



The Renaissance Revival in English Literature

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In literature between 1870 and 1914 motives and characters originating from the Italian Renaissance can be found in increasing frequency. This phenomenon is also to be observed in German and – to a lesser degree – in French and Italian literature. It comes into view in two ways. Firstly, there are certain historical characters and events, for example Cesar Borgia or the reign of the Medici family. Secondly, characters fashioned after Renaissance models (e.g. the universal man, ‘uomo universale’) appear in contemporary surroundings.

A new interest in the Renaissance began in the field of history and arts. In 1848, the Arundel Society was founded and its work – particularly a series of 200 coloured reproductions of early Italian masters like Giotto, Fra Angelico or Perugino published between 1856 and 1897 – made these painters famous and drew some attention towards Renaissance art. Additionally, the National Gallery exerted an important influence on the public. The question as to whether its role was to instruct or please the public influenced the Gallery’s buying policy heavily. From 1855 on, its director Charles Eastlake acquired paintings from various Italian schools, but particularly from Florence and from the High Renaissance (1450-1540). As early as 1863, he remarked on the National Gallery’s role in stimulating a growing love for art and improving the public’s taste (Hale, 120). In literature, the Renaissance revival had its forerunners in the romantics, some of whom actually lived in Italy for a time, such as Byron and the Shelleys or Robert Merry and the Della Crusicans. They had already written on heroic characters and great artists of the Renaissance, for example *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice* (1820/21) and *The Lament of Tasso* (1817) by Byron or Shelley’s *The Cenci* (1819). The English translation of Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* (1850-52) as well as of Grimm’s *Life of Michael Angelo* served as source and inspiration for several Victorian writers, among others Robert Browning with his poem on the painter Andrea del Sarto (1855).¹

However, the interest of the next generation of writers shifted to a different aspect. They recognised the importance of arts and letters during this era, but the focus of their attention was an exceptional type of character arising in the Renaissance. It displayed a fascinating mix of traits: physical and intellectual strength combined with passion and aesthetic refinement, the struggle for power, cruelty and violence seemingly without regrets. In this regard, historian and poet John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) shaped the imagination of his contemporaries. In his *Renaissance in Italy* (1875-1886), he paints a vivid picture of a time when men lived most wholly, developing a highly perfected individuality and striving for beauty, but not necessarily for goodness. Liberated from medieval superstitions and lies about sin and sexuality, a resurrection of the body took place. Fascinated by great individuals

and violence, Symonds relishes in contrasts of good and evil. According to Hale, he presents “a race of natural aristocrats, unbound by convention, free to become whatever they willed, indifferent to the herd” (Hale, 189).² This image proved to be very fruitful.

Walter Pater provided the philosophical foundation for this revived interest. In his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), he not only presents a new type of art criticism, but also the outlines of a striking theory of perception. The ‘Conclusion’ culminates in the famous proclamation: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end . . . To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (Pater, 210). Among his admirers was Oscar Wilde who turned his master’s theory into literature. Accordingly, he chose the Renaissance as background for his early play *The Duchess of Padua* (1883) and *A Florentine Tragedy* (1894). What drives the characters of these plays is the endeavour to experience the distinctive and special moment, to achieve heightened and sharpened perception no matter what the consequences of their actions might be.

Other poets followed Pater’s gospel as well: Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson were even labelled as “new Marlowes”, but mainly for their lifestyle – Johnson allegedly died after a pub fight.³ In their poetical works, both attempted to renew neglected forms of Renaissance poetry independently from the English “Parnassians” Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson and Edmund Gosse, who concentrated on French forms. In *Adrian Rome* (1899), a novel Dowson wrote in collaboration with Arthur Moore, we find a protagonist who is not only rich, but highly talented artistically, being both a poet and a painter. Adrian expresses a very distinctive view on life: “To be concerned with high passions, to live as fully and intensely as one could, rather than as long and as peacefully as one might, – it seemed to him that it was only under such conditions that the born artist could properly work out his salvation” (Dowson and Moore, 44). This sounds familiar to the reader of Pater’s works and it is safe to state that we find here repercussions of Pater’s teaching. *Marius the Epicurean* was published in 1885, the year before Dowson went to Oxford where Pater was teaching at Brasenose. In his letters, he frequently mentions that he is reading Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* and inserts quotes from the novel.⁴

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) dreamt of a different Renaissance. To him it was not only a period in history, but the age of the artistic and passionate, an event which he hoped to renew in his own time. It was derived from Italian Renaissance and English Renaissance literature (e.g. Spenser and Jonson) mainly, but the poets of the Pléiade also worked an influence on him. Before 1900, Pater’s writings had furnished him with the theory of ‘Renaissance man’, but after that he converted Pater’s views in order to develop a new literary style which was intricately connected to a new conception of personality and entailed reshaping his own personality (Chapman, 11, 50). In his *Autobiographies* we find numerous remarks on the Renaissance like the following: “Somewhere about 1450 . . . men attained to personality in great numbers, ‘Unity of Being’, and became like ‘a perfectly proportioned human body’” (Yeats, 291).

In 1903 he read Baldassare Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* (orig. Italian: *Il libro del Cortegiano* 1528) in Hoby’s translation for the first time (Chapman, 24). This conduct book provided him with the concept of “sprezzatura”, meaning effortless skill or feigned carelessness which became a central feature of Yeats’ aristocratic ideal. While touring Ireland with fellow Rhymer (and Pater protégé) Arthur Symonds in 1896, Yeats made the acquaintance of Lady Augusta Gregory. Lady Gregory acted not only as his patroness (Yeats, 407-09), but was

likened to the Duchess of Urbino, who was praised by Castiglione.⁵ In his letters to her he proposed a modern court at her house Coole Park resembling that of Urbino. To him Urbino and Coole Park stood for a world at one with itself, with aristocratic values which he considered lost in the society of his own time. In contrast, the era of the *Courtier* resembled an age, when the unity of being and of one's personality was unquestioned.⁶ In the poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" (1918) he laments the death of her son Robert praising him as "soldier, scholar, horseman, our Sidney and our perfect man", in short Castiglione's perfect courtier.⁷

Apart from these examples, where do we find allusions to the Renaissance in English literature towards the end of the nineteenth century? Inspired by aesthetic critics like Walter Pater and historians like John Addington Symonds, poets like A.C. Swinburne and Stephen Phillips wrote tragedies using characters and events taken from Italian Renaissance history.¹⁰ Regularly chosen topics comprised famous love stories (like Paolo and Francesca in Dante's *Divina Commedia*),¹¹ the life of the great artists, ruthless tyrants or degraded priests. Apart from subject matter, John Ruskin and J.A. Symonds rediscovered Renaissance literature and published it in new editions. As I have mentioned earlier, some poets, for instance Ernest Dowson, took up old types of stanza and metres of Italian and French origin and applied them to the English language. The Renaissance revival in literature is part of a wider stream, which has a theoretical and philosophical background. In England, there are two scholars to be named in this context: John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Walter Pater (1839-1894). In his Oxford days, Oscar Wilde had been a student of both Ruskin and Pater. Both had distinctive views on the Renaissance that differed sharply. For Ruskin, the advent of Renaissance art caused the end of the more valuable Gothic art with its calm, serenity, devotion and truth (John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, 1854). The emergence of the individual was not this period's central feature, but pride and infidelity, which led to the separation of form from content and the displacement of truth by beauty. Due to a new more scientific approach in developing artistic skills and techniques, the importance of learning grew, at the same time reducing the social position of the craftsman. In Ruskin's view, the only way to save modern civilisation was the restoration of pre-Raphaelite art, thus engendering the regeneration of society through art.

In contrast to Ruskin who stressed the aspect of morals in art, Pater presented a captivating new vision of the Renaissance. His *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) did not present a remote scholarly discussion of a certain period in history. In his essays, he combined the discussion of literature, philosophy, painting and art history as well as their reception throughout Europe. To him, the term "Renaissance" did not only designate an age, but a unique phenomenon, which he characterises as follows:

An age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralised, complete. Here, artists and philosophers and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts. There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate. (Pater, xiii-xiv)

Here, we come across the notion that a new type of personality is developing. This type turns up in two different modes, the first described by Symonds as passionate, highly cultivated aristocrats of mind. Castiglione portrays the second mode in his *Book of the Courtier* (1528). In the second half of the nineteenth century, a complete

personality like this, effortlessly pursuing a variety of interests on an advanced level, including sports and art, was becoming an outdated model. In the age of industrialisation with its strong belief in progress and the advancement of natural science specialists were required. Pater objects to this. He derives his ideal from Renaissance models linking self-fashioning as a prominent aspect of Renaissance man to a modern theory of perception and philosophy of mind.

We find these modern theories outlined in the notorious “Conclusion” of the *Studies*. Pater explains how our apparently continuous life falls apart into sheer moments when analysed closely: it is merely “a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought” (Pater, 208). Everything is in flow – we are subjected to constant change. “To such a tremulous whip constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is *real* in our life fines itself down” (209-10). What we would define as real in our life proves to be nothing more than moments and impressions (Austrian philosopher Ernst Mach, 1838-1916, declares the end of the concept of a unified I in his preface to *Analyse der Empfindungen*, 1885). Philosophy, religion and art are only means to alert one’s mind, to cause sharp and precise observations and to incite new impressions and intense moments. It is this context which generates probably the most famous quotation:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. . . . How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. (210)

Given that “reality” disintegrates upon closer inspection, it is experience, impression and passion providing a sense of real life by way of their intensity. Through this intensity, the spirit becomes momentarily free. Nevertheless, the search for impulses strong enough to render this widening of horizons must not stop:

While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems, by a lifted horizon, to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend. . . . With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. (211)

The aim in life is to get “as many pulsations as possible” in order to keep up a “quickened sense of life” (ibid.) and “a quickened, multiplied consciousness” (212, 213). Pater proposes several realms where these pulsations might be found, but there is one especially qualified: “Art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake” (ibid.).

The difference to the historical age of Renaissance is obvious: for Pater, discovery and examination of the world is no longer an end in itself, but only in terms of what it means to the observer. What he intends is not the perception of the outside world, but the perception of perception itself. He is not interested in real objects, but in the impressions they bring about. Experience itself is important, refinement and intensity of senses and stimuli, the creation of moods and moments of ecstasy – all of which can be experienced through art in the most perfect manner. Much to Pater’s

discontent, it was above all else this line of thought in the “Conclusion” that fascinated especially his younger readers. Unfortunately, they took it to mean to achieve refinement of senses and intense experience that Pater strongly disapproved of. Consequently, he suppressed the “Conclusion” in later editions.

The early works of Oscar Wilde display many examples concerning Renaissance elements. Literary criticism has almost forgotten his early poetry and tends to neglect his early play *The Duchess of Padua* (1883) as well as *The Florentine Tragedy* (1894). Even in his first piece of published prose in 1877, the review of the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in London, Wilde uses Renaissance elements in his writing, for example comparing G. F. Watts’ painting *Love and Death* (1875) with Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. Throughout his review, he introduces himself as an art critic of higher sensibility and finer perception than most of his contemporaries who has not only his native, but European cultural heritage at his hands. Picking this exhibition for his début as an art critic, serves two purposes. Firstly, he sides with avant-garde painting in Britain, breaking with the traditionalistic and conservative Royal Academy and particularly its narrow-minded Hanging Committee.¹² Secondly, he treads along the lines of popular beliefs advocated by Ruskin and Lindsay, who tirelessly asserted that English art needed new spirit and pointed at early Renaissance Italian painting.¹³ Furthermore, Wilde manages to include more or less subtle references to both his teachers in Oxford, Ruskin and Pater, whose teachings diverged unmistakably. Wilde sent a copy of his article published in July 1877 in *Dublin University Magazine* to Pater who approved of the young man’s taste and knowledge (Wilde had quoted his Botticelli essay) topping his praise by inviting him to Oxford.¹⁴

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-91), Wilde already employs the witty dialogue, aphorisms and paradoxes or, to put it differently, the style and wit most readily identified with his later drama. Therefore, the society scenes here anticipate his style in the comedies. However, there is a second element suggesting that *Dorian Gray* might be perceived as a link between his earlier works and the comedies: the use of Renaissance elements – a characteristic feature of his early work up to 1891.

In *Dorian Gray*, this takes place by way of allusions, firstly to certain characters and secondly to art and decoration. Regarding the latter, Dorian enjoys lavish decoration and consequently Renaissance lamps and Venetian glass are some of the antique objects he chooses. In his own country house, Selby, he discovers “some curious Renaissance tapestries” (Wilde, 77) which he uses to redecorate the bedroom in his town house. Dorian’s collection of jewels and pearls leads us to the first aspect, that of Renaissance characters. The young man relishes the stories associated with the precious stones. Several of them are related to the Renaissance. “How exquisite life had once been! How gorgeous in its pomp and decoration! Even to read of the luxury of the dead was wonderful” (109). There is a certain sense of loss in these lines and a longing for a time when it was common for people to indulge in refined luxuries.

Moreover, the Renaissance represents particularly the enigmatic combination of beauty and evil. Dorian recounts stories of cruel and passionate characters of the time, which he claims to have read in Chapter 9 of the “yellow book” he borrowed from Lord Henry. Although Wilde does not explicitly state either author or title, it is not very difficult to find out that the notorious poisonous book is Joris-Karl Huysman’s *Against Nature* (1884). Oddly enough, the tales of betrayal, revenge and

murder Dorian admires are not to be found there, but invented by Wilde. For Dorian, the stories “pictured the awful and beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made monstrous or mad; Filippo, Duke of Milan, who slew his wife, and painted her lips with a scarlet poison that her lover might suck death from the dead thing he fondled” (114).

Not only Italian chronicles generate tales like this, but Dorian’s own family history also contributes some more. Even his birth is part of a tragic love affair: his mother, a beautiful and romantic heiress of noble ancestry, refused all suitors of her class and eloped with a young soldier to Belgium. His grandfather paid an adventurer to insult him in public and in the ensuing duel his son-in-law was killed brutally. Brought back to England the pregnant young woman never spoke again to her father and died shortly after giving birth to Dorian.¹⁵

Lord Henry seizes the opportunity of becoming a guide or tutor to orphaned Dorian, the “son of Love and Death” (41). His approach resembles that of an artist, only he does not work with formless clay or marble waiting to be moulded, but with a young man. The form is already there – he compares Dorian’s beauty to old Greek marbles – so that his task is slightly different. Lord Henry puts himself in the same line with Plato and Michelangelo, pursuing the same aim in different ages: trying to reveal eternal perfection and beauty by way of creating worldly beauty, or art. In this case the work of art seems to be different, it is neither painting nor sculpture but a life: “To project one’s soul into some gracious form” (41). Lord Henry attempts to fill into Dorian’s form his own ideas and convictions and bring him thus to life.

This project modifies the Renaissance concept of artist as creator, but with a special twist. Working with living matter provides a peculiar thrill: “there was a real joy in that – perhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims” (41). Meeting Dorian for the first time in Basil Hallward’s studio, he instantly realises that he has found the ideal object. While Hallward finishes his portrait of Dorian, Lord Henry begins his work explaining the concept of “new hedonism” to him: “The aim of life is self-development. To realise one’s nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for” (29).

Dorian adopts this program of life as a work of art, seeking ever stranger pleasures and trying to realise his fantasies. Nevertheless, to the ones who know him only in society he becomes “the true realisation of a type . . . that was to combine something of the real culture of the scholar with all the grace and distinction and perfect manner of a citizen of the world . . . He seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to ‘make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty’ ” (103).¹⁶ In other words, Dorian personifies the modern variation of the Renaissance courtier, described in Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* (1528). This manual of court behaviour with its emphasis upon manner served as a “practical guide for a society whose members were nearly always on stage . . . a model for the formation of an artificial identity” (Greenblatt, 162). Due to the emphasis put on theatricality, on dissimulation and feigning and the attention to surfaces, its program fits in neatly with Dorian’s demeanour in society.

Apart from his appearance in public, there is a darker side to him. Life according to Lord Henry’s teaching is not as easy as Dorian thought initially. His friend had told him: “Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is purification” (29). Yet his sins do have consequences: Dorian realises that pleasure and elevation only last for the moment. Since the picture carries the signs and stigmata of his life, he

is able to carry on. All the rumours do not seriously hurt his reputation, because he still has “youth’s passionate purity” (29) about him. This enables him to a certain extent to live above law and convention. Morals do not apply to him, because he is a special and rare individual whose only obligation is his own self-perfection. Dorian is aware of Lord Henry’s unique influence, but does not realise its real extent, because it parallels his own instincts and thoughts.

In contrast to the fairy-tale element of the secretly kept portrait revealing his moral decline, there is a distinctly modern thought in the way Dorian reflects on his family history. His country house, Selby, does not only provide tapestries, the “frescoes of the Northern nations of Europe” (109), but a picture gallery with his ancestors’ portraits. Dorian Gray is the last descendant of a family whose lineage reaches back as far as the English Renaissance, the reign of Elizabeth I. Looking at the paintings, he contemplates his heritage and wonders whether it is their lives he leads: “had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own?” (112-113). He ponders whether it might be possible that he inherited not only their beauty and grace, but also their inclination to sin and debauchery. In this line of thought there is an almost scientific understanding of vice passed on to later generations either according to the theory of heredity or to the idea of infection. Here, we find traces of the program of naturalism established by Zola. If the same laws apply to nature and society, then vice, its origin and consequences has to be regarded and evaluated by methods developed by the natural sciences, in this case medical science.¹⁷

In Wilde’s novel, the Renaissance serves mainly as an historical example of a highly-cultivated age, when beauty, luxury, passion and evil were closely connected; an age, when only a few superior individuals possessed the strength, courage and imagination to lead a life solely bent towards the aim of self-perfection.

In his book on *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt rejects the stereotype of autonomy as the central issue in the Renaissance: “What *is* central is the perception . . . that there is . . . a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities” (Greenblatt, 1). One of these changes entails that formerly fixed social positions give way and thus social mobility depends not any more on heredity, but on abilities and merits, on strength and willpower. Another factor is the corruption of the Catholic Church, which together with a growing Paganism – especially on the part of the educated people due to their admiration of the classical cultures – led to an erosion of the moral landscape. Greenblatt lists the sources of Renaissance anxiety as follows: “a sharp population increase, the growth of cities, . . . the rapid expansion of certain key industries, the realignment of European-wide economic forces” (Greenblatt, 88). Looking at British and European societies at the turn of the century, this list sounds oddly familiar. Writers at the brink of the twentieth century faced a change no less grave and looked back in time in order to find inspiration for the question of how to cope with the challenges of modernity. This multi-faceted literary fashion of Renaissance revival flourished mainly in the genre of historical drama between 1890 and 1910, but regarded as a whole its popularity did not mirror literary quality. Stephen Phillips (1864-1915), for instance, tried to revive poetic drama and grand style for his plays and was highly praised. Critics declared him a peer of Sophocles and Dante for his *Paolo and Francesca*, he himself aiming at Milton (Buckley, 238-40). Despite his

huge success (publisher John Lane stated that for some time each new Phillips volume sold by subscription ten thousand copies [Buckley, 271]), he was soon forgotten.

Frederick William Rolfe (1860-1913), on the other hand, never earned much money through his writing. He claimed that his publishers and the press were responsible for his failure – financially and in life generally – and was therefore very quick to start a law suit, but never doubted his own genius. A devout Catholic convert from Scotland, he had been rejected by the Church and took to writing. During his stay at the Scots College in Rome he met the Duchess Sforza-Cesarini who endowed him with the title of “Baron Corvo” which is only one of his numerous explanations for his title. In 1901 he published *Chronicles of the House of Borgia*, a historical study showing his admiration for the Borgia family and their “swift, vivid, violent age” (Symons, 121). With the expressive images and dramatic pictures, extraordinary wording and ingenious surmises it definitely stands out compared to other historical works. Being enthralled with this age, he took it up again for his next book, the novel *Don Tarquinio: A Kataleptic Phantasmatic Romance* (1905). In the prologue Rolfe/Corvo claims it to be a transcription of an original manuscript written by Don Tarquinio Santacroce in 1523. It describes twenty-four hours in March 1495, the fortunate day of the “handsome daredevil young Roman Patrician” (Letter to Herbert Rolfe, 25 March 1905) Tarquinio. In this letter to his brother, Rolfe/Corvo gives a summary of the novel:

During these 24 hours, he made friends with Lucrezia Borgia and her brother Giaffredo, ran 26 miles, disguised, with a cypher message printed on his back, for Caesar (called) Borgia (by which means the latter was enabled to escape from King Charles VIII of France, who held him as hostage, married Hersilia Manfredi; and won so much favour from Pope Alexander VI (Borgia) that His Holiness magnificently removed the Great Ban from Santacroce. (ibid.)

Clearly, Rolfe reused the knowledge he had gathered for the *Chronicles*. Although studded with footnotes, the style in this novel is striking for its concentration on the senses, especially on vision – colours and surfaces are described effusively:

Indian oarsmen propelled [the barge]; and the colour of their flesh resembled the colour of a field of ripe wheat when as some delicate zephyr sways the stems in the sunlight not more than half-revealing poppies: but their eyes were like pools of ink, fathomless, upon glittering mother o’-pearl, very beautiful, and quite unintellectual. (Rolfe, 21)

This example shows how *Don Tarquinio* approaches the brink of decadence stereotype. Thus the literary fashion of Renaissance revival deteriorated to a merely stereotypical treatment by writers who only benevolently may be called minor; their works becoming involuntarily parodies of what had started as a movement based on philosophy and history.

¹ Naturally there are more literary witnesses: Robert Browning’s poems *My Last Duchess* (1842) and *Fra Lippo Lippi* (1855) or George Eliot’s novel *Romola* (1863). In Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) we find an account of the Italian Risorgimento, the struggle for freedom from foreign powers Spain, France and Austria, which eventually led to the unification of Italy under King Victor Emanuel II in 1861. Apart from biblical allusions, Barrett Browning links these events with many references to antiquity and Renaissance culture thereby ennobling the liberation movement.

² We find this concept in Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings such as *Genealogy of Morals* (1887, English translation 1899) and in German and French instances of the Renaissance revival in literature.

³ Fletcher lists different accounts of Johnson’s death: from being knocked down by a hansom-cab while being intoxicated to collapsing and fracturing his skull on his way to the offices of the *Daily Chronicle*.

The true course of events is rather dreary. Due to his heavy alcoholism, Johnson spent his time between his rooms and the pubs in the Fleet street area. On Monday, 29 September 1902, he ended up in the pub 'The Green Dragon', where he "perched himself on a barstool which he then fell off" (Fletcher lviii). Having lost consciousness, he was rushed into hospital, but died two days later. According to the post-mortem he had suffered a stroke.

It was Dowson who led a life of "wine and blood and reckless harlotry" as Ernest Rhys wrote in "Lines on Marlow" in the first *Book of the Rhymers' Club* (1892). This parallel was frequently remarked on by John Gray who addressed him as "Kit" or "Kit Dowson" (Adams, 38).

⁴ For example, in his letters to Arthur Moore, c.f. his letter dated 28 March 1890: "There is a certain grief in things as they are" (Adams, 190). The young man loved the book so much that "after leaving university he purchased his own [copy], despite thereby leaving himself financially embarrassed" (Adams, 12).

⁵ The news of her being very seriously ill leaves him devastated: "All Wednesday I heard Castiglione's phrase ringing in my memory, 'Never be it spoken without tears, the Duchess, . . . is dead', and that phrase, which . . . often moved me till my eyes dimmed, brought before me now all his sorrow and my own, as though one saw the worth of life fade for ever" (Yeats, 478). Chapman points out, that for fear of breaching Victorian manners Yeats was reluctant to praise Lady Gregory outright in Renaissance fashion, but mythologised Coole Park nevertheless (Chapman, 128-141, 130 esp.).

⁶ There are several poems to be named, among others "To a Wealthy Man" (1912) and "The People" (1915) or the epigrams in *The Green Helmet* (1910). Yeats was occupied with the Renaissance all his literary life. In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize and the reception in the Royal Palace makes him wonder about courts throughout history. He proposes the Renaissance court of Urbino described by Castiglione as the model court. Then he contemplates on how a modern version could work: "And now I begin to imagine some equivalent gathering to that about me, called together by the heads of some State where every democratic dream had been fulfilled, and where all men had started level and only merit . . . ruled" (*Autobiographies*, 546). Cf. Burke and Salvadori.

⁷ Next to Gregory (and John Synge) Lionel Johnson appears in the poem, "courteous to the worst" (Allt and Alspach, 324) and one of the passionate dead. On Yeats, Johnson, Dowson and fellow members of the Rhymers's Club see Gardner.

¹⁰ Symonds worked on this topic throughout his life: 'The Renaissance', Oxford Prize Essay 1863; *History of the Italian Renaissance* (1875-86); *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article 'Renaissance' (1885); the translation of *The autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* (1886). Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Marino Faliero. A tragedy* (1885); *The Duke of Gandia* (1908). Stephen Phillips, *Paolo and Francesca* (1899); *Pietro of Siena* (1901).

¹¹ *Divina Comedia*, "Inferno" V, 70 – 142. Francesca da Rimini falls in love with her husband's brother Paolo Malatesta. Gianciotto, the husband, finds them out and kills both his brother and his wife. This story provides several subjects to follow up – betrayal, honour, love and beauty.

¹² Many artists disapproved of the Academy's favouritism, which did not allow for innovative art to be presented here. Edward Burne-Jones, for instance, was refused to exhibit, although he was a distinguished artist already. Sir Coutts Lindsay felt the need for an alternative exhibition venue and founded the Grosvenor Gallery (Holland, 13; Staley).

¹³ This belief informed "the competition for the frescoes in the new houses of Parliament", that were completed in 1868. Anna Jameson, self-appointed art historian, "compared the contest to that held for the gates of the Florentine Baptistery" in 1401 (Hale, 158-9).

¹⁴ See Merlin Holland, "From Madonna Lily to Green Carnation" (in Sato and Lambourne, 13-18).

¹⁵ Dorian himself never refers to his own story throughout the novel. Lord Henry inquires as to his tragic family background and its summary might serve as a short description for a drama: "A beautiful young woman risking everything for a mad passion. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous, treacherous crime. Months of voiceless agony, and then a child born in pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man" (Wilde, 40-1).

¹⁶ Followed by the sentence: "Like Gautier, he was one for whom 'the visible world existed'" (Wilde, 103). Théophile Gautier was one of the eminent figures of the French art for art's sake movement paving the way for symbolism. Wilde attempts to combine Renaissance aspirations with modern theories.

¹⁷ We find examples for that especially in French literature, for instance in naturalistic novels by Emile Zola, which were available in an inexpensive translation. It took some time before the realist movement started in Britain with Thomas Hardy, George Moore and sketches of slum life by Arthur Morrison. See Jackson (Chapter xvi: 'The New Fiction').

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