Rediscovering Herbert Horne
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Although not precisely in the world of connoisseurs, art historians and dealers, Reginald Turner, like Rothenstein, saw as much of Horne as anyone during Horne’s last years. Turner indeed presents an image of Horne in his novel *Samson Unshorn* (1909). Horne appears as Jasper Fawn who shocks a British aristocrat by laughing at a large canvas of the Holy Family. The good Lord protests that the picture is not funny when Fawn defends himself by employing his favourite word, "amusing." Fawn’s only other comments on paintings are "rotten" or "good." The generalised epithets of the Botticelli can be seen as extensions of Horne’s informal judgments. His laugh, we are told, "was the terror of the auctioneer. His laugh had been known to stop the bidding for a picture when the price was leaping up, and he caused hitherto supposed masterpieces to be bought in, costing the owners several thousand pounds." Fawn’s character certainly closely resembles that of Horne: "He had no raging desire for notoriety. His position was too unassailable and his ideas too fixed. Moreover, not to be well known was useful when he came to pick up a bargain or to sift a jewel from the rubbish."

In his article in the *Anglo-Italian Review*, Turner speaks of Horne as "grim . . . almost sullen in manner until he thawed,
and then he had a very distinct and powerful charm." We are also told that Horne used to make "occasional predatory visits to London," particularly to the area of the Fulham Road: "there it was that he picked up two of Michelangelo's original sketches for the Sistine Chapel for a penny each." We may assume this to be typical, if not actual truth.

Max Beerbohm in his letters to Turner summons up Horne and "The Laugh":

when did you begin to be this austere Florentine dilettante? Did the shade of Herbert Horne accompany you on your visits to the curioshops, frowning and nudging, and uttering some faint echo of that hoarse raven laugh which meant "spurious"?

Horne is also present briefly in another of Turner's novels, Count Florio and Phyllis K. (1910), and Max duly explains to his wife "the nature of Herbert Horne" so as to accentuate for her the fun of the characterisation: "I wonder if . . . H. H. 'had his attention drawn' to the book. . . . he would be wounded to the core."

In a letter dated 10 February (presumably 1913) Turner informed Beerbohm that

Horne moves into his palace soon, which may mean in about three months. At any rate his books are being transplanted. I have got one or two bits of furniture from him which do not suit his palace and which he wanted to get rid of, and he is having some Empire chairs—which are not very pretty but which he says are good—covered for me.

It was at this time also that Horne sent Randall Davies the fruit of his twenty-year research into the poems and letters of the Earl of Rochester in the hope that Davies would complete the edition. Yet although he was distinctly out of touch with the latest shudders in English works of literature and art, he showed some mild interest in Davies's account of the Camden
Town school and in the rise of Wyndham Lewis. Indeed, his reference to Lewis is, in terms of documentation, an early one. On 14 April 1914, he sent Davies a copy of

our Florentine "Futurist" Magazine. Please read carefully the first article "contro le Donne" and give special attention to the first design by Rosai. Tho' I fear you are not sufficiently Florentine to grasp the full import of the fragments of words and other things which figure in that remarkable drawing. . . . I wish you would pass it on to Wyndham Lewis, and tell him that I should be so very grateful to know how he and his school would treat such a subject. I imagine his friezes for the dining rooms of the great, culminate with a specially attractive treatment of the same theme.¹⁶

The magazine is *Lacerba*. The article by Giovanni Papini is entitled "Il Massacro delle Donne" and the subject of Rosai's drawing is "Latrina."¹⁷

In 1912, Horne purchased a decayed Florentine palazzo at 6 Via dei Benci with the purpose of creating a context for his collections. The Conte Gamba observes:

In course of time he began restricting his purchases . . . making it his particular purpose to collect ancient objects of household use, which if not always worthy of a place in a larger museum were such as to display the practical sense and decorative taste of the rare objects . . . which have formed part of the traditional furnishing of a house belonging to the ancient Florentine bourgeoisie.⁸

These objects included furnishing of massive walnut in pure style and plain good taste, ceramic ware of the best factories for the table, and humbler but typical and attractive objects of household use, as well astrolabes, surgical instruments and chests with arabesqued Florentine work. According to Gamba:

The ancient palace of the Alberti, at the corner of the Corso dei Tintori and the Via dei Benci, was purchased by the Corsi family in 1489 and most probably was re-built by them in its present form after drawings by Giuliano da San Gallo. Although this is not proved by
any existing document, seeing the fruitless researches made by Horne himself in the archives of that family, stylistic reason and comparison with other constructions and ornamentations by that celebrated architect, specially with the Gondi Palace, point to such a conclusion.

The artist had evidently proposed showing how a house of small size could be made splendid and elegant by means of the art of proportion, distribution of light and sober and studied ornamentation. Above a large and light underground he succeeded in raising three floors of spacious rooms, with access by a wide and rich stair, at the same time providing several conveniences not common in ancient constructions.

The exterior, surrounded at the base by that inviting stone bench, which almost exclusively at Florence, seems to uphold, and ennoble, the principal palaces of the Renaissance, attracts the gaze on account of the harmonious distribution of stone and space. The courtyard has but a single portico, which however is spacious and has slender columns with capitals and consoles, all of different design, and friezes of foliage over the doors carved with the utmost delicacy by Giuliano's best stone-workers, perhaps with assistance of Andrea Sansoviano himself, as may be argued from analogous capitals in the sacristy of the Church of Santo Spirito. Below the two rows of inside window run fascie of graffito. The stair overlooks the courtyard from two slender-columned loggie; while on a third floor it overlooks the whole of this restricted vertical prospect from the third covered but sunny loggia. In ancient times it was used for drying the wools which are dyed in the laboratories in the basement, for the trade carried on by the industrious ancient owners, who probably had their office or warehouse in the ground-floor rooms, still admirable on account of the rich consoles of the vaults. Here there was once, it would seem, a fine chimney-piece of carved stone, while another very rich one adorned a room on the first floor, over the door of which ran friezes in the same taste and skilful workmanship as those below. But all this, alas, was sold in days past, and some pieces are known which now serve as examples of ornamentation in Institutions across the Ocean. On the other hand, the wonderful figured console in the courtyard, that upholds the vault of the loggia, and which had been removed a great many years before, was munificently given back by Prof. Stefano Bardinoi to the Horne Museum.

Once in the possession of this precious edifice, the worthy learned Englishman devoted himself to restoring it to its ancient state and appearance, removing partitions and overlayings, freeing rail-
ings, bringing to light again the original plastering both within and without, restoring the stone-work and reconstructing doors and window-panes according to the ancient traces discovered. 9

In the old Corsi palace, Horne lived frugally, in one room virtually at the top of the building, sitting, so one account runs, in a cane chair in what served both as a library and a bedroom. Papers might be kept in the massive chests below, but otherwise the piano nobile and the floor above were given over to pictures, statuary, and cabinets for drawings.

The little room upstairs was all that remained to Horne and the twentieth century. Here he lived for the last two years of his life in declining health, without electric light or continuous hot water supply, since these services were not appropriate to the building. From the severest art-historical point of view, the only inappropriate item in the house was Horne himself.

For most of his life Horne appears to have suffered from ill health. His letters are full of references to colds, influenza, and mysterious debilities. His health became alarming in 1912 and by 1914 he had consulted seven Florentine doctors in addition to his own regular physician. Work in the palazzo was still unfinished when his condition became critical. After three days of acute pain he died on 14 April 1916.

During his long periods of ill health, when much of his time had to be spent in bed, people came to his house bringing objects to offer him for purchase. Even in the last few hours of his life the ruling passion was active: he summoned up sufficient strength to acquire the Saint Catherine of Luca Signorelli.

We have further glimpses of the final scene from Reginald Turner's letters to his old friend Randall Davies, whom Horne had appointed literary executor:
Two days before he died Herbert sent for me to give me several bundles of papers which he asked me to destroy without looking at. . . . They were no doubt private papers which concerned no one but himself. . . . He showed me a book which contained a MS, poems written recently by him, and this you will no doubt have in due time.10

Of this volume, there is no trace in the archives of the Museo Horne, nor does it appear in the collection of Mrs. T. C. Dugdale, who inherited Horne's personal papers from her first husband, Randall Davies. It may be that the manuscripts of earlier poems in the Museo Horne were what Turner had in mind, for those include unpublished poems, though few if any appear to date from after 1900. Turner continues:

I saw a good deal of Herbert during his last months, much more than any one else, and though as you know he was not expansive by nature, he often spoke of you with great affection. He suffered a great deal at the end but bore all with wonderful fortitude and remained always occupied and interested, and I don't think he in the least expected to die, till a week or less before he did die. He seems never to have thought of making a will and it all had to be done in a hurry. It was after he made the will that he asked me to destroy certain papers and he showed perfect lucidity and great strength at that interview although he was at the point of death.11

Horne's will, it appears from Turner's account, was also drawn up unsatisfactorily by an Italian lawyer and it may be that the odd distribution of Horne's remains between the municipality of Florence and the collection of Mrs. Dugdale was the consequence. The letters to Horne from Ernest Dowson clearly came under the head of personal papers and should therefore have come into the possession of the literary executor but, like the manuscripts of the earlier poems, remained in the Casa Horne. Other literary material may well have disappeared.

His collections Horne bequeathed to the Italian state. His intention had been that these should be added to, but his
Italian friends, who had the disposition of the sums he left for the upkeep of the Museo Horne, invested much money in Italian State Bonds which disastrously depreciated. Few visitors in the 1920s and 1930s visited the Museo. In the post-war period it was more or less permanently closed. I was fortunate to come into contact with the custodian, Signor Tito Messeri, son of Horne’s housekeeper, who cherished the memory of the great collector and art historian and gave me free access to the house and its contents. A few years after my visit, the drawings, including the English water-colours and a superb sketchbook of Tiepolo, were moved to the Uffizi.

According to Maurice Brockwell, "those who are in a high position to know believe that he left much literary material of a high quality including finished manuscripts for books on Pesellino and Bianca Capello." Moreover, Lee Warner of the Riccardi Press remarked in a letter to Davies of 29 April 1916: "I have not seen him since 1913. We then had a long discussion, succeeding others in the previous year, as to a revised version of his Leonardo, the completion of his Botticelli and separate lives from Vasari completely annotated. [There was] also a terrific work on the (I think) Riccardi Palace." No trace of the complete manuscripts of those appears to remain.12

The memoir which Randall Davies contributed to the exhibition of Horne’s English paintings held in the autumn of 1916 was based on a typewritten lecture which exists in two versions, the first annotated by Horne’s sister, Beatrice. Davies, who was one of Horne’s intimate friends, offers several valuable observations on Horne:

Even in his earliest work, when he was only just of age, there was "a strength and warrantise of skill" that promised much more, if people had only seen it, than some of the more brilliant and taking beginnings of many of his contemporaries.13
Davies also gives us details of yet another of Horne's unfinished works,

an exhaustive study of Cozens which was to have been printed in the Burlington Magazine. "You will be glad to hear" began one of his letters to me just over a year ago, "that the Anglo-Russian alliance is shortly to have a leg-up and the world in general is to be informed how Peter the Great was the founder, in every sense of the word, of the British School of Water Colour Painting. Of course you and I know that it all came about through Alexander C."14

And contradicting what Image was reported to have said to Symons:

"I think I am the only one of my generation," he said to me once, "who has not been influenced by Oscar Wilde." And that aloofness—not social by any means, but in his work—was one of the secrets of his more solid if less brilliant success. Not only did he not seek popular recognition; he positively avoided it.15

And of the collections in the Palazzo:

Each drawing is mounted by his own hand, and on the back of each is written by him the account from which the following catalogue is compiled. Here, as in all that he did, one may discern the spirit of that marginal note of Inigo Jones's that Horne was so fond of quoting—"In the name of God, Amen."16

Fritz Saxl's description of Horne remains definitive:

Herbert Horne's outlook in his earlier years was widely intellectual and specifically English; he painted Pre-Raphaelite allegories, he wrote poetry, edited seventeenth-century texts, collected English water-colours, was a member of a guild . . . and a friend of the Rossettis, of Oscar Wilde, and Walter Pater. He said about himself in those early years: "in no-one on earth (I am conceited here) is 'the torrid and the frigid interwove' more than I." At a certain point he left England with all her friendly figures, gave up his work as an artist and a man of letters, and became an austere Florentine scholar who rather
shunned the company of men. His main interest in life was from then on to write on Botticelli accurately and disinterestedly in a frigid style which almost obliterates the personality of the author. Any attempt to connect the effects of Botticelli's art with his own emotional experience is so severely avoided—an almost heroic attempt at subduing the "torrid" streak in his character in order to produce an unimpeachable piece of historical scholarship.17

To this one might add that Florence rather than Botticelli became his main interest in life. But the style indeed became the man—or the man the style. Other mentors, too, might have been mentioned: Mackmurdo, Image, Stewart Headlam, and Morris, who affected Horne as he affected many in Horne's generation. Yet Horne though angrily aware of the role of capital in the destruction of the past, of amenities, of buildings and of townscapes, was virtually a man without politics, even if in earlier years he was faintly attracted through Image and Headlam to a species of Christian Socialism, one that saw the flesh as sacramentalised rather than corrupt.

Horne's relationship with Oscar Wilde is more puzzling. The two men probably came to know one another in 1886 and a dozen or so letters were exchanged between that date and 1891. Wilde contributed to the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* and the two were associated in an abortive scheme to place a plaque designed by Horne in Chatterton's old school at Bristol. However, Wilde's projected essay on Chatterton for the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, an elaborate affair, was abandoned half-finished. Wilde wrote warmly to Horne about a presentation copy of *Diversi Colores*, but there the record ends. Their interests, their ambiances diverged, though not altogether so. For Horne remained friendly with Wilde's circle, survivors such as Ross, Turner, Beerbohm. It was certainly no simple ethical choice.

From the beginning, Horne had been charmed by Wilde. The man and his letters have the same warmly naïve, almost
boyish note that we find in Lionel Johnson's letters at the time of a first encounter with the great aesthete: "Oscar has asked me to tea tomorrow and wrote a most complimentary letter about my verse." Or "I dine with him tomorrow. Mrs. O. is about 22 and very very very very very [illegible]—so now you know." It is only Symons who suggests any overt homosexuality in Horne. The exclusive (and vulgar) relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas isolated Horne, as it isolated John Gray and Johnson, from Wilde. We have a last splendid glimpse in a letter of Horne to Rhys from 20 Fitzroy Street on 9 February 1890: "I asked the Rhymers here the other evening: Oscar came in at the end, after the rhymes were all over, and smiled like a Neronian Apollo upon us all. A kind of enthusiasm or inspiration followed." 18

In the manner somewhat of Yeats, Horne submitted to many mentors, then dismissed them as mentors, though not necessarily as friends, when he had exhausted what they had to offer. By their influence, he released in himself possibilities, brought them to definition, by a series of disgusts, as Pater wrote of Leonardo da Vinci, rather than by the alienation and synthetic process that we find in Yeats. Superficially this may recall Wilde's notions of the instability of the self, the multiplication of selves; but Horne's terminology of "torrid" and "frigid" suggests an act of self-transparency. Pater's practice, if not Pater's doctrine, furnished the model.

Puzzling, unsympathetic, contained, faintly sinister even, are the epithets that others found appropriate to Horne's personality. The final impression remains of a man embarrassed by a multiplicity of competing talents, who gradually liberates himself by quiet and firm acts of will. The *Hobby Horse*, in which one may trace that movement toward the "frigid," the intensifying antiquarian and archival note, his poetry, and his decorative work were virtually abandoned. There follows a process of self-purification that extends to the
private life. The final architectonic idea, one might say, was a classicism of personality.

That enthusiastic and speculative youth who had impressed Image, so generous in emitting general ideas, transformed himself by the age of twenty-five into the tired, finicky, silent presence evoked by "Michael Field" and angering John Davidson. It is not sufficient to stress the ever-increasing specialising of interest, the caution of the semi-invalid who must preserve his energies. As his own iconography witnesses: in the portrait by H. Harris Brown of 1908, reproduced in the *Catalogue of the Horne Museum*, the full lips, the clairvoyant fingers as they stroke objects for texture, plainly indicate that though sublimated the "torrid vein" remained.