Rediscovering Herbert Horne

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CHAPTER 1

The Early Phase

Herbert Horne’s name is probably more familiar to historians of art than to those concerned with literary history. His work on Botticelli remains authoritative and he preserves a minor but honourable place in the history of design, largely through his connexion with A. H. Mackmurdo and the Century Guild. But Horne’s activities were not confined to these fields. He was a scholarly and elegant typographer and book designer, a connoisseur who on small means built up a remarkable collection of eighteenth-century water colours, and as an architect he made a small but distinct contribution.

From 1886 to 1891 he was virtual editor of the Century Guild Hobby Horse and he edited its successor the Hobby Horse which ran from 1893 to 1894. This was perhaps the most complete example of an English “Total Art” periodical with its hand-made paper, specially designed initials, borders and typography, and programmatic content. That content places it in the late Pre-Raphaelite Arts and Crafts tradition, but with occasional anticipations of Art Nouveau. Horne was also one of the minor poets of the period, and although he was only twenty-six when the Rhymers’ Club was formed, his authority in matters of taste was already such that he was able to assume
the role of mentor. With Lionel Johnson, W. B. Yeats and, to a lesser degree, Arthur Symons, he gave that cénacle such coherence of doctrine as it possessed. Yet in spite of his distinguished gifts and achievements, Horne had no place in the Dictionary of National Biography, though he himself contributed to the earlier, more useful volumes. His poetry was only part of his many-sided activities, and was abandoned early for severer pursuits.

Herbert Percy Horne was born in London on 18 February 1864 at the house of his maternal grandfather John Rowland Gibson, a surgeon, of 10 Russell Square, London. He was the son of Horace Horne and Hannah Louisa Porter. Horne's father's fortune has been derived from and had declined with the business of horse carriers. From his father, Horne derived his ardent interest in collecting. By the time Herbert was attending Miss Moore's day school at 8 Hereford Street, Kensington, at about the age of ten, he had already begun to collect scraps of old glass and to take brass rubbings. Here he came under the influence of one of his masters, Daniel Barron Brightwell, art critic and later editor of the Birmingham Weekly Post, whose work appeared under the pseudonym "Rufus." Horne was to remember Brightwell always with respect and affection, though his tastes naturally diverged from those of his old master. At Miss Moore's he also encountered Randall Davies who was to be his friend for over forty years. Davies was deeply interested in literature, art history and collecting, and was to become Horne's literary executor.

After a period at Kensington Grammar School, Horne was articled to a relative, George Vigers, who practiced as a surveyor in Old Jewry in the City of London. About 1880, the Horne family had moved to 6 Newton Grove in the West London garden suburb of Bedford Park, built by E. W. Godwin, Norman Shaw, E. J. May and others in a style which G. K. Chesterton was to describe as "sometimes Elizabethan
and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical." During his adolescent years, therefore, Horne moved in what can fairly be described as an artistic *ambient*, for Bedford Park, if not quite the aesthetic quarter of popular journalistic description, had many notable residents, literary men, actors, academics, and was full of talking clubs and amateur theatricals.² Probably at this time Horne read Pater's *Renaissance* and acquired his first interest in the quattrocento.

Towards the end of 1880, Horne had encountered some of A. H. Mackmurdo's drawings, obtained an introduction and enquired whether Mackmurdo would be prepared to give instruction in architectural drawing and design. Horne probably joined Mackmurdo about 1882, the year in which Mackmurdo had founded the Century Guild. This was the first of the Arts and Crafts Guilds specifically designed to unite the arts. Impressed by Horne's abilities, Mackmurdo decided to take him into partnership, and a letter from Horace Horne to Mackmurdo of 2 June 1883 sets out the terms of agreement: for the first year Herbert Horne was to receive fifty pounds and commission on work bought by him; at the end of that year he was to be taken into full partnership, receiving for the next three years a third and subsequently one half of the profits.⁵

On both Mackmurdo and his close friend, Selwyn Image, Horne seems to have made a bold impression, and the Century Guild offices on the first floor at 28 Southampton Street were filled with discussion, verse-writing and theorizing in general about art and life. The archives of the Museo Horne, Florence, contain a number of manuscripts which record Horne's views: a rather sentimental Anglo-Catholicism and Pre-Raphaelitism counterpoint to the harsher antinomian precepts of Blake. Horne struggled toward the recognition of the dual elements in his nature—the voluptuary and the precisian—which as Fritz Saxl pointed out were to be finally and fruitfully united in
the passionately accurate scholarship of his last years. The following rough extract, for example, seems to cut Blake down to the size of Selwyn Image, for its doctrine anticipates Image's polemics against Impressionist art:

Male and female created he them—the dual, the knower and the lover
the poetic nature is the marriage of Heaven & Hell—
You shall be as Gods knowing good and evil—
The torrid and the frigid interwove—entangled
recreated each of each all these finer battles which escape a coarse crude net of words.
On his right is science—pure, cold, intellect and the religion of such intellect—puritanism, that would be destroyer of art. On his left pure naked flesh where religion is lust ever striving to seduce art.
Body and soul one in the scientist's sense of the word—one in the monk's sense of the word.
Therefore the influence of the body must survive with the influence of the soul—both are eternal.
Neither the immortality of the Atheists; nor the immortality of the theologians.
The power of great creation, not of great invention—
Inspiration not memory—idealism not realism.6

Other aphorisms are close to Stewart Headlam's and Image's sacramental and anti-ascetic ideals.

Further discussions with Image centered on the relations between the arts. We find Horne experimenting with a "lyrical novel" under the influence of De Quincey's Suspiria de Profundis. Early in 1883 he outlined a theory of poetry combining arguments which resemble Poe's exaltation of lyric verse with a positivist theory of progress that reflects Mackmurdo's influence. Music is hinted at as a type of the arts, but his doctrine is again crossed by Anglo-Catholic and Blakeian influences: lyric, which to Horne seems peculiarly appropriate to the present age, is defined as the "arbitrary use of the con-
crete in order to idealise human feeling." This leads to a condemnation of Tennyson's *Idylls*. The message is "that everywhere the flesh is hindering and confining the work of the spirit. Surely all know, or should know, by this time that the flesh is the spirit and the spirit is the flesh—that if the spirit is good the flesh is good & vice-versa. The Idylls of the King are but a blaiſe [sic] of fine words flung up on a theological foundation that virtually was rotten three centuries ago." Mackmurdo's influence emerges in the attempt to determine a historical rhythm in the development of poetry, a development from Epic (action) to Lyric (feeling):

The evolution of our ideas has always ascended from the more special to the more general: & therefore from Action thro thought and feeling & not from feeling to action. . . . By the law of the development of the more special before the more general, we should expect to find the Epic spirit completed before the Lyric: as we do. Poetry from being special at first will at last attain a vast generalization.

The propositional form of the argument is Positivist, but the doctrine's interest largely relates to the fragments of a programme in the circle of the Rhymers' Club as these are recalled by Yeats in his *Autobiographies*. Much of the 1890s poetic theory is latent in these remarks: the rejection of action and discursiveness, the reaction from Tennyson because of his "impurities," the exaltation of the lyrical and the subjective. However, Horne rather inconsistently attempted to justify his notions on optimistic and Positivist grounds, which ran counter to all that we know of the Rhymers' beliefs.

Close to the theories of the Rhymers' and Selwyn Image is another note written at the beginning of 1884, in which Ruskin's view of Nature is rejected virtually in terms of Blake's Trees of Life and Science. Imagination leads to a complete historical relativism:
All things exist only as we are in possession of their mental equivalents. It would be as true to say that Shakespeare existed at the time of Aristotle as the then unknown planets. All things were from the first; but to us now, only those things of which we are mentally in possession.

The tree of Giotto, the tree of the Purist, the tree of the Ruskinian were realities to their several producers—realities to the last sense of the word.

Again it would be said that the Ruskinian tree approaching almost with identity to the photograph must be true absolutely in the same proportion. Who will not admit a photograph of a face to be wanting altogether in certain qualities! A photograph of a tree is then also wanting in these qualities.

In other extracts, Horne has clearly attended to Mackmurdo's historical method in *Wren's City Churches* (1882). There Mackmurdo altogether excluded the archaeological and comparative emphasis on mere architectural vocabulary, fashionable at the time, concentrating on close analysis of buildings in isolation, together with a summary reference to the contexts of Wren's work—social, political, artistic, literary. This was an alternative also to Pater's intuitive approach and helped to deflect Horne's interest from the Medieval period to the Renaissance. Another set of notes in the Museo Horne, probably dating from 1884, reveals that the seventeenth century had become Horne's ideal moment in English culture, challenging the present:

An age of no beliefs & so of no architecture: an age that must purify: an age that has found the desire of life in science, the knowledge of appearances. An age that has built itself a city greater than the cities of wrath, a city of iron and matchboarding... which is to say of rust and of tinder.

In the seventeenth century, gardening, architecture and literature had been properly associated; the architectural sense, indeed, had been fruitfully diffused over every art:
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Reasons for beginning with the Renaissance. During the early Renaissance every "artist" has the architectural sense, the cut of the two people kneeling before a seated figure & other figures standing at back—towards end of book. True of Giotto's art. The round temple in Raphael's cartoons. Contrast this with modern paintings & the architecture in them. The whole Elizabethan period wanting in this architectural feeling, both in literature and in architecture.

And recurring to his own ambition in poetry to reconcile the "torrid and the frigid":

Not only of poetry but of every art:—
In expression restrained, but in the matter expressed free and licensed.
Milton's Samson.
Bach's Fugues.
Chosen because the architectural effect is obtained by coral necklace, scroll, & book . . .
and very slightly by purely architectural lines.

Such enthusiasms and detractions led Horne "to trace the Muses upward to their spring," and in the English tradition that involved a shift of emphasis from Wren to Inigo Jones. He was to contribute a poem on Jones to the Century Guild Hobby Horse for January 1886 and to furnish an article, full of too generous attributions, on the admired architect for the Dictionary of National Biography. But Jones himself led Horne to Palladio, Italy, and ultimately to Vitruvius. Horne was to visit Italy for the first time in 1889 and from the middle of the 1890s to spend much of his time there.

As we shall see, the importance of these extracts is that they reveal Horne in this early phase gradually freeing himself from the influence of Image and Mackmurdo, the pupil eventually becoming the master.