improve standards, he set out to democratize the appeal of advanced aesthetics, producing work both synthetic and striking, original and entirely of its time.

4. Selwyn Image and Oscar Wilde

This chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from section 1.1 Matthew Tildersley' PhD thesis at Durham University. Entitled The Century Guild Hobby Horse: A Study of British Little Magazines 1884-1897, it was published in 2007.

The exact time of the founding of the Century Guild is unknown - a detail lost from amongst the letters, articles, poetry and biographical accounts that survived the ravages of the twentieth century. However, it is certain that it occurred somewhere between June 1882 and 1883, and the organisation "gradually faded out" by around 1890.² The purpose of founding the Guild was "to render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but of the artist. It would restore building, decoration, glass painting, pottery, wood carving and metalwork to their right place beside painting and sculpture." Such a statement makes clear the debt owed by the Guild to William Morris, whose incendiary career dominates the Arts and Crafts movement of the later Victorian age.⁴ Alongside Morris, the three founding members of the Guild, Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo (1851-1942), Herbert Percy Home (1864-1916) and Selwyn Image (1849-1930), were influenced profoundly by John Ruskin, under whom both Image and Mackmurdo had studied at Oxford.⁵ Indeed, Lillian Block states that their "admiration for Ruskin approached absolute worship." (Home did not attend Oxford, but studied under Image before becoming apprenticed to Mackmurdo, with whom he later went into partnership.)

Mackmurdo and Home were both architects (their works including some design work for aspects of The Savoy Hotel, 1889) and both were enamoured with the art and architecture of Renaissance Italy. Mackmurdo was a frequent visitor to Italy, where he instigated a movement to save Wren's threatened churches, and Home's increasing interest in the history of Italian art led him to move to Florence in 1904, where he remained until his death. Both could be considered polymaths, whose spheres of expertise included art, poetry, literary and artistic criticism, alongside architecture and art history; Mackmurdo's later life was almost exclusively devoted to political and social theorising, with an evolutionary-socialist bias.⁸ The Guild's focal meeting place was secured in Autumn 1889 when Mackmurdo purchased the house at 20 Fitzroy Street, a location central to the British decadent movement.

The third member of the Guild's triumvirate is yet more difficult to characterise. Selwyn Image was an artist, a designer of stained glass and a new Greek type-face for publishers Macmillans; his design skills were such that in 1902 he was approached to submit a design for the King's Coronation Procession; he was a poet, letter writer, critic, Anglican Priest, zealous anti-Puritan, and part owner of a sugar plantation in Barbados. Image became a defender of the music halls and Oscar Wilde as they took their tum in the firing line of bourgeois Victorian attitudes towards morality, and also spoke out publicly against the Temperance movement. He was central member of the British Decadent circles of the fin de siècle, frequent escort to young female theatrical performers and latterly Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford University.

Image's ancestors, Huguenots who migrated from Avignon to East Anglia in the late seventeenth century, appear to be the very epitome of dry, passive gentility, comprising a long line of clergymen, artists, fossil collectors and butterfly breeders.

His own father was Vicar of Bodiam, Sussex, and it was assumed that Selwyn would follow in his ancestors' footsteps. Although his considerable artistic talents were evident during his education at Malborough College, when he attended New College Oxford, c.1868, his intentions were initially to take Holy Orders. At Oxford, Image "placed himself almost exclusively under the influence of John Ruskin" who both influenced and nurtured the artistic side of the young man.

12 After his first meeting with Ruskin, Image wrote to his brother, John, on the 8th February 1871,

The more intensely I feel, what God is, what life is, what our own present days are, what Christianity, and what our English or any other Church- the more certainly I am assured that Holy Orders is not for me.

Nevertheless, the inner struggle between the two possible careers of artist and clergyman resulted in Image following into his father's occupation, being ordained first a deacon, and then Priest at All Hallows, Tottenham, later that same year. Image's earlier doubts about life in the clergy, however, soon came to the fore once more, compelling him to tell his father in December 1873 that "I am sick of religionists- out and out- utterly sickened of their squabbles and meannesses and follies and uncharitableness." The specific reasons for Image's leaving the Church are, however, ambiguous; his letters to Mackmurdo at the time offer a tantalising glimpse into the situation, as he tells his friend, "The Church I think will not come down on me with any penalties -though I suppose they might legally be visited on me- But they won't- I am too small fry." 15 Whatever the nature of his misdemeanour, by 1880 the conflict between the man and his career was over. Image had resigned his curacy and was studying art with Mackmurdo (with whom he had become close friends two years earlier) and Ruskin's assistant, Arthur Burgess. From within this artistic community grew the Century Guild, and in 1884, its "inhouse" magazine, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* was first published.

For those seeking to define the man, Selwyn Image's subsequent life was something of an enigma, leading R. K. R. Thornton and Ian Small to describe his personality as a "mixture of passion and frigidity." To "Michael Field" Image was "High Church and Bohemian in due measure that disconcerts neither himself nor anyone else." Writing to Arthur Moore in 1890, Ernest Dowson recalled a meeting with Home and Image thus:

In the evening I slacked & eventually met Image and Home at midnight outside the "back door" of the Alhambra! & was introduced to various trivial coryphees. There was something eminently grotesque in the juxtaposition. Home very erect & slim & aesthetic - & Image the most dignified man in London, a sort of cross in appearance between a secular abbe & Baudelaire, with a manner du 18me siecle- waiting in a back passage to be escort to ballet girls whom they don't even ! ! !

Lawrence Binyon's account of him, included in the catalogue preface to Image's

Memorial Exhibition (Cotswold Gallery, 1930), is particularly striking in its many similarities to descriptions of the character of Oscar Wilde:

I cannot think that any one in our day was a better talker. His talk came from a ripe mind, rich in reminiscence; but its special charm was the quick and cordial enjoyment of life which it communicated. Little incidents, chance insights and encounters, disappointments and delights became vivid and moving adventures. His talk, with all its delicious humour and sentiment, was coloured by strong convictions and frank prejudices: it had gusto, it had always style.

The idea of no one in Binyon's day being a "better talker," when that "day" included Wilde, may sound a little surprising to certain modern readers. The nature of Wilde's fall from grace and his secular crucifixion, has led him to become legendary, canonised, even. Due to this position in popular perception, Wilde has been endowed with a mantle of uniqueness. The fact that his downfall was precipitated by a "secret sin" only serves to emphasise this notion of singularity and solitude. However, Wilde's views on art and life in general were not formed in isolation; staggering though his intellect may have been, his ideas were formed from the ideas of others, as he matured amongst a wide circle of peers; first at Trinity and Oxford, and later in the artistic communities of the fin de siècle.

Selwyn Image was a significant figure in such circles, though his presence amongst the British Decadent movement is paid little or no attention in the majority of studies of the era. As he outlived Wilde by some thirty years, and his later life was defined by his most prestigious position, it is the older, Professor Selwyn Image who has left his modest mark upon the world of art and letters. Though never "dry," this persona is definitely sedate and genteel, leading Will Rothenstein to remember him as "the 'safe' candidate" for the Slade Professorship, taken up in 1910, when he was chosen in preference to Roger Fry and W. R. Lethaby.

Mackmurdo, when editing a posthumous collection of poems, stated that throughout Image's poetry "unfolds the personality as it grows from lusty youth to age ripe with wisdom."²³ However, Mackmurdo's editorial skills in presenting selections of Image's letters and poems lead the Saturday Review to sum up the late Professor's existence as "A Simple, Quiet Life."²⁴ It is the "lusty youth" who deserves more attention than that given in Mackmurdo's "edition" of Image's life and work.

Image's poetry, prose and criticism throughout the latter twenty years of the nineteenth century reflect, illustrate, and even influence the growing tensions between bourgeois morality and artistic and personal freedom which grew throughout the 1880s, culminating in Wilde's imprisonment in 1895. Image's work in the Hobby Horse is wide ranging, stretching from woodcuts and design work to artistic and social criticism, poetry and sharp-witted, risqué fiction, as he takes up arms against the rising tide of puritanism in late Victorian Britain. As shall be explored in later chapters, subversive and clandestine sexuality played a very large part in this particular struggle for artistic liberation. Oscar Wilde became a personification of this struggle, as his life and art became inextricably linked, both for himself and his prosecutors; but the philosophies behind Wilde's "social crimes" - be they personal or artistic - were far more widespread than his life and works

alone.

The writings of Selwyn Image in *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* would appear to prefigure many of the preoccupations in Wilde's own work, particularly *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Certainly, a considerable degree of similarity in the two men's works must be expected, as a result of their both attending Oxford University, and moving in the same artistic circles. Nevertheless, there may be cause to suspect that some of Image's works in the late 1880s were direct influences on Wilde's later work. However, as sexuality became a dominant discourse in this struggle within society (as is ably demonstrated by Wilde's novel and its reception), it is first necessary to examine what may be discerned of the sexual life and opinions of Selwyn Image himself.

Whilst researching her MA thesis in 1940, Lillian Block was fortunate enough to contact Mackmurdo (then 91) personally, and in the correspondence that followed, the aging artist spoke of his "oldest and dearest friend," Professor Selwyn Image: "To him I owe much in a world of maze: so catholic in his taste: so human in his sympathies, as was Browning who found some good in prostitutes, some bad in Bishops." That Mackmurdo should use this particular example to illustrate Image's broadness of view is of particular significance, as Image's involvement with the London music halls illustrates.

The Local Government Act of 1888 gave the newly created County Councils direct control over "registering premises of public entertainment and granting licences to proprietors."²⁶ Music halls became a specific cause for concern for the newly appointed licencing body, as many were perceived as being the "established haunts of prostitutes." In Mrs. Ormiston Chant, a mouthpiece for the growing army of puritanical social activists of the 1880s and 1890s who sought to eradicate this particular evil, opposed the licence for *The Empire* on the grounds that "the place at night is the habitual resort of prostitutes in pursuit of their traffic, and that portions of the entertainment are most objectionable, obnoxious, and against the best interests and moral well-being of the community at large."²⁸ For this lady and others, there was little distinction to be made between the prostitutes on the promenades outside, and the performers on the stage itself.

Image saw the attempts to close the promenades as "Essentially [...] the spirit of Puritanism: the spirit which condemns the human body as a vile thing, and regards the free life of the senses as evil," in an article for *The Church Reformer*.²⁹ Writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he uses masterful rhetoric to illustrate how the closure of the promenades will not curb prostitution at all (being Ormiston Chant's ostensible aim) but merely result in the closure of the theatre as a whole. Image was involved in this counter-movement against the puritans from the first, and his vehemence in the matter is made plain in a letter to Herbert Home in 1889:

This is the season, as you know, for renewing licences. The Committee of the London County Council are making bigger asses of themselves over the business, than ever did even the antient [sic] magistrates[...] One of their number, a certain McDougall, seems to have been going the round, and sniffing about for nastiness. I hope he may suffer in hell eternally,

with his nose held over a privy[...] We must exterminate the impudent creatures, who oppose and seek to rule us; or be ourselves exterminated.

Writing to his brother John at around the same time, Image sought to explain his involvement in the matter thus:

I am much interested in music-halls for their own sake, and would do anything in my power to fight their battle: but I am fighting now with the more vigour, because I am certain that if these people have their way with the halls to-day, to-morrow they will go on to attack higher forms of art. This puritan or purity movement, which is gaining all over the place, is essentially opposed to the first principle upon which all art is based: and in my poor way I will do my best to fight it to the death.

This "first principle" was, for Image, sensuality. In the previous letter, he refers to a meeting at the home of the radical Christian Socialist and fellow anti-puritan, Rev. Stewart Headlam, where he "was moved to make a speech, and set forth in unadorned terms the gospel of sensuousness, as the very foundation for fine art." However, as the letter to his brother indicated, artistic freedom was not his sole reason in defending the music halls. As may be gleaned from Dowson's letter above, Image had a personal interest in the performers themselves. A letter to Mackmurdo, probably from 1889, declares, "do come to the Theatre tonight- where I am told the exhibition of feminine legs is indeed inexpressibly entrancing,"³⁴ demonstrating that the (unspecified) professional women to be found there were of at least as much interest to Image as was their plight. Sylvia Tickner, when listing the veritable "Who's Who" of the British decadent circle that frequented the Crown, stated that "Image, like so many of the Crown habitués [sic] was frequently seen escorting a [lady] from the Empire or the Alhambra." Indeed, supporting the dancers became something of a cause célèbre amongst the decadents, leading Image, Home, Victor Plarr and Arthur Symons to institute "The Secret Society of the Believers in the Ballet."

Stewart Duckworth Headlam (1847-1924) is a key figure within this particular circle. As editor of *The Church Reformer*, he blazed a peculiar trail through the fin de siècle as a rabidly fanatical anti-puritan Anglican clergyman, and moved within the circles of artists and writers that defined the British decadent movement. Quite probably on Image's suggestion, he stood surety for half of Wilde's bail in 1895, and Sylvia Tickner ventures to propose that his particular sympathy with sexual deviance "had no doubt been extended by [his brief], disastrous marriage to a lesbian."³⁷ Staunch defender of dancing per se (indeed he wrote a book on the subject and argued strongly for the re-institution of dancing into the liturgy) he established private dances for his friends and the belles of the music hall, initially at St. James' Hall, and later at his own house. The letters of Ernest Dowson give a brief glimpse into this world, which Victor Plarr recalled as "a brilliant picturesque episode [in the] crowded artistic life of the early '90s."⁴⁰ Writing to Arthur Moore, 23rd June 1889, and bemoaning the after-effects of "that little green absinthe," Dowson laments,

I should by now be dancing neath S. Headlam's Chinese lanthoms with fair sylphs of Th' Empire & Alhambra. But somehow I couldn't come up to the scratch. The liver & the spleen, chiefly the latter have stood in my way. I am rather sorry because it would have been

novel & unconventional to say the least.

The picture Dowson and Plarr paint would easily fit the descriptions of Dorian Gray's exotic gatherings, and could indeed be seen as part of the environment in which Wilde's heady mix of the exotic and the illicit, as found in his novel, was formulated. Image's part in the proceedings is characteristically ambiguous. Ezra Pound offers this retrospective interpretation in his poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley":

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels;
Headlam for uplift; Image impartially imbued
With raptures for Bacchus, Terpsichore and the Church.
So spoke the author of "The Dorian Mood"

Image's own poetry provides another insight into this half-lit world of pseudo-illicit charms. Beginning "Let others sing of the country's charm," the poem "Urbanus Loquitur" (1894) explores the pleasures of the city, which often go unseen:

For me, for me, another world's
Enchantments hold my heart in thrall :
These London pavements, low'ring sky,
Store secrets, on mine eyes that fall,
More curious far, than earth or air
By country paths can make appear.

The stem reformer scowls aghast,
'Mid the doomed city's trackless woe:
Apelles veils his shuddering gaze,
Its ugliness "offends him so" :
The dainty-eared musician dies
In torment, of its raucous cries.

Yet are there souls of coarser grain,
Or else more flexible, who find
Strange, infinite allurements lurk,
Undreamed of by the simpler mind,
Along these streets, within the walls
Of cafes, shops, and music halls.⁴⁴

The love of the city over the country in Image's early verse is typical of decadent poetry, distinguishing it from its more nature-orientated, Romantic forebears. ⁴⁵ Also, the idea of "souls of coarser grain" and the atmosphere of clandestine delights - "enchantments," curious "secrets" and "allurements" that "lurk" within the London less traveled by respectable society- match Wilde's decadent novel (and indeed his private life) exactly, and may indicate a shared taste in such pleasures between the two authors. Image's confession in "De Profundis" (1894) would tend to give strength to such a supposition:

Because my courage ebbs away ;
Because my spirit's eyes are dim;
Because with failures to the brim
My cup fills day by day :

Because forbidden ways invite ;
Because the smile of sin is sweet ;
Because so readily run my feet
Towards paths, that close in night :

This particular poem raises rather awkward questions, namely what is "forbidden," by whom, and for what reason? For a man who fought puritanism and censorship so consistently and tenaciously, the very idea of "the forbidden" would seem anathema. However, in his article "Butterflies at the Empire" published in *The Saturday Review* April 13th 1901,⁴⁷ his recollections of his music-hall-going days suggest that the idea of what one is permitted to do and what is forbidden may be an imposed, classbased, social construction:

Fifteen years ago, well you went to the Alhambra, or the Empire, or the Pavilion, or the Oxford; but in genteel society, at dinner parties and where ladies came, you did not mention the fact. At least, if you were pressed, you owned up to it with a blush, you made confession of your vulgarity, almost your sin, under your breath.

Hence the quintessentially late-Victorian quality of duality, the very backbone of Wilde's novel, is apparent in the life and work of Selwyn Image. The life of "secret sins" indulged in amongst those "of coarser grain" is to be kept strictly separate from the life lived in genteel society.

One may be tempted to read Image's poetry as being fictitious, or at least not lyrical; however this would go against the evidence of those who knew his methods. A. H. Mackmurdo wrote in 1932, "he never wrote a line of verse save when it had been wrung out of him by the force of an emotion which some stirring event had unloosened, the reader will know it to have been so." This does indeed appear to be the case, even if Mackmurdo expresses the idea rather dramatically. In 1896 Image contributed to several numbers of *The Savoy* and the April issue includes a poem, "The Truant's Holiday," that would appear to be no more than a fanciful creation based on pagan themes:

Come, let us forth, Sibylla! The brave day,
See, 's all a-quiver with gold and blue!
Come, let us fly these paltry streets, and pay
Our matin worship at some woodland shrine.

However, a letter to Alderson Home (proprietor of *The Londoner*) reveals that the poem is in fact "an invitation to Janet to come out and spend a day in Epping Forest." Not only does this letter illustrate the fact that much of Image's poetry is based on his personal life, it also clarifies the issue of Image's relationships with music-hall dancers: Janet McHale was an 18 year old dancer whom Image

befriended in 1891 (Image himself being 42), and subsequently married on the 27th of April, 1901.

Looking at Image's early poetry, however, it is manifestly clear that here was a man who burned with sexual passion well before his marriage at the ripe age of 52. Only a fraction of his prodigious poetic output was ever published. Writing to Home as early as 1886, whilst attempting to organize his manuscripts, he stated that he was "appalled to discover that one way or another there must be nearly 200 of them! I never realized how much I had scribbled." Though he contributed poetry to various magazines throughout his lifetime, only two collected volumes were ever published: *Poems and Carols* (1894), which consisted of 33 verses, several of which had been previously published in the *Hobby Horse*; and the posthumous collection edited by Mackmurdo in 1932. This reprinted much of the earlier work, but with an additional poems, largely arranged in chronological order. As Tickner notes, "Most of the earlier poems were the outcome of personal feelings, few of which were intended for publication" and that "both collections contain poems more sensual in tone than might be expected from the pen of a Victorian ex-clergyman." Indeed, many of the earlier poems positively smolder with passion and sensuality, with "In Love's Snare," written in 1882, being a particularly piquant example:

O BARE your throat, Lynnette, said he
O bare your bosom so soft, and white,
That my lips are longing to close on tight:
O bare them full for my eyes to see,
For there's never a sight
So fair elsewhere to ravish me!
[...]
And you're here, Lynette, and I hold you, dear!
Do I dream? Is it vision or truth? Do I kiss
Or dream that I'm kissing like this and this
And this, till the lips are tired with mere
Sheer passion and bliss
Of your beautiful body that's lying here?
[...]
And what does it matter? You're here, and I,
And Love, that's over us both on fire
With the pulse that is all in all of desire.
And what does it matter? -The hour will fly.
Ah! God, and expire!
But here, Lynette, for the while you lie.

Again, a poem simply dedicated to Mackmurdo and dated August 2nd 1883 blazes with passion:

Ah! that dainty love-mouth!
Kiss, kiss, kiss, till the lips are burnt to white
With the kissing lips of passion that clings tight,
Tight, tight, tight, till the blood's red fails for burning

Of love's cruel, sweetest drouth.

The physicality of Image's early love poetry is remarkably similar in tone to much of Baudelaire's "Black Venus" love poetry in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire's declaration "O vows! O perfumes! O kisses infinite!" in "Le Possede" matches Image's feverish desire precisely. Equally, Baudelaire's "Lethe" speaks of a Desire

[...] to sleep and not to live!
And in a sleep as sweet as death, to dream
Of spreading out my kisses without shame
On your smooth body, bright with copper sheen.

The almost tortuous level of exquisite desire in Image's poetry, the blending of agony with ecstasy, is also a recurrent, and much celebrated theme in the poetry of Swinburne. Hence, as with the more widely acknowledged poets of the British decadent era, such as Symonds, Dowson and Wilde, the sensuality of Baudelaire and Swinburne is an identifiable feature of Selwyn Image's early bohemian poetry. Indeed the more subversive elements of these two European greats of erotic and sensuous poetry are also to be found in the writings of the recently de-frocked Reverend Image's work.

"Love's Carelessness" was sent to Mackmurdo on November 18th, 1884, along with a covering letter. In the text, Image exposes a level of subversive intent with regard to the sensuality and moral implications of the poem. He introduces it as "a little poem on the well-worn subject which you may commend as you think to H. H. [presumably Home] [...] Of course I know you are too pure a person to have any sympathy with it yourself"⁵⁸ The theme continues in the same passionate and sensuous vein as those cited above, but closes with a stanza that introduces the notion of morality:

In heaven or hell? Is it light of fire
Or light of the sun? desire on desire!
Be it hell's or heaven's love scorns to heed.

In a philosophy similar to that of Walter Pater in his *Renaissance* (1873-93) therefore, for the one-time clergyman, notions of good and evil can be transcended by beauty and the sensuous life - again a central facet of Wilde's novel.

In the introduction to Image's *Letters*, Mackmurdo states that his "passion for Beauty [..] led to the pursuit of Beauty in all its manifestations [..] wherever freely sought: In the features and figure of a girl, in the rhythm of the dance, in the voice of men and the song of a bird." A letter to Mackmurdo of November 1883 ably demonstrates the effect of a beautiful girl upon the epicurean Mr. Image:

Lilith was with me this evening. I never saw her look anything like so lovely as she threw herself back in the chair draped in that Indian muslin dress with an exquisite piece of orange Indian silk held up off her head, and the heavy dusk hair lying away there underneath

framing the shadowed face. O Lord! we are weak mortals - and all my strength went I can tell you - I think it must have been verily "grace" that kept me off then, and to all appearances collected. Heavens! If I could paint such a vision. Dominus vobiscum.

Indeed, it is not only the beauty of the female form that has such an effect on Image; writing to his cousin Katie in 1924, who was at the time visiting Italy, he told her

Be sure you fall in love, or anyway do your hardest to fall in love, with Donatello's bronze Boy David in the Museo Nazionale - the naked lad with the helmet and laurel crown on his beautiful head[...] And tell the Boy how an old man in Holloway, London, adores him, and constantly refreshes his tired eyes by looking on him, though it be alas! in nothing but a photograph.

Similarly, writing to Mackmurdo from Rome, twenty one years earlier, in April 1883, Image displays his adoration of the young male form, and youth itself:

I haven't done a thing- except a few notes, and one or two pencil heads from the loveliest of boys, but I think I have drunk in some new life [.] Please give my best remembrances to Hom [sic], whom I, worn out with sins and follies and feebleness and waning years, envy for all his youth and energy and dawning brightness.

In this letter the envy and near worship of youth, coupled with an eye for "the loveliest of boys," strikes resonant chords with Wilde's Lord Henry in the opening chapters of *Dorian Gray*. Indeed, the "dawning brightness" of Home's blossoming youth strongly prefigures Dorian's golden dawn in the first chapter of Wilde's novel. The beauty and vitality of youth appears to be an ongoing preoccupation with Image, as almost 20 years later, he writes to Christopher Whall, exclaiming "Oh! those sweet kids at the Grafton! what a ravishing thing is youth. I wonder how the Omega artists would interpret their legs?" This fixation with young male bodies, and the typically Greek perception of the male as the principal form of beauty, may also be glimpsed in a letter to his brother John in 1882: having read Bret Harte's *Flip* (1882) to his sister Annie, Image confesses that "I am hopelessly in love with "Flip," with her straight, slight figure like a boy's, and her freckles."

The letter to Mackmurdo also shares other aspects with decadent writing. The idea of being "worn out with sins" and in one's "waning years" while the writer was in his early thirties, recalls the playfully melodramatic ennui typical of much decadent writing of the time, as may be found in Arthur Symons' "Satiety," published when the poet was a mere 24 years old:

I have outlived my life [...]
What joy is left in all I look upon?
I cannot sin, it wearies me. Alas!

Hence Image's personal life and writings display many of the themes and influences of style that resonate throughout the British decadent movement. In his opposition to the growing puritanism in society, matters of sexuality and sensuality become ever more important modes of expression. For Mrs. Ormiston Chant, and the burgeoning movement she represented, the music halls and their dancers represented a sexual

threat to society; Selwyn Image befriended and supported the ostracized dancers (even marrying one of their number) and defended the art of dance on the very basis of its sensuality. His poetry, richly sensuous, with passages bordering on the sexually explicit, along with his personal life, defies the rigid social mores of bourgeois late Victorian Britain.

More than this, Image's love of "Beauty" in all his forms, led him to adore the masculine as well as the feminine- a social crime that became increasingly intolerable in the 1890s, as the excruciating word-by-word examination of Wilde's depiction of Basil's feelings for Dorian during the first trial illustrates. As mentioned above, many aspects of Wilde's personal and artistic philosophies may be found in the work of Selwyn Image. In the following chapters, the development of many themes in Wilde's work shall be examined through articles published in *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*. Due to their many similarities, the magazine and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shall be used to illuminate each other, highlighting common themes, and their evolution, as may be tracked in a quarterly periodical over a ten year publication history.

5. Art For Art's Sake

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Art for Art's Sake, Sensation for Sensation's: Aestheticism, Decadence and The Century Guild Hobby Horse.

Yes, there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new hedonism that was to re-create life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself and not the fruits of experience sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.

This passage, which first appeared on page 66 of the Lippincott's edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, marks a crucial turning point in Dorian Gray's life. From this moment on, Dorian indulges himself in every kind of experience, experiences many might class as "sinful," whereas before, his life had been centred around the detached appreciation and acquisition of all things beautiful. This movement from passivity to activity may be defined as a shift from the aesthetic to the decadent, the former denoting a detached appreciation of beauty and the latter an engaged, and even morally corrupt, behaviour- a movement from "art for art's sake" to "sensation for sensation's sake."

In many ways, the story itself marks a similar shift in Wilde's own status in society. As Jeremy Reed has noted, before the story's publication, Wilde was seen as "little more than an imposing colourful aesthete." After its publication, however, many readers and critics sought to re-define their opinions of Wilde, as is illustrated by an article in the *St. James's Gazette*, June 1890:

Time was [..] when we talked about Mr Oscar Wilde; time came [.] when he tried to write poetry and, more adventurous, we tried to read it; time is when we had forgotten him or only remember him as the late editor of *The Woman's World* - a part for which he was singularly unfitted, if we are to judge him by the work which he has been allowed to publish in Lippincott's Magazine and which Messrs Ward, Lock & Co. have not been ashamed to circulate in Great Britain.

Writing shortly after the Lippincott's publication, the *Daily Chronicle* described the work as "a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction" and the tale itself rife with "secret and unspeakable vice." For the *Scots Observer*, 5th July 1890, the book "deals with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing in camera" and in an open accusation of homosexuality on Wilde's part, describes him as being

able to "write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys,"⁷³ recalling the recent case of the Cleveland Street homosexual brothel. ⁷⁴ As Peter Ackroyd notes, therefore, "The Picture of Dorian Gray marked the first stage in Wilde's long descent into open scandal and eventual infamy."

Wilde was seen as the figurehead of the British decadent movement, and as such, his behaviour and his writings were central to the movement's appearance to the British public. Hence, like the smallest droplet sending out ever-increasing ripples on the surface of a pool, the above paragraph, when first published in the July edition of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine 1890, has a much more wide-ranging significance than merely being a development in the plot, as Dorian's "life," Wilde's life and the lives of British artists and writers of the fin de siècle undergo a "sea change" in public perceptions when art and morality become inextricably linked. Hence, Wilde's crystallised moment in the life of Dorian Gray is emblematic of a wider movement in society at large.

One important aspect of periodical publications is that they offer a unique insight into cultural changes. A monthly or quarterly publication will reflect changes in society more immediately, as each issue is in itself a "cultural barometer," reflecting and recording the environment in which it was produced. The Century Guild Hobby Horse ran from 1884 until 1894, the very period throughout which the arguments over morality and art were debated heatedly in Britain until the victory for bourgeois conservatism at Wilde's trials in 1895.⁷⁶ The Hobby Horse is of particular interest in this case, as it was a periodical to which Wilde contributed. Upon reading the Hobby Horse, one becomes aware of developing themes and preoccupations amongst the writers and artists that contributed, and through their works one may glean an insight into contemporary issues in society at large. Having singled out Wilde's moment of transition for Dorian, and his own transition in the eyes of his critics, it is possible to discern a more gradual movement from what may be termed "aesthetic" to what became typically known as "decadent" within the pages of the magazine itself.

"Arthur H. Mackmurdo M. C. G." (the suffix standing for "Member of the Century Guild") announces the arrival of The Century Guild Hobby Horse in April 1884 with the inaugural essay "The Guild's Flag Unfurling". Largely opposing the contemporary schools of Naturalism and Realism, the Guild's work will be "characterized by its direct and new presentation of sentiment, rather than by its representation of external sources of sentiment in the material world." (Mackmurdo's italics: April 1884, 9.) Apart from this artistic declaration, Mackmurdo stresses repeatedly the fraternal nature of the group: "one Guild- this super-sensuous sentiment" with "close pressing bonds of kinship and thought." The Romantics are invoked in his statement that the Guild shall represent "creation only in the sense that Shelley uses the word" and in general the ethos of the magazine at its outset places the Hobby Horse firmly within the Arts and Crafts movement. The earlier issues are replete with articles claiming the superiority of the arts of the Middle Ages in such fields as architecture, fine art, music, embroidery, glazing and printing, amongst others, when compared to the lamentable state of contemporary nineteenth century work. This sentiment of a brotherhood of aesthetes, inspired by

an older, chivalric code, and whose sacred quest is the recapture of Art's rightful place at the heart of modern society, is wonderfully encapsulated in Arthur Galton's (1852-1921) sonnet "To The Century Guild" (I, iii, 87):

The Faery Queene of Spencer's mystic page
Sent forth her Knights to deeds of old renown,
Nobly they strove for her, her cause and crown
Pretenders false they slew with righteous rage.
Art is our Queen, for whom stem war we wage
Against all those who dare to tread her down;
Little reck we of stroke, or scoff, or frown,
Who willingly for her our lives engage.
Our Queen is bound; men traffic her for gold,
Base traders hold her royal realms in fee,
Some recreant Knights their brotherhood deny,
Others to Mammon their bright arms have sold.
Her loyal Knights are come to make her free,
They fight until her banner floats on high.

Oscar Wilde's article "Keats' Sonnet on Blue" precedes Galton's poem in the same issue, and reiterates the Guild's ethos in many ways. The article, centred around Mrs Speed's gift to Wilde of an original manuscript of Keats' sonnet, begins with a recollection of his lecture on "the Mission of Art in the Nineteenth Century" during his recent tour of America. Echoing Mackmurdo's earlier declarations opposing Realism, Wilde explains how the manuscript demonstrates that Keats' creative process is essentially "spiritual, not mechanical." He also reaffirms the Romantic connections of the magazine, not only in the fragmentary subject matter itself, but also by claiming that the differing versions of the sonnet allow an insight into Keats' creative process and are of "psychological interest"- this phrase being distinctly reminiscent of Coleridge's view of Kubla Khan's intrinsic merit, after Byron urged him to publish the work. The bulk of the article is taken up with the subtle differences between Wilde's manuscript and the two previously published versions of the sonnet found in Lord Houghton's *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848) and that in A. J. Horwood's copy of *The Garden of Florence*, as published in *Athenaeum*, 3rd June 1876. Wilde refers to "printer's errors" in a footnote to page 84; he notes that the word "of" replaces "to," and "its" replaces "his" in the Horwood version. He goes on to state that "The 'Athenaeum' version inserts a comma after art in the last line, which seems to me a decided improvement, and eminently characteristic of Keats' method." The importance of commas in this case recalls Wilde's languid response to a lady's declaration that "that boy [Wilde] must be working too hard." Wilde agreed saying "I was working on a proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again."

The overall result of Wilde's article is to introduce the reader to tiny, yet treasured philological details. The tone of the piece and the specific changes to the manuscript depict Wilde as a man absorbed by minutiae, who finds beauty in the trivial and for whom Art is an end in itself. Though certainly an example of Wilde's playful

sprezzatura, the effect of this article, along with much of the writing in the Hobby Horse, depicts a closeted world of artists absorbed by aesthetics and largely removed from the concerns of the masses. However, a storm had been brewing that would eventually shatter the tranquillity of this ivory tower, and prove a formidable challenge for Galton's Knights.

May 1885 saw the opening of the Academy's annual exhibition in London and the London Press naturally covered the event, The Times including several articles detailing the various exhibitions therein. On Wednesday 20th May, "Having waited in vain for any public remonstrance," the painter and treasurer of the Academy, John Callcott Horsley, masquerading as the now legendary "British Matron," writing in The Times, began an attack upon the "indecent pictures that disgrace our exhibitions."⁷⁹ The "display of nudity at the[...] Academy" brought about in this unfortunate creature "a burning sense of shame" as the gallery itself became, for her, transformed into a Bosch-like vision of Hell, forcing her

to turn from them with disgust and cause only timid half glances to be cast at the paintings hanging close by [...] lest it should be supposed the spectator is looking at that which revolts his or her sense of decency.

Against this most vicious onslaught of indecency, the Matron announces that a "noble crusade of purity [...] has been started to check the rank profligacy that abounds in our land." Over the following week, eighteen letters were printed by The Times debating nudity in art, before the editor announced that "We cannot publish any more letters on this subject" on Thursday 28th. Two thirds of the letters printed disagreed with the Matron, largely pointing to her lack of education, want of culture and the various flaws in her argument. Opposing letters came from artists such as Edward J. Poynter (whose work at the Academy included a nude based on the statue of the Equiline Venus), young girls, women, parents, and a scathing attack on bourgeois Christianity from Jerome K. Jerome, when he agreed with the Matron "that the human form is a disgrace to decency" but begged her not to castigate the artists "who merely copy Nature. It is God Almighty who is to blame in this matter for having created such an indecent object."

However, the strength of language and the zealous fervour in those letters supporting the Matron spoke louder than any reasoned argument or wit. On Thursday 21st, "Clericus" lends his voice to the Matron's cause, damning the paintings as "an outrage on decency and injurious to morality." The following day "Senex" expands on the issue of morality claiming that artists' models are necessarily exploited, and likens their profession to that of prostitutes. On Saturday 23rd "Another British Matron" claims that her predecessor's letter was "an expression of the feelings of every right-minded man and woman." Describing herself as a mother of children "whom I hope to train up to be an honour to their religion and their country" she launches into a tirade of breathtaking religious and nationalistic ire concerning the influence of nude paintings:

What has the passion for the nude in art done for our neighbours across the Channel that we should view without fear and alarm its introduction and spread among ourselves? [...] Our

honour for ourselves, our love for our daughters, and our regard for the future welfare of our country, whose warriors, statesmen, and citizens are to be born of our daughters, compel us to decry and discountenance, with all our powers, these stealthy, steadfast advances of the cloven foot.

Such nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments were calculated to touch several raw nerves at this particular moment in history. As the articles surrounding these letters in *The Times* demonstrate, Britain was feeling the Imperial strain of the war in The Soudan (General Gordon's demise having occurred but four months earlier), the Afghan border crisis, anarchist dynamiters and ever-increasing problems in Ireland. British Imperialism, Hebraic Christianity (as Arnold might define it), social stability and the great British family itself were under attack; and those foremost in the firingline were those arch-purveyors of all that is evil and destructive- artists. Thus the Matrons' "crusade of purity," or as Wilde prefers in the above quotation, the "curious revival [of] uncomely puritanism" was well under way.

In August 1885 Selwyn Image wrote an essay entitled "On the Representation of the Nude" dealing specifically with matters raised in the letters to *The Times*, and it was published as the inaugural essay in the January issue of the *Hobby Horse*, 1886. Recalling his own inner struggle between religion and art, he clearly identifies the opposing parties of the sensuous world of Art, and a morality based on Christian teaching; yet his purpose in writing the essay is not to attempt to reconcile these opposed parties with Arnoldian, liberal rhetoric; rather he condemns those who try to do so:

I cannot help feeling [...] that when artists or critics or amateurs in general grow very contemptuous over such letters, and are indignant in their protests that all fine art tends towards fine morality,- by which they assume to understand Christian morality,- and that therefore these presentations of the nude, which may be undoubtedly fine art, tend towards fine morality, I cannot help feeling, I say, in part that they must consciously be posing.

His argument rests upon the fact that the number of those for whom the appreciation of painted nudes is purely a matter of educated aesthetics - a detached appreciation of beauty itself - is remarkably small. For the many, in varying degrees, painted nudes must represent titillation, and he argues that

when you hear Christ say that even the imagination of fleshly indulgence is adultery and that no adulterer can enter into his kingdom; when you know how the temptation to such imaginings is everywhere, and that yielding to it is the easiest and the commonest of human yieldings, the victory over it the hardest won of human victories:- with what sort of honour can you say [the "Lord's Prayer"] while you put yourself at all events within the reach of sensuous allurements, and study the fascinations of nakedness?

Prefiguring the decision made by Dorian Gray (and, indeed to some extent the semantics of its articulation) in the opening quotation, Image states that the Christian ideal "is an ascetic ideal[...] with the exuberant and joyous life of the senses, it is in perpetual and deadly antagonism." The life led in accordance to Art is necessarily sensuous, and therefore necessarily sinful. As in his "gospel of sensuousness, as the very foundation for fine art" given at Headlam's meeting in

1889, to Image, popular Christianity and Art are fundamentally opposed and should remain so. His conclusion is not, therefore, one of reconciliation, but is simply a matter of choice: "We must make up our minds. It is a radical question in art come just now to the surface for us: and we must make up our minds what we ought to believe." Rather than countering the attack upon Art in the letters to *The Times*, the *Hobby Horse*, represented in Image's essay, clearly seeks to further the divisions between Christian-based morality and Art.

However, Image's writing, like the man himself, is intrinsically ambiguous. Much of his writing is open to misinterpretation, depending upon the level of insight in the reader. Many readers of Image's essay have not realised which side of the divide Image himself was on. On Tuesday 19th January, *The Scotsman* reviewed the newly re-issued *Hobby Horse* and ridiculed Image's "feeble article on the 'Representation of the Nude,' in which he takes the 'British Matron' of the *Times* to his heart. In a letter to Mackmurdo on the 25th January 1886, Image explains his position:

No, I shall not die of the canny Scotchman's stabs. I would sooner certainly that people did not think me "gushing" and "frenzied" and "feeble" and an embracer of British Matrons: but if they do think it, it cannot be helped, and it will not upset my digestion.

Similarly, a further letter to Mackmurdo around the same time parodies the *British Matron's* thesis in general, and *Senex* specifically. He writes to Mackmurdo anonymously, decrying the "immorality and indecency [...] obtruded on the eyes of our public" to be found in an illustration Mackmurdo submitted to the *British Architect*.⁸⁶ *Senex's* particular complaint is lampooned in the sorry tale of "a young girl for sale, some poor innocent plainly under the protected age of 16, whose winning smiles (sic) smites me to the heart in its unconsciousness of the hideous fate to which you and your accomplices are dragging her." The letter ends, "Repent ere it be too late. A Friend," and once more, if read by one ill-versed in Image's particular form of humour and rhetoric, may be received in precisely the opposite spirit to that intended.

Such mistaken readings of "On the Nude" have continued, with Lorraine Hunt claiming in 1965 that "the Pateristic art-for-art's-sake movement[...] was rejected by Selwyn Image in his essay 'On the Representation of the Nude'" as a foundation for her stoically determined view that "the actual art contents of the *Hobby Horse* do not suggest that the editors were preoccupied with questions of art and morality."⁸⁷ Yet as Image's struggle against the puritans over the music halls illustrates, it is the world of sensuousness and not that of religious bigotry and intolerance, which Image-the-artist is championing. As ever, one has only to examine his poetry to be convinced of the man's personal feelings on such matters. "For the Picture 'Monna Vanna' By D. G. Rossetti," dedicated to Mackmurdo in 1883, illustrates both his "gospel of sensuousness" and the fundamental opposition of morality based on the Gospels, and Art, as proposed in the essay above:

O God, O God, what hast thou done with peace
For one who hath gazed even once on her, felt her kiss,
Felt her bared, glorious bosom fall and lift

With passion of kisses? Felt? - nay, or dreamed like this,
Dreamed that he's seen her, touched her, held her, clung
Till his body and soul were one with her, passed away
Out of mind, out of sense, through a passion of nerves unstrung.

Clearly, for Image, the temptation towards sexual fantasy offered by sensuous paintings was not merely to be defended, but to be positively revelled in. Ascetic, Hebraic Christianity is essentially opposed to the world of Art, and those who seek to defend the artistic world from modern society's attacks must necessarily oppose Christian teaching. Thus, with the battle lines well defined, Selwyn Image takes up a defiant stance against bourgeois morality based upon orthodox Christianity and exhorts his informed readers to do the same.

An important aspect of any periodical is the reader; the meanings of any article must be understood from within the context of its implied readership. As Ian Fletcher has noted, the Hobby Horse, along with other like-minded periodicals, suffered from the "decadent paradox" of trying to balance aesthetics with financial viability.⁸⁹ Due to its highly selective appeal, "300 seems to have been a typical circulation figure for CGHH." Without doubt, the vast majority of those would have been like-minded artists of one colour or another. As such, Image's article may be seen as something of a manifesto or rallying cry for the artists of fin-de-siecle Britain.⁹¹ His is a defiant stance, and as such defines itself very much by what it opposes- i.e. puritanical, Protestant notions of morality. As sensuousness and sexuality are used by the opposition to damn the artistic lifestyle, so sensuousness and sexuality become blazons of the artist.

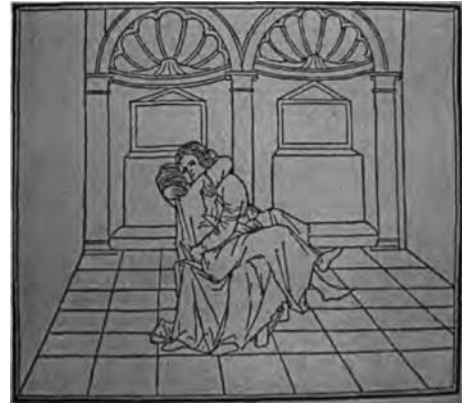
Thus the transition from a detached aestheticism to a more consciously active "decadence" may be seen to take place in 1885 as artists react to their would-be oppressors, and art is forced to take account of morality with a distinct emphasis on the sexual life. Hence, the subject of art and morality, so masterfully transformed into the central conceit of Wilde's fantastic novel and alluded to so disingenuously in his prefatory epigrams in the 1891 edition, first found its popular expression in the papers and periodicals of the mid 1880s; and the choice that Dorian Gray makes is emblematic of the choice forced upon many artists and aesthetes of the 1880s as the two sides became further entrenched.

Following Image's essay, many other works included in the magazine may be seen as representing an emphasis on the sensual, and indeed the sexual, life in art, and depict a defiant reaction to the rising tide of puritanism. The 1888 annual edition includes several works depicting "unconventional"



sexuality, such as the "ruined maid" in Image's poem "Refugium" and the headily sensuous fetishism in his "Of Her Heart-Shaped Locket, Worn Secretly in Her Bosom". The same issue also includes Herbert Home's Hardy-esque tale of premarital sexuality bound up with the death of the beloved in "Amatar Loquitur". Ernest Dowson's personal sexual psychology is reworked in his "A Case of Conscience" as an Englishman abroad falls passionately in love with an underage French girl. The same edition also saw the publication of his poetic masterpiece "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae," with its hypnotic refrain "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion".

Likewise, the artistic contributions to the Hobby Horse become increasingly sexualised, from the inclusion of Frederick Sandys' luxuriously opulent "Danae in the Brazen Chamber" (above) to the erotic woodcuts reproduced from the 1499 Venetian printing of *The Hypnerotomachia* (right).



Volume four contains Charles Haslewood Shannon's supremely sensuous lithograph drawn on stone, "Umbilicus Tuus Crater Tomatilis, Numquam Indigens Poculis. Venter Tuus Sicut Acervus Trici, Vallatus Liliis" (below).



Shannon's Umbilicus Tuus Crater Tornatilis ... (Courtesy of Birmingham Central Library.)

This lengthy Latin title is taken from the Song of Solomon, 7: 2 in the Vulgate Bible, a common source of inspiration for many artistic works in the Hobby Horse:

Your navel is a rounded goblet
that never lacks blended wine.
Your waist is a mound of wheat
encircled by lillies.

In using such a scriptural quotation as his inspiration, Shannon is able to both expand upon the sexuality and sensuality in his art, whilst also condemning the hypocrisy of religiously inspired censorship. This double-edged use of scripture is common amongst many writers of the fin de siècle. The lavish sensuality of *The Song of Solomon* was championed by many seeking to expose the hypocrisy of puritanical Christianity, as it strove to expunge any expression of sensuous sexuality. Pierre Louys' infamous erotic epic, *Aphrodite* (1895), carried under the arm of the defiant Wilde as he was arrested, is a wonderful example of this technique. The entire text is a crescendo of sensuality and erotic suggestiveness, with the chapter "Demetrios' Dream" marking the apex. All the explicit details of the chapter's dizzying erotic heights are directly quoted from the Old Testament:

She throws her veil from her and stands in a narrow garment which clasps her legs and hips.

"I have put off my coat ;
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet ;
How shall I defile them?"

"My beloved put his hand
By the hole of the door
And my bowels were moved for him."

"I rose up to open to my beloved,
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
And my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh
Upon the handles of the lock.
Ah! let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth!"

As Selwyn Image had made plain in his essay on "the Nude," Art and Christian teaching were fundamentally opposed with regard to sensuality. Hence the inherent sensuality, not to mention profound sexual deviancy, that may be found in Christian scripture became one of the most potent weapons in the artists' rhetorical armoury.

From within this air of sexual defiance amongst the artists of the later nineteenth century, flourished the now infamous homosexual counter-culture that would push against the boundaries of acceptable sexuality in Victorian Britain in such publications as *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* (1880-1894) and the ill-fated *Chameleon* (1894), before being crushed by a puritanical judiciary at Wilde's trials in 1895; and again, this may be seen within the pages of the *Hobby Horse*. Ian Fletcher has remarked upon the growing "Uranian theme" in the magazine,⁹⁷ as is reflected in the inclusion of works by John Addington Symonds, Lionel Johnson,

Simeon Solomon, John Gambril Nicholson and Charles Haslewood Shannon, amongst others. Indeed, the magazine included a few works that were quite explicit in their homosexual content. The 1890 annual includes both Symonds' homoerotic "Bion's Lament for Adonis" and Lionel Johnson's "In Praise of Youth" - a poem which would fit perfectly alongside the flagrantly homosexual works of Johnson's fellow Oxonians in *The Chameleon*:

Their eyes on fire, their bright limbs flushed,
They dominate the night with love:
While stars burn and flash above,
These kindle through the dark such flame,
As is not seen, and hath no name:
Can night bear more? Can nature bend
In benediction without end,
Over this love of friend for friend?

The homosexual imagery is unmistakable. Indeed, the flame that "hath no name" would appear to prefigure Alfred Douglas's "Two Loves" published in *The Chameleon*, notable for being one of the poems used to damn Wilde by his prosecutors in 1895. The unpublished letters of Arthur Galton (held in the Dugdale collection) offer an intriguing insight into the authors' intentions in including such deviant material. Johnson wrote to Galton on 4th September 1890 claiming that the poem "touches, I trust, with delicacy, upon Greek virtue and Greek vice," making plain the poet's intention of expressing and promoting homosexuality in his work. Referring to the April issue of 1891, Johnson describes it as "a good number, but most indecent,"⁹⁹ and Simeon Solomon's distinctly androgynous "Bacchus," which opened the July issue of that year, elicited the response from Galton "will not the frontispiece be thought lewd? The title of it is unusually barbarous, even for the vulgate."¹⁰⁰ The "barbarous" title was not present in the final, published issue for July, but Solomon's provocative frontispiece remained.

The risk one took in using outlawed sexuality as a weapon against mainstream society by 1890 may be seen in the fact that Walter Pater declined Wilde's request to review *Dorian Gray* on account of it being "too dangerous" and he advised Wilde to excise the overt references to homosexuality.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, alongside Wilde's revisions, and the addition of extra chapters and sub-plots, Wilde made one very telling alteration. The novel which Lord Henry gives to Dorian is described in the Lippincott's version as embodying the characteristics of "the finest artists of the French School of Decadents." In the Ward, Lock and Co. novel edition of 1891 this school is changed to the "Symbolistes." By 1890 the embodiment of subversive sexuality in art became popularly linked to the term "decadent" (as may be seen in the scathing reviews *Dorian Gray* received upon its publication) and was therefore necessarily immoral, in the eyes of the more conservative elements in society. Karl Beckson has made the valid observation that "The attempt to state precisely what Decadence and Aestheticism mean has led numerous literary historians to dash themselves on the semantic rocks."

Though precise literary definitions of these terms will remain necessarily

enigmatic, this transition within the pages of the Hobby Horse demonstrates the reactive quality of the movement perceived as "decadence." As the aesthete strives to defend his use of the sensuous in artistic depiction, sensuality becomes the central theme of artistic expression, and the resultant works, necessarily more strident in their embodiment of the sensuous, are labelled morally "decadent" by detractors. Thus, the transition Dorian Gray makes from the aesthetic appreciation of beauty, to the decadent life, centred on sensation and illicit sexuality in opposition to the prevailing puritanism, is representative of that taken by the wider circle of artists *infin-de-siecle* Britain, from which the Hobby Horse's contributors were drawn, as subversive sexuality became a weapon against the ascetic, Protestant morality that had its "curious revival" in late Victorian society. The war between the puritans and the artists was well defined by the turn of the last Victorian decade, and they were fighting along the battle-lines drawn up by Selwyn Image in 1885.

7. Selwyn Image and Oscar Wilde Revisited

This chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from section 1.6 of Matthew Tildersley's PhD thesis at Durham University. Entitled The Century Guild Hobby Horse: A Study of British Little Magazines 1884-1897, it was published in 2007.

This reciprocal action between the two bodies of literature also has implications for the author of so many of the works here examined, Selwyn Image. As Wilde's literary works were used as "evidence" of sexual deviancy at his trial, what is to be deduced about the man whose literary works are so similar to those of Wilde as to be considered direct influences? There can be little doubt that several of Image's works here examined display homoerotic, if not homosexual, qualities. In the light of the works here examined, what conclusions may be drawn regarding the Reverend-turned-artist, social rebel-turned-Professor, who was once to be seen "ladling out punch at some Art Workers' Guild festivity, sporting a lady's flaxen wig"?

Image's adoration of Donatello's Boy David, and his fixation with the features of "the loveliest of boys" in Rome or the "ravishing" youthfulness of the "kids at the Grafton" could equally be read as the detached appreciation of beauty in one who has received a Classical education in the arts and is unfettered by gender-biased concepts of beauty. As the Greek view of beauty hailed the young male form as perfection, it is reasonable to suggest that such values would be instilled in students of Greek culture. Image's passionate eulogy for his lost friend, Arthur Burgess, by its very nature is open to varied readings. As Jeffrey Richards has noted, "changes in language and modes of expression render statements of affection from previous ages highly complex and ambiguous matters."¹⁸⁰ Richards also draws parallels between Victorian England and ancient Greece, in that both were male dominated societies. "For the upper middle classes" he claims "life revolved around all-male institutions: the public school, the university, the armed forces, the church, parliament, the club, the City." This section of Victorian society was precisely where Selwyn Image belonged, and as John Tosh notes,

intimate friendships between young men [...] were a further consequence of carefully policed contacts between males and females [of the same class] and the attraction of young men to each other was enhanced by the generally superior quality of their education compared with that of girls. In any society where women are regarded as markedly inferior or different, close friendships between males is likely to flourish. Christian tradition extolled the virtues of spiritual love between men, and familiarity with the Greek classics reinforced the message that what men could give each other was better than anything a woman could offer.

Image's love for Burgess could indeed be "that deep, spiritual affection that is pure and it is perfect" which Wilde so eloquently, yet disingenuously, extolled at his trials. Burgess could well have been to Image what Arthur Hallam was to Tennyson, or Wolcott Balestier to Kipling. On the other hand, as Richards states, "the extravagant language employed between friends may have been born of literary

convention, or it may have been the closest that men of conventional moral conscience could get to expressing carnal affection;" and it is worth noting that the only surviving writings of Image regarding his love for Burgess are cited anonymously.

Furthermore, Image's defence of Wilde in the pages of *The Church Reformer* go far beyond Wilde's case alone, to become a vindication of homosexuality itself. In the article "Morality, The Press, and The Law," Image declares

The law of the land regards the particular form of sensuality of which Mr. Wilde stands accused as a criminal [sic]. I need hardly say that in many ages of the world it has not been so regarded, as it is not so regarded to-day in many European countries [...] But there is undoubtedly a very wide-spread feeling amongst thoughtful Englishmen, with which speaking for myself! most heartily agree, that the law as it at present stands altogether steps outside its province in taking any cognizance of this thing in itself, and is an exceedingly pernicious law which ought to be repealed.

In the masterful rhetoric that follows, Image's article in *The Church Reformer* mirrors much of the work of homosexual apologist writers such as John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter. He argues that all other crimes are so defined by their negative impact upon innocent parties, such as in the cases of public drunkenness and thievery; "but it punishes the man who indulges in this form of sensuality for the mere sensuality itself." Image's assessment of this disparity is that homosexuality is outlawed because it is "sinful." The law's hypocrisy in this matter is then highlighted in the fact that

the sin of adultery with its much more immediate effect upon society it takes no notice of as criminal at all [...] in this *sole* instance, the law punishes a man for a particular action because it has determined that the action is a sin. (Image's italics.)

The result of the law as it stands is a gross interference with "individual liberty in the sphere in which it is on the whole of the highest benefit to society that the individual liberty should be paramount." The secrecy and opportunity for blackmail that are the results of the present law lead to immeasurable "distress" and "incalculable evil." In using the terminology of religion, Image places homosexuality within the same bracket as sensuous art in that it is opposed to puritanical Christianity, and Image the Libertine maintains that, like art, the Law should not be influenced by religious intolerance. This article also has an impact upon so many of Image's writings examined thus far, in that here the term "sensuality" is clearly a necessary substitute for the more accurate "sexuality." Viewed in such a light, Image's "gospel of sensuousness" and his attack on puritanism's fevered opposition to "the free life of the senses," may indeed be read as being much more direct references to sexual libertinism.

Throughout the writings of Selwyn Image there is sufficient evidence to assert that conventional morality was far from being a guiding force in his life. As John Tosh notes, profound physical restrictions on young women in the middle classes ensured that "middle-class girls were off limits" to young middle-class men. "Sexual experience," he concludes, "meant crossing class lines." This is precisely what

Image did in his befriending young female performers in the music halls and ultimately marrying a dancer. Indeed, Image's marriage is unconventional in almost every aspect, when compared to Tosh's outline of respectable middle-class constructions of masculinity. He gives a rough estimate of "late marriage" due to the middle-class financial requirements for wedlock, to be when the groom is 27 years old, and states that "indefinite delay" in marriage "was not a comfortable option for anyone who respected convention." Image's "performance" of his own masculinity (when compared to Tosh's standard) is anything but well-defined and conventional. "Only marriage could yield the full privileges of masculinity," writes Tosh. "To form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them - these things set the seal on a man's gender identity." All of these considerations seem to be of the least importance to Image, who put off marriage until the age of 52. He married well below his own social class (compounded by his wife's, to many, "unseemly" profession) and even then, never raised a family. Clearly issues of gender definition and a clear cut sense of masculinity were of no concern to Selwyn Image.

Image's heterosexual desire is overtly manifest in much of his earlier, published poetry. But as mentioned in chapter one, only a very small fragment of his poetic output has yet been made publicly available, and the vast majority of his early letters and poetry are now lost. The reasons for this state of affairs are open to any and all interpretations at the present time, from the mundane to the flamboyantly sublime. In his "Bundle of Letters" a homosexual subtext is unquestionably present. Yet this is not a definitive argument for Image being bisexual. He may simply have been playing with the issues of literary censorship and enjoying "crossing the line" unnoticed and unheeded, or simply fighting the corner for homosexuality in the same way in which he allied himself with the music hall dancers. Nevertheless, he tells us in his poetry that "forbidden ways invite," and he would have been no stranger to London's homosexual society at the fin-de-siecle; locations such as the Alhambra, and even Image's home address of Fitzroy Street, are significant points on Neil Bartlett's clandestine map of homosexual Victorian London.

Ultimately, the problem of definition in such matters as sexuality is shown to be a fundamental problem with the act of defining. Linda Dowling's Foucaultian concept of a battle for the dominant discourse at Oscar Wilde's trials is of particular relevance here. She uses Wilde's speech on "the love that dare not speak its name" as the key example of Wilde seeking to define himself, rather than be defined by his accusers. Jeffrey Richards dwells on the same event, recalling Wilde as "classically defining the Platonic ideal," but goes on to state that the trials exposed the fact that his "conduct was the exact opposite of what he had advocated in the dock." However, this is not an accurate appraisal of the situation. Wilde being one thing does not negate him also being another. Saint Oscar, and Sinner C.3.3. are one and the same. Wilde's personal discourse is polyphonic (though at the trials he may have wished otherwise).

Both Image and Wilde were products of a singular type of education, not merely restricted to Oxford, but also restricted to a very narrow timescale. Both had instilled in them the notion of defining one's own unique and masterful personality, and both

succeeded in doing so most admirably. Although their later lives followed distinctly different paths, this notion of singularity defined them both, making either one singularly impossible to define.
