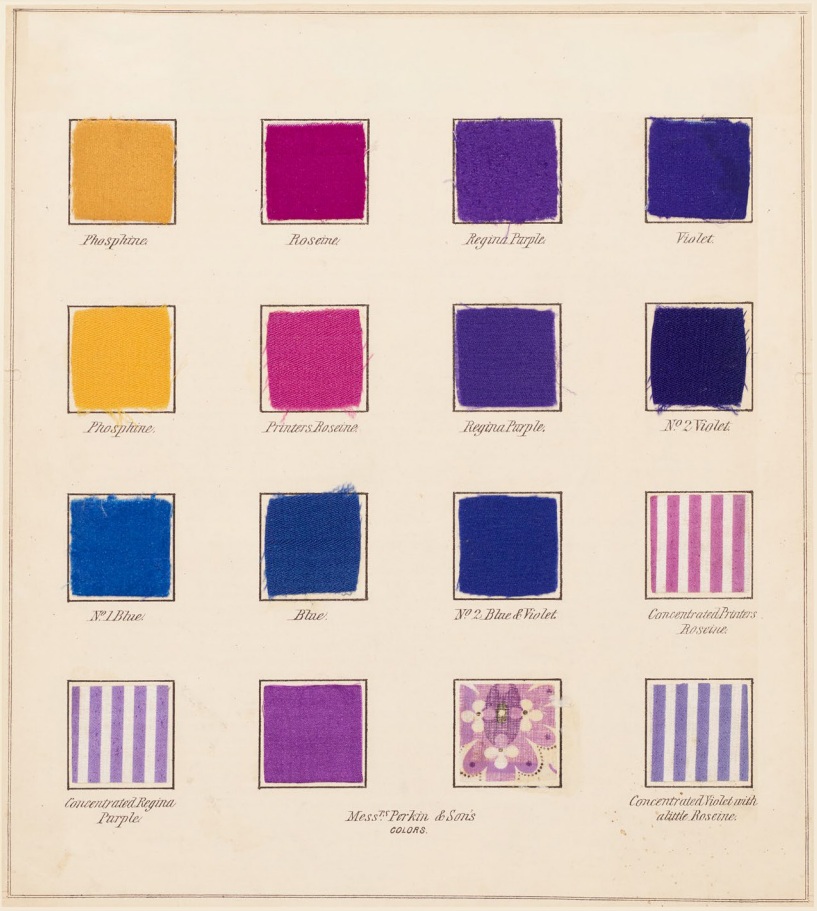
Colour Matters

Exploring Chromatic Materialities in the Long Nineteenth Century (1798-1914)



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Stefano Evangelista, Charlotte Ribeyrol and Matthew Winterbottom (eds), *Colour Matters: Exploring Chromatic Materialities in the Long Nineteenth Century (1798-1914)*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2026, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0501

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0501#resources

Information about any revised edition of this work will be provided at
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0501

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-753-7
ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-754-4
ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-755-1
ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-757-5
ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-80511-756-8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0501

Cover image: Coal Tar Dyes. Specimens of Fabrics Dyed with Messrs. Simpson, Maule & Nicholson's Colors, c.1865. Cotton on card. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, John Johnson Collection, Soap 1(41) subsect. Dyes (Coal Tar Dyes, 1860–1880)
Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

The publication of this book was supported by the European Research Council (ERC)

7. The Queerly Racialised Colours of Religion and Decadence at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge

Dominic Janes

The Sexual Offences Act (1967) was intended to legalise male homosexual sexual acts in England but only when they were carried out in private. It was not expected that ostentatious displays of same-sex affection would suddenly become commonplace. Before this date, homosexuality was associated with the behaviour of what were widely seen as sexual deviants. It was supposed that many such men were androgynous and would, if given the chance, dress in colourfully 'effeminate' styles. These attitudes directly descended from debates in the nineteenth century over the connections between colour and the conceptually linked material realms of bodies and their clothing. Racialised understandings of colour as related to skin tones included assumptions that allegedly primitive peoples were variously sexually animalistic, effete or perverse. The normative British male body could be understood as colourless in so far as it was conceptualised as white, but its adornment with bright clothing increasingly required the masculine alibis provided by military or sports uniforms. Strong colours could be justified as possessing the utilitarian purpose of visibility on the battlefield or at team events. Subtle and exotic hues, by contrast, particularly mixtures such as blue-green or shimmering iridescences, fell under suspicion of being the bearers of recondite meanings that implied peculiar and unhealthy fascinations.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0501.07

This chapter explores the evolution of these stereotypes by focusing on a case study of images of so-called 'aesthetic' students at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. These were individuals who, it was alleged, looked to the stylistic and sexual example of Oscar Wilde. To be colourful, particularly to be a man who dressed colourfully, was to court attention. All of this helps to explain the apparently histrionic response of newspaper writers to the appearance on Wilde's person of a green-dyed carnation in 1892. The floral buttonhole betrayed its artificial origins since the result was not a true green but a strangely metallic, blue-green colour. Innocuous aniline dyes or inks would have been used, but artificial green retained a frisson from the poisonous arsenic that had been used to make this colour earlier in the century. Because the perversity of Wilde's material adornments were understood as a reflection of his bodily desires, such floral practices could be seen as against nature in a way that evidenced a decadent taste for sickly or even decaying green-tinged flesh.[1] This placed a discomforting focus on contemporary tensions between admiration for mother nature and the masculine realm of scientific progress (including research into chemical dyes) which many hoped would save the 'race' from degeneration.

All this did not go unnoticed on campus. Student periodicals participated in either aesthetic expression or parody of it before and after Wilde's trials of 1895. Of particular importance were Oxford's *The Isis* (founded 1892) and *The 'Varsity: A Social Review of Oxford Life* (founded 1901), and Cambridge's *The Granta* (founded 1889). These publications contained commentary that varied from the serious to the ludic, but even the lighter aspects of such satire can be understood to have participated in overt student debate over gender and culture, as well as in more covert interventions over sexuality.[2] The journals were originally illustrated with photographs and drawings in black and white, although elements of colour were introduced during the interwar years as this became more cost-effective.

1 Stefano Evangelista and Charlotte Ribeyrol, 'Colour for Colour's Sake', in *Colour Revolution: Victorian Art, Fashion and Design*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol, Matthew Winterbottom and Madeline Hewitson (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2024), pp. 173–91 (pp. 185–86).

2 For a comparison with parody at the national level, see Dominic Janes, *Oscar Wilde Prefigured: Queer Fashioning and British Caricature, 1750–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 171–226.

I will start this chapter by exploring intersectional aspects of debates over the use of colour in costume. The discovery of melanin in 1873 ushered in a more chemical understanding of skin colour, and led to a more colourist—as opposed to a cultural—view of racial difference.[3] It will be seen that race, thus interpreted through skin tone, played a role complementary to sartorial choices in the way in which the visual appearance of 'exotic' male students was commented on and satirised. The categories of those who were seen as colourful characters—queer, at the minimum, in the sense of 'strange'—overlapped with those who were classed as men of colour because they were racially non-white. Furthermore, such people were frequently alleged to be insufficiently manly. I then explore the impact of Wilde, first as a student and later as the subject of public scandal, on attitudes to aestheticism and decadence in these two universities. Finally, I will argue that the by then more obviously homosexualised queer styles of the *fin-de-siècle* were available for creative appropriation by a new generation of students in the Edwardian and interwar periods. Queer men, alongside non-whites, were exoticised in a student culture that seems to have been alternately fascinated by and fearful of diversity.

Men, Colour, and Men of Colour

Women were first able to attend Cambridge in 1869 and Oxford from 1878, but they were not able to take university degrees at this date.[4] They also remained a small minority of the student body. Student publications were, not surprisingly, primarily written by men for men, and what we would term male gender norms—for example, in matters of costume—were a frequent preoccupation. Looking back on the sartorial traditions of the long nineteenth century, the psychologist J. C. Flugel wrote in his *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930) that men had renounced the use of bright colours.[5] He related this to the demise of aristocratic flamboyance at the time of the French Revolution and the restriction of colourfulness to

3 Madeline Hewitson, 'Surface Matters: Skin Colour, Race and Materiality', in *Colour Revolution*, pp. 123–30 (p. 123).

4 Dyhouse, Carol, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870–1939* (London: UCL Press, 1995), pp. 14–27, 54–63.

5 J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).

those deemed outside the sphere of Western public politics (i.e. women, children and 'coloured people'). Men, sporting the new middle-class uniform of the black frock coat, were now to be seen in public as sober if not necessarily sombre.[6] Those who adopted bright colours or overly precise tailoring were liable to be denounced as dandies and accused of 'effeminacy' (i.e. a lack of manliness). There is clear evidence in the student publications of a distaste for men who made too vivid a visual impression. The first in a series of articles on 'undesirable dons' (i.e. academics) in 1905 focused on the figure of the intellectual 'poseur'.[7] The author later summed up his set of pen portraits, saying that 'all the dons of whom I have written this Term have had "colour," to use the slang of the modern literary man. That is to say, they have stained University life in some way'.[8]

The development of new standards of male normativity has been explained by Paul Deslandes in his important study *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (2005).[9] Aristocratic privilege declined through the long nineteenth century and was partially displaced by the rise of an essentially middle-class ethos that valorised work (on and off the playing field), Anglican Protestant morality and gender conformity. This took place in association with a cultural reaction against rising diversity in the student population. These two universities were slow to internationalise and it is no accident that the establishment of the Rhodes Scholarships in 1902 faced considerable opposition. We might assume that the scruples were mainly in relation to the moral status of Cecil Rhodes as an imperialist, but student opposition at the time focused more on fears of cosmopolitanism.[10] Although there were some African and Caribbean Rhodes Scholarship constituencies, in reality the vast majority of Rhodes Scholars were

6 John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion, 1995).

7 'Portalone', 'Undesirable Dons. I. The Poseur', '*Varsity*, 26 January 1905, 548.

8 'Portalone', 'Undesirable Dons. V. Doesn't Care "a-Fortieth Part of a Rupee"', '*Varsity*, 23 February 1905, 618.

9 Paul R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 209–28, is an edited and condensed version of Deslandes, '"The Foreign Element": Newcomers and the Rhetoric of Race, Nation, and Empire in "Oxbridge" Undergraduate Culture, 1850–1920', *Journal of British Studies*, 37.1 (1988), 54–90.

10 Editorial, 'The Rhodesians', '*Varsity*, 20 May 1902, 543.

white: the first Indian Scholarships, for example, were not awarded until 1947. However, rising numbers of—often South Asian—students did arrive through various other means such that, by 1920, a significant minority of those matriculating (i.e. entering) Oxford were non-British.[11]

The claims of women and people of colour were equated in student parody, for example in a drawing of the supposed coat of 'Arms of the Fabian Society' (1907).[12] This socialist group, founded in 1884, was alleged in this drawing to champion the rights of women suffragists and Black people (both of whom were drawn looking ugly and ridiculous). Such women corresponded to the first of two misogynist stereotypes that were popular with (some) male students: first, the woman who, by adopting what were alleged to be the male characteristics of intellectual activity and public engagement, was seen as unfeminine and, therefore, unattractive; second, the pretty, young female student who was essentially eye-candy for men. Women were believed at the time—in a line of thinking that went back to classical antiquity—to be particularly susceptible to colour, and this might explain why they were sometimes associated with colourful men and people of colour.[13]

It has taken a long time for the roles that women played in the development of aestheticism and decadence to be fully appreciated, partly because they were often not taken seriously at the time. An example of this was 'The New Aesthete-Athlete Era' (1881), a cartoon published in the national periodical *Funny Folks*.[14] This showed a boatload of ugly and debilitated women attempting to row whose colourful appearance was implied, in this black-and-white cartoon, by the peacock design of their boat and sunflowers on their outrageously aesthetic frocks. It thereby mocked female sporting abilities and any supposedly 'rational' quality to aesthetic dress, and deployed a gibe—also used against men—that the adepts of beauty were themselves ugly degenerates. The similar tone of the male-centric student media can be

11 Deslandes, "'The Foreign Element"', p. 60.

12 'The Arms of the Fabian Society', *Granta*, 23 February 1907, 213.

13 Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 188.

14 'The New Aesthete-Athlete Era', *Funny Folks,* 6 April 1881, 116; Dominic Janes, *British Dandies: Engendering Scandal and Fashioning a Nation* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022), p. 87.

seen from the masthead that accompanied '*Varsity*'s 'At the Theatre' column: a Black chorus girl in petticoats.[15]

Colour in a racial sense was, however, mocked in a casual rather than an obsessive manner, since the latter was seen as being ungentlemanly. The tone can be judged from moments such as that in the 'comic' novel of university life, *Red Paint at Oxford* (1904), when, 'toward the end [of the meal] Freddy expressed a violent antipathy to the colour of the Turkish gentleman who served us with coffee'.[16] The polite Englishman was not meant to draw attention to such things but could be excused when, as here, he was tipsy and young. In line with this ethos, blacking-up at costume parties was often seen as nothing more than an amusing joke, if a slightly vulgar one. It was a common conceit that Black people were stupid in a way that was similar to white people's prehistoric ancestors.[17] Indians were more visible than Blacks in university life and harder to typecast. It was even possible for an admittedly small student debating society (The Dabblers, Trinity College, Cambridge) to at least consider, if not pass, a motion that 'the Asiatic races are superior to the Teutons' (though a few years later they also almost passed the motion that 'race hatred is a blessing in disguise').[18]

James Peiris, who came on a scholarship from Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), became the first non-white President of the Cambridge Union (the university's premier debating society) in 1882, and there was not to be another for many decades.[19] The exceptionally racist language of 'Jehu Pryde's article, 'The Black Peril', which was published in *Granta* in 1901, was, in fact, directed at Indian students who had—prejudice notwithstanding—become increasingly prominent at the Union. In a grotesque precursor of Enoch Powell's racist invective from 1968, 'Pryde' predicted 'ensuing streams of blood' if nothing was done, and provided 'diagrams representing the growth of melanthropy' [i.e. Blackness] in

15 'At the Theatre', '*Varsity*, 22 January 1901, 13.

16 'Pish' and 'Tush', *Red Paint at Oxford: Sketches* (London: Greening, 1904), p. 9.

17 'Og', 'Prehistoric Light Fours', *Granta*, 1 December 1900, 121.

18 Debate undated but signed 7 May 1906 (lost by 3 to 6), Dabblers Society Minute Book 1904–07, Rec 4.4, and debate 23 January 1913 (lost by 4 to 5), Dabblers Society Minute Book 1912-14, Rec 4.7, quoted courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.

19 Stephen Parkinson, *Arena of Ambition: A History of the Cambridge Union* (London: Icon Books, 2009), p. 18.

Union audiences over twenty years.[20] Not only this, but Hindu rituals were, supposedly, taking place at the Union. A parodic response to this allegation, 'Man Æsthetic', transformed Pryde's religious rituals into an aesthetic festival of 'nature made unnatural [...] where the chanting priests, tie-vestured in the least hint of heliotrope, hair-curled, hymn Venus, Flora, Minerva, or any seeming deity who graces the pantheon of modern paganism'.[21] This seemingly bizarre vision is a reference to the 'new paganism' which, for example, had been advocated at an Oxford essay-reading society in 1892.[22] William Frederick Lofthouse (Trinity College), who was to become a prominent Methodist scholar and educationalist, had criticised the arguments presented and suggested that 'the reader's views of life might have been influenced by the aesthetic surroundings of university life'.[23]

In so far as school and university debating was modelled on the proceedings of the Westminster Parliament, and was treated by some students as training for a career in politics, debating societies were, as Dyhouse put it, 'quintessentially arenas of masculine performance'.[24] This was precisely why speakers had to be careful to present themselves in line with gender norms. There was a theatrical and performative element to the giving of speeches that laid florid exponents open to charges of effeminacy. Indian students (for whom English was not their first language) were sometimes stereotyped as speaking in prolix circumlocutions and could allegedly become overly emotional (which was seen as a feminine trait) when discussing topics such as imperial affairs.[25]

'Pryde's' prejudices were called out by the president of the Indian student society, The Majlis.[26] There is also evidence of East Asian

20 Jehu Pryde, 'The Black Peril', *Granta*, 4 February 1901, 174–75 (p. 175).
21 H.L.H., 'Man Æsthetic', *Granta*, 16 November 1901, 92–93 (p. 93).
22 Dennis Denisoff, *Decadent Ecology in British Literature and Art, 1860–1910: Decay, Desire, and the Pagan Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 23.
23 A.J. Hughes (Queen's College), 'Christianity and Paganism', 22 November 1892; St Hilary Essay Society Minute Book, 1892–1894, Cup.23, reproduced courtesy of Mansfield College, Oxford. Mansfield was a college for nonconformist students that was closely associated with, but not formally a part of, Oxford University at this date.
24 Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*, p. 206.
25 Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930,* The Colonial Legacy in Britain 1 (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 93–94, 160.
26 'Correspondence. The Black Peril', *Granta*, 9 February 1901, 201–02.

students answering back against colourist attitudes, saying, for instance, that Chinese people did not think of themselves as yellow but as being 'man-colour'.[27] Indeed, whiteness was itself something of a state of mind, considering that 'white' skin was actually various shades of brown and pink. Some white students, indeed, rejected such racism, particularly those who took a critical view of the British Empire.[28] Academics who attempted to curry favour with their students by sharing racist jokes about coloured students could also be mocked, as in the pen portrait of 'Dons I Dislike... the Humorous Dog' (1912).[29] This notwithstanding, it is not surprising that non-white students, particularly those of African heritage, found these universities challenging places to live and study in.[30] Both Oxford and Cambridge had the aforementioned Majlis, as well as many other societies where whites and non-whites were (theoretically) able to mix on equal terms.[31] One example of these were sports clubs where the desire to win might overcome racial prejudice. In 1911, *'Varsity* published an editorial on 'playing games' which took the form of a mock defence of a 'native prince [...] of some semi-barbaric state' who saw no point in sport.[32] This stereotype was, however, countered by the presence of non-whites who excelled on the river or on the pitch. Since muscularity was seen as inherently masculine, this had the additional benefit of countering those racist assumptions that Asian men, in particular, were lacking in manliness.[33]

Men of colour and all-round colourful characters were not only allowed to stand out from the rest if they were sufficiently good at sport, but were expected to do so. Top athletes were elected as 'blues' and were entitled to wear distinctive dark (Oxford) or light (Cambridge) blue blazers and associated regalia. These originated from choices

27 Editorial, 'Thoughts that Occur. The Chin of To-Morrow', *'Varsity*, 9 November 1911, 45–6 (p. 45).
28 Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 80–98.
29 'Alceste', 'Dons I Dislike. V. The Humorous Dog', *'Varsity*, 22 February 1912, 177.
30 Symonds, *Oxford and Empire*, p. 267.
31 *Ibid*., p. 262.
32 Editorial, 'Thoughts that Occur. On Playing Games', *'Varsity*, 11 May 1911, 256.
33 Symonds, *Oxford and Empire*, p. 263; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); 'Ranji', *Granta*, 17 October 1896, 3–4.

made by the respective university rowing teams in the 1820s and 1830s which may, in turn, have derived from the colours associated with the public schools Harrow and Eton.[34] Over time, the university's elite cadre of blues became associated with the defence of what were seen as traditional political values and gender norms.

As the two universities expanded, there was an explosion in the number of clubs and societies which differentiated themselves from one another by the elaboration of uniforms for both sporting events and social occasions. The aim of such outfits, like traditional military uniforms, and in imitation of professional athletes, was to provide immediate visibility; and the result was a profusion, and sometimes a confusion, of bright colours.[35] The male renunciation of colour clearly had a major exception when it came to masculinised group identities, whether military or sporting. But men still had to be careful not to extend their tastes for brightness to their private attire, as shown in a squib, 'The 'Varsity "Blood"' (1909), which denounced this character's 'lurid tie' and 'socks [that] are green, and pink, and red'.[36] In contrast to the aforementioned effeminate priests with their ties of the subtlest heliotrope, the masculine dandyism of some public school (pure) 'bloods'—who sometimes were, or aspired to be, blues—was parodied for its swaggeringly indiscriminate use of colour.[37] In the case of his socks, this particular blood was in danger of sending the wrong sexual signals, since Havelock Ellis in *Sexual Inversion* (1915, first edition 1897) claimed that homosexuals ('inverts') had unusual preferences for green and red.[38] Interestingly, Ellis also racialised such tastes, since he claimed that green 'is very rarely the favourite colour of adults of the Anglo-Saxon race'.[39]

34 Christopher Thorne, 'Blues and the Blues Committee: Some Historical Notes', 10 July 1996, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/9497798/blues-and-the-blues-committee-cambridge-university-sport.

35 Dave Day and Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Delineating Professional and Amateur Athletic Bodies in Victorian England', *Sport in History,* 35.1 (2015) 19–45.

36 'Jawjar', 'The 'Varsity "Blood"', *Granta*, 20 November 1909, 110.

37 J.A. Mangan, 'Blues, Bloods and Barbarians: Some Aspects of Late Victorian Oxbridge', in *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play,* ed. by Mike Huggins and J.A. Mangan (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 35–56 (p. 38).

38 Stefano Evangelista, 'Queer Colours', in *Colour Revolution*, pp. 197–203 (pp. 197–98).

39 Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1915), p. 299, quoted and discussed in Evangelista, 'Queer Colours', p. 198.

Class prejudice toward the 'lower' orders appears in another skit, 'Townee' (1912). This made fun of a young man from the city of Oxford who was not associated with the university (in contradistinction to students, known as 'gowns' after their academic robes). He is a masculine 'ladykiller' who thinks himself 'really rigged up in the pink of fashion' complete with a 'rainbow-hued' tie, the colours of which 'faded half-imperceptibly into one another'.[40] The implication is that he has ineptly combined the flashy style of the aristocratic bloods with the perverse colour sensitivity of the aesthetes (which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter), to disastrous results. Such class prejudice stands in contrast to contemporary queer ideals of cross-class relationships which challenged not only sexual norms but also the expectation in heterosexual marriage of making an alliance within one's own social class.[41] We may now condemn John Addington Symonds, who collaborated with Ellis in his work on inversion, as one who fetishised and objectified working-class men, but his views were radical in his own times. Much the same point could be made about those who advocated eroticised mixed-race relationships.

All this shows that colourfulness in skin tone and clothing was only respected by male students in specific circumstances. The open embrace of diversity could be imagined but only as a ludic vision of the future. White male privilege was deeply entrenched at these universities at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was not entirely secure. It was for this reason that the visible boundaries of normativity were being shored up, even as they were also sometimes problematised, through satire that zeroed in on intersections of class, race, gender and, as we shall see next, sexuality. It was in this climate that the aforementioned Dabblers debated a motion in late February 1906 on 'the life of the average undergraduate' from which the mover 'excluded all Blacks[,] pub crawlers, green carnations and ultra aesthetes'.[42]

40 'Townee', *Isis*, 27 January 1912, 147.
41 Evangelista, 'Queer Colours', p, 200.
42 Undated debate, c. late February 1906; Dabblers Society Minute Book 1904–1907, Rec 4.4, reproduced courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Queerly Colourful Faiths, 1874 to 1895

Late Victorian aestheticism and decadence were partly queer enterprises, but Oscar Wilde's conviction for gross indecency in 1895 cemented the idea for some students that they were substantially so. This meant that *fin-de-siècle* style was open for condemnation or appropriation by new generations of young men in the early twentieth century. Arguments that Wilde's comic plays were indebted to the style of black minstrelsy would more firmly place his work further outside the 'average' as defined and defended in the Cambridge of 1906.[43] Yet Wilde was never 'cancelled' in the early twenty-first-century sense by university students. His comedies continued to feature in private readings organised by literary clubs and performed (complete with female impersonation) by the many men-only undergraduate drama societies on a regular basis, although it is telling that *Salome* (1893)—the public performance of which was banned in Britain—was rarely even discussed. It was given a private reading by the Parnassus Club (Peterhouse, Cambridge) in 1909, albeit in association with an earnest discussion of the origin of elements in the play that were divergent or absent from the Bible.[44]

After Wilde arrived in Oxford in 1874, he had a set of suits made up from materials in a loud check pattern along the lines of those worn by sporty 'bloods', and it took a little while before he began to embrace the aesthetic styles for which he was to become (in)famous.[45] The deluge of satire that was shortly to follow Wilde's ascent to celebrity status included contributions from members of his former university, such as 'How Utter' (c.1880) by John Bowyer Buchanan Nichols. This showed Wilde contemplating a lily within a neo-classical-style border featuring busts of women and of a long-haired youth with pendants labelled 'O. W' (Figure 7.1).[46] This is in line with much early mockery of Wilde

43 Michèle Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), discussed by Andrew Holleran, 'Oscar in Blackface', *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 25.6 (2018), 19–22.

44 Play reading, 7 November 1909, Parnassus Club Minute Book 1904-1924, GBR/0273/Pet MSS 700, archives of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

45 Matthew Sturgis, *Oscar: A Life* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018), pp. 67, 98.

46 Photograph of John Nichols, 'How Utter' (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1880), 118 x 173 mm; G.A. Oxon. 4o 415, fol. 706/John Johnson 697, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. The references are to the two sets of these caricatures

as being an effeminate ladies' man, although there is some evidence that he had already flirted with same-sex adulation when a student.[47] This was one of a huge number of satirical prints drawn primarily by students from the University of Oxford that were published by the book-binders and photographers Thomas Shrimpton and Son. They often showed recognisable members of the university and were widely collected there.[48] The equation of Wilde with the supposedly feminine world of décor(ation) is paralleled in Shrimpton's prints of this date that focus on Anglo-Catholic priests who, as a group, were beginning to fall under suspicion of sexual and gender non-conformity. Their frequent advocacy of clerical celibacy led to them being attacked for being either unmanly or else potential abusers of women.[49] One example of such parody is an anonymous drawing captioned 'The handsome Ritualistic Priest arrayed in purple and fine linen, irresistible with the "Devout Women"' (c.1880) (Figure 7.2).[50] The caption makes ironic reference to Luke 16:19 (King James version), 'There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day'. Few of Shrimpton's cartoons were hand-coloured, and this emphasises the importance of colour to the parody of this form of contemporary religiosity.

Ritualists were people in the Church of England who drew their inspiration from the Oxford Movement that had begun in the 1830s. They formed what was known as a High Church party and were to later to become known as Anglo-Catholics. They advocated for a more elaborate form of ecclesiastical ritual involving the increasing use of colourful vestments and other objects and adornments that had been largely abandoned as a result of the Protestant Reformation.

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in the library, with the second being that in the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera.

47 Sturgis, *Oscar*, p. 99.

48 Personal communication with Colin Harris, February 2019, and see Harris, 'Shrimpton and Son's "Oxford Caricatures": A New Resource for the Study of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century Oxford', *Bodleian Library Record,* 30.1-2 (2017), 61–83.

49 Dominic Janes, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 1–29.

50 Photograph of artist unknown, 'Ritualistic Priest' (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1880), 124x154 mm; G.A. Oxon. 4o 415, fol. 629/John Johnson 629 (the latter being the hand-coloured version), The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Fig. 7.1. Photograph of John Nichols, *How Utter* (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1880), 118 x 173 mm, John Johnson Collection Caricatures 4, no. 697, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Fig. 7.2. Artist unknown, photograph of hand-coloured version, *Ritualistic Priest* (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1880), 124 x 154 mm, John Johnson Collection Caricatures 4, no. 629, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

The result was an aestheticised form of worship that was attacked as being the vanguard of Popery by the opposing evangelical Low Church party within the Church of England.[51] Disputes over such matters in the 1840s and 1850s prefigured controversies over mid- and late Victorian aestheticism, as when a critic argued, in 1851, that ecclesiastical colour is often 'considered immoral […] because it is an immediate sensation and makes its effects independently of those ordered memories which are the basis of morality'.[52] Student satire made fun of not only overly effete men but also those who were obsessively sporty, and in a similar fashion, the extremes of the high and low Church parties in Anglicanism came in for parody. For instance, in another Shrimpton's cartoon which was simply entitled 'Protestant Ritualism', two Anglican ministers are shown as if performing the mass in the Anglo-Catholic fashion (facing east at the High Altar and, thus, looking away from the congregation) but with a blank wall behind and a plain altar cloth with simply a cushion to hold a copy of the Bible and a communion plate.[53] The only applied colour is a line of red on the dress of one of the clerics to show that he is wearing an Oxford MA hood.

The 'handsome Ritualistic Priest' (Figure 7.2) can be compared with another print showing the camply posed Rev. Horatio Morphiamoses who boasts of attracting some of the 'most exalted and loveliest females' to his confessional, whilst the more masculine presenting Rev. Skoggs says that women will not come to him but 'I can get hold of some boys'.[54] At this time, the practice of confession in private to a priest was being attacked as a dangerously Catholicising innovation in the Church of England and one that was alleged to involve the potential for sexual impropriety.[55] The implication was either that such priests were willing to feminise their own gender in order to seduce women, or else they had

51 Dominic Janes, *Victorian Reformation: The Fight over Idolatry in the Church of England, 1840–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

52 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

53 Photograph of artist unknown, 'Protestant Ritual' (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1875), 157 x 124 mm; G.A. Oxon 4o 413, fol. 291/John Johnson 280, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

54 Photograph of artist unknown, 'Fathers Skoggs and Morphiamoses' (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1882), 125 x 158 mm; G.A. Oxon. 4o 416, fol. 866/John Johnson 857, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

55 Dominic Janes, '*The Confessional Unmasked*: Religious Merchandise and Obscenity in Victorian England', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41.4 (2013), 677–90.

an interest in boys. The latter could be seen as a normative stance in so far as manly men were expected to impart masculine virtues to the next generation, but there was some degree of awareness of other possibilities. Edward Carpenter, one of Britain's first homosexual rights campaigners, wrote in the 1905 edition of his epic poem, *Towards Democracy,* of the 'young man who organises his boys from the slums' as one aspect of contemporary queer life in London.[56] Indeed, there was an investigation in 1907 by Oxford's proctors (the university's disciplinary officials) into suggestions of sexual impropriety on the part of those organising boys' clubs in the city.[57]

Allegedly flamboyant religiosity was, furthermore, associated with theatricality, as in another Shrimpton's print which advanced a mock proposal for the 'Church Stage Guild' in Oxford by depicting three figures—including the Rev. John Prideaux Lightfoot, Rector of Exeter College—as aesthetes holding a lily, a peacock feather and a sunflower, respectively.[58] Exeter was also associated with aestheticised religion as a result of its new and spectacularly lavish chapel by Sir George Gilbert Scott. This building, partly inspired by the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, was erected in the late 1850s and was completed with a splendid series of stained-glass windows by the firm of Clayton and Bell. The Church and Stage Guild had been founded in 1879 by the Rev. Stewart Headlam who was to put up half of Wilde's bail money, accompany him to and from court and wait at the prison gate on his release in 1897.[59]

Practising the cult of beauty, whether it be classical or Christian, was, therefore, implied to be partly a pose. Much the same could be said for Orientalist aestheticising of Islam. In 1888 Robert Ross, who, it is thought, had become Wilde's lover two years earlier, published a satirical pen portrait in a rapidly suppressed Cambridge student publication, *The*

56 Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (London: GMP, 1985), p. 325, discussed by Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914,* Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 39 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 38, 137.

57 Proctors' Records on Boys' Clubs and Life Drawing; Pr1/23/9/3, archives, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

58 Photograph of artist unknown, 'The Inner Brotherhood' (Oxford: Thomas Shrimpton and Son, c.1882), 153 x 135 mm; G.A. Oxon. 4o 416, fol. 910/John Johnson 906, The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

59 Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 177.

Gadfly. This described a visit to the rooms of his socially prominent—and queer—history tutor at King's College, Oscar Browning, who is found lolling on a divan while 'two Arab boys severally support on each side an ash tray and a gold cigarette box'. In case the implications remained unclear to the innocent reader, it was further alleged that Browning held regular events at which 'all the [male] Undergraduates who are clever or handsome, or have any qualities at all, are sure to be met'.[60] The implicit queerness of Shrimpton's cartoons is here made all but explicit.

A further point about these satirical depictions, some of them indulgently cordial and others overtly hostile, is that they show the links that were starting to be made not simply between racial diversity and gender non-conformity but also with sexual indeterminacy. Some of the examples of this from the Edwardian period are crude, including depictions of 'Chaa-Lee's Aunt from China' and 'Mahamed Saladin Ben Punka' as bizarre, intersexed 'Orientals'.[61] Browning was, notably, presented—in verse imitating the ludic style of Edward Lear—as a man who did not partake in such processes of othering in so far as 'he befriends the collegiate negro/And other exaqueous fish' (i.e. fish out of water).[62] A negative interpretation of this is that Browning was seen as a predatory older man who objectified non-white students, but a more generous understanding is that he was keen to ally himself with others who were outsiders to the mainstream of university life. We will probably never be able to precisely fix the degree to which queerness was being exposed and condemned or highlighted and expressed in many of these (mostly anonymous) student articles and drawings. What is quite clear is that Wilde's same-sex passions were becoming ever more overtly discussed and, indeed, depicted, as in 'A Dream of Décadence [sic] on the [River] Cherwell', a cartoon 'by our decayed artist' in a promptly suppressed Oxford periodical, *The New Rattle*.[63] This showed a bloated

60 Anonymous [Robert Ross], 'O-C-R B---NG at Home', *Gadfly*, 15 November 1888, 1–2; see also Dominic Janes, 'The "Curious Effects" of Acting: Homosexuality, Theatre and Female Impersonation at the University of Cambridge, 1900-1939', *Twentieth Century British History,* 33.2 (2022), 169–202 (pp. 176–79), and Jane Marcus, review, *Ian Anstruther, Oscar Browning: A Biography, Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985), 556–58.

61 George Cooper, 'The Popular Craze for Chinese Plays', *Granta*, 16 November 1901, 87, captioned 'New Version of an Old Play "Chaa-Lee's Aunt from China"', and M.C., 'Types of the Times. 2. Mahamed Saladin Ben Punka', *Isis,* 7 November 1903, 35–36.

62 'How Pleasant to Know the O.B.', *Granta*, 27 October 1894, 21.

63 'JCR Spider', 'A Dream of Décadence on the Cherwell', *New Rattle* 4, no. 2, 20 May 1893, inset before p. 3, discussed in Janes, *Oscar Wilde Prefigured*, p. 204. A junior

Wilde and a diminutive, cross-dressed Lord Alfred Douglas (who was a student at the university at the time) consorting in a rowing boat.

Another, only mildly less overt example was a spoof, published in *Granta,* of Robert Hichens's novel *The Green Carnation* (1894). This was, itself, an essentially transparent parody of Oscar Wilde's circle of friends in general and his close relationship with Bosie Douglas in particular.[64] This story, 'The Blue Pink' (a 'pink' being another name for a carnation), was accompanied by a cartoon showing Mr Amarinth, looking like Wilde, 'sprawling elegantly on the sofa', much as Ross had imagined Browning on his divan. Douglas appears as Reggie, an athlete ready to play football for the university: 'He was exquisitely beautiful and exquisitely aware of it [...] He assumed several different poses, such as a Greek god playing half-back might assume'.[65] Yet he is thrown into confusion by the clash between the colour of his jacket as a sports 'blue' and the hue of the carnation in his buttonhole. The implication is that as the flower now signalled queer desire as an element of the worship of beauty, so sport was starting to be coded as standing for conformity not only in gender performance but also in sexual object choice.

Because sexual non-conformity was often depicted as ugly, the queer embrace of the cult of beauty can be seen—as in the twentieth-century use of the term 'gay'—as a way to counter popular prejudice. The decadent turn to the open embrace of deviance as perversely beautiful can, therefore, be seen as a step towards the open declaration of marginalised tastes. Queer people may have become adept at focusing on colour in order to covertly signal alternative sexual preferences or, as in the cult of art for art's sake, as a way to step aside from the often hostile moralism that suffused 'realistic' representation.[66] Indeed, Havelock Ellis's concern to explore this issue may 'give us a glimpse into the cultural construction of the turn-of-the-century homosexual as a chromophile—an individual marked by a heightened sensitivity to colour'.[67]

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common room (JCR) functioned as a social club for a college's undergraduates.

64 Robert Hichens, *The Green Carnation* (London: William Heinemann, 1894), discussed in Janes, *Oscar Wilde Prefigured*, pp. 202–05.

65 'The Blue Pink', *Granta*, 1 December 1894, 99–100.

66 Stefano Evangelista and Charlotte Ribeyrol, 'Colour for Colour's Sake', in *Colour Revolution*, pp. 173–91 (p. 173).

67 Stefano Evangelista, 'Queer Colours', p. 198.

Queer Fears and Opportunities after 1895

The arrest and trial of Oscar Wilde was reported factually in the local Oxford and Cambridge papers and there was nothing to stop students from consulting the national press either.[68] His disgrace certainly did not stop students talking about him, nor, it was alleged, imitating him. Editorials in the student press, such as one entitled '"Iridescent Hues." A Warning to Freshmen [i.e. first year undergraduates]' (1896), alerted them to the perils of reading decadent literature and wearing suits made of blue or green.[69] These were the two key colours of the iridescent feathers of the (male) peacock that contrasted with the drab tones of the (female) peahen. Such plumage had by this time become well established as emblematic not only of dandified masculine preening and 'peacocking' but also of an allegedly Oriental style, bearing in mind that peacocks are native to India. Iridescence also implied a tendency to change hue depending upon the light, suggesting a potentially subversive quality of indeterminacy. This latter quality, arguably, was also invoked by a queer Oxford student, John Francis Bloxam, when he named his short-lived periodical, *The Chameleon* (1894); this contained not only his own story about the love between a priest and a male youth, but also Wilde's 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young'.[70]

The influence of Wilde was, perhaps not surprisingly, more in evidence in Oxford than in Cambridge. Two pieces by the same author in the Cambridge periodical *Granta* alleged that there was some decadence persisting in Cambridge in 1897, but that it continued to flourish in Oxford 'like a green carnation tree'; and that the 'Cambridge Philistine, with his dirty chemical hands, torn Norfolk jacket, often plain manners, but sound science' stood in sharp contrast to the effeminates who, with 'an aesthetic little green boot-lace of a tie' and 'a wee little kind of hypertrophied Eton voice', mingled with the proper gentleman at Oxford.[71] A decade later the cat at Wilde's old college, Magdalen, was called Oscar, according to Arthur Mackworth writing in *Varsity*

68 For example, 'The Oscar Wilde Case', *Oxford Review*, 29 April 1895, 3. Like *Isis*, this was an 'undergraduates' journal' published during term time.

69 Editorial, '"Iridescent Hues." A Warning to Freshmen', *Isis*, 24 October 1896, 15–16.

70 O. Wilde, 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young', *Chameleon* 1, no. 1 (1894), 1–3.

71 B., 'Some Oxford Men and Manners', *Granta*, 20 November 1897, 95–96 (p. 95); B., 'Decadence', *Granta*, 27 November 1897, 111.

Vices, 'but for what reason I was unable to discover'.[72] He did, however, elaborate on the 'types of vicious men' present in the college, including a decadent who was addicted to smoking, refused to shave and painted rings under his eyes in order to appear dissipated, and an Anglo-Catholic who was obsessed with his slim figure, lunched on celery sticks and got assaulted by drunk sportsmen.[73]

Such denunciations, combined with warnings including the one published in *Granta* in 1904 that described decadence as a form of madness in London and Paris that had claimed the lives of various artists including that of the author of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), seem only to have added to Wilde's posthumous readership.[74] English literature was slow to get off the ground as an academic discipline and drama was never more than a hobby for most students in Edwardian Oxbridge, but if the works of Wilde were not on the curriculum they were certainly being read and contested by students, as can be witnessed in the (anonymous) praise and parody of *De Profundis* (1897) on its first publication in 1905.[75] Queer life in late Victorian and Edwardian Oxbridge was lived primarily in the closet, but unusually close relationships between male students did not go unremarked even if it is usually impossible to tell whether satire was inspired by stereotypes alone or by real relationships between students. One such satirical narrative, 'The Reformation of a Decadent', described the close friendship between Bunthorne (the name of the sham aesthetic poet in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, 1881, which Wilde was to promote in his tour of the United States), and Carolwood, who despite being 'beefy and athletic in appearance' was his bosom companion—'decadence was their ideal, *De Profundis* their favourite'.[76]

One strategy for exploring the world of male same-sex desire at

72 C.H. Davies, 'High Street, Oxford', *Varsity Vices: The Oxford Truth* (1908), pp. 2–3 (p. 2).

73 Arthur Mackworth, 'Types of Vicious Men', *Varsity Vices: The Oxford Truth* (1908), pp. 9–10 (p. 10).

74 C.R.-G., 'Vignette', *Granta*, 17 February 1904, 211–12.

75 D.J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature from Its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), and compare the anonymous review of Wilde, 'De Profundis', '*Varsity,* 23 February 1905, 626, which hailed its 'brilliant author', with the satirical piece 'The Æsthete's Confession (after Reading "De Profundis")', *Granta*, 11 May 1905, 222.

76 'The Reformation of a Decadent (an Idyll)', '*Varsity*, 15 November 1906, 89 and 91 (p. 89).

Oxford and Cambridge is to look at novels written by authors whom we know to have been homosexual, such as E. F. Benson, who attended King's College, Cambridge, graduating in 1891, and, for a later comparison, (John) Beverley Nichols, who attended Balliol College, Oxford, graduating in 1921.[77] Benson's autobiographical novel *The Babe. B.A.: Being the Uneventful History of a Young Gentleman at Cambridge University* (1897) derived its title from contemporary student slang in which 'babe' (i.e. baby) was employed to refer to a (potentially androgynous) youth who did not yet need to shave. Apart from the eponymous undergraduate, the book features a character based on Oscar Browning in the form of the history tutor Mr Stewart, who is described as looking like something 'out of the *Yellow Book* by Aubrey Beardsley'.[78] His tastes tended to the aesthetic. He said, for instance, of his favourite liquor Chartreuse, 'what a lovely colour it is. A decadent, abnormal colour, the colour of a spoiled piece of soul-fabric. Yes, quite delicious'.[79] An important aspect of student life for the Babe is cross-dressing, both merely for a lark, and on the (same-sex) student stage. After one performance, a student from Heidelberg 'thought she was a woman, and [...] fell in love with her on the spot, and was disposed to take it as a personal insult that the Babe was of the sex that Nature made him [...] Every night at the fall of the curtain, the Babe was called back again and again, every night the whole house rose at him like one man, and the florist outside the theatre must have realised a competence for the rest of his days'.[80]

Such gender confusion might suggest transgender identities today, and was a core component of the inversion theory of homosexuality at the time, but it should be emphasised that aesthetic dons and cross-dressing

77 Brian Masters, *The Life of E. F. Benson* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991), pp. 81–93, 124; Sayoni Basu, 'Benson, Edward Frederic (1867–1940), novelist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, May 16, 2005, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30713; Simon Goldhill, *A Very Queer Family Indeed: Sex, Religion, and the Bensons in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 63; Bryan Connon, *Beverley Nichols: A Life* (London: Constable, 1991), pp. 72–99; Brian Connon and Clare L. Taylor, 'Nichols, (John) Beverley (1898–1983), writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23* September 2004, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31497.

78 E.F. Benson, *The Babe. B.A.* (London: G. P. Putnam, 1897), p. 101; and see G. Kitson Clark, 'A Hundred Years of the Teaching of History at Cambridge, 1873–1973', *Historical Journal*, 16.3 (1973), 535–53 (p. 543).

79 Benson, *The Babe,* p. 24.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

students were everyday elements of the university scene and were not publicly read as homosexual before the early 1930s.[81] Nevertheless, insinuations of queerness as an aspect of female impersonation were being made after Wilde's trials, as in 'Ye Clever Æsthete' (1896), a verse in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan, when it alleged 'he's rather fond of acting if he wears a pretty dress', which implied not merely cross-dressing but also chromatic drag.[82] Gender confusion was also presented by some male students as an explanation for the campaign for women's suffrage. In 1908, *Granta* published 'Votes for Women' which was, in fact, an anti-suffrage poem that claimed that 'the nation/Revolts from this growth epicene/Of decadent civilisation/Male-female, betwixt and between'.[83]

There were many at the time who held that the manly rigours of war would put a stop to such gender indeterminacy. This was the point of a wartime cartoon captioned '1913–1916', showing a drawing of a languid aesthete with a cigarette on the one side and a normative man with a coat and pipe on the other.[84] What was actually to happen, post-war, was rather different. There was something of a fashionable craze for a new aestheticism in the mid-1920s that saw men such as the future fashion designer Cecil Beaton not merely cross-dressing on stage in Cambridge, but wearing heavy make-up on a daily basis. His diaries show the ways in which student theatre provided an entrée into circles of men interested in queer sex.[85] However, according to another aesthete of the time, Harold Acton (writing in a review of Osbert Burdett's *The Beardsley Period*), Cambridge was still lagging behind: 'The period is over, but the attitude of mind has survived it, in Oxford more than elsewhere'.[86]

Beverly Nichols's novel *Patchwork* (1921) has many similarities to Benson's *The Babe.* Indeed, it even redeploys the earlier novel's title by using it as the name of a student publication that parodies Nichols's

81 Dominic Janes, 'The Varsity Drag: Gender, Sexuality and Cross-Dressing at the University of Cambridge, 1850-1950', *Journal of Social History*, 55.3 (2022), 695–723.
82 'Tintinnabulum', 'Ye Clever Æsthete', *Isis*, 23 May 1896, 268–69 (p. 268).
83 'Votes for Women', *Granta*, 11 March 1908, 232–33 (p. 233).
84 '1913-1916', '*Varsity*, 23 February 1916, 5. *Isis* and '*Varsity* were incorporated into one periodical during World War One.
85 Dominic Janes, 'The "Curious Effects" of Acting'.
86 Harold Acton, review, Osbert Burdett, *The Beardsley Period*, *Cherwell*, 14 February 1925, 142–43 (p. 142).

main protagonist, Ray.[87] This character is, moreover, essentially Nichols himself, since his novel was, like the earlier book, both autobiographical and careful not to be too obvious about same-sex desire.[88] The plot of *Patchwork* parallels his own student career, which saw him relaunching *The Isis* after the war and becoming President of the Oxford Union debating society. Ray, we learn, is excited by the thought of recovering the world of queer Victorian Oxford. He aspires to buy rare editions of works by Walter Pater and does manage to purchase a set of Beardsley plates from Wilde's *Salome* from the library of Robert Ross.[89] People, he thinks, should be free to talk of decadence, do what they want, and not be judged by the colours they wear—after all, he says, it is not as if we are now under conscription in the army.[90] He even manages to host a dinner party attended by the physically towering presence of Osbert Wilde (perhaps a conflation of Osbert Sitwell and Wilde), who was known as Oscar.[91]

Ray enjoys befriending Indian students and relishes the fact that his college, Balliol, has a reputation for being open to people of colour.[92] It would be an exaggeration to say that aesthetic and queer people and men of colour teamed up in some sort of rainbow alliance, but they do seem to have shared a more inclusive approach to diversity. Writing in 1901 of a Cambridge graduation ceremony half a century earlier, A. C. Benson—who, like his brother E. F. Benson, was homosexual—recalled an event when a 'boisterous individual' shouted racist abuse at a West African student. This was, however, answered by a 'pale slim undergraduate' who cried out 'shame, shame! Three groans for you, Sir!'[93] The courageous voice was that of Benson's own father who, when archbishop of Canterbury, was to be parodied in *Punch* for queerly aesthetic tastes.[94] A stereotypical division between sporty, conservative imperialists and radical aesthetes that was widespread in interwar student periodicals originated in the

87 Beverley Nichols, *Patchwork* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921), p. 177.
88 Erica Brown, 'The Rise and Fall of "the Original Bright Young Thing": Beverley Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (1927) and Popular Authorship', *Review of English Studies*, 66.273 (2015), 144–63 (pp. 145, 158), and Connon, *Beverley Nichols, p.* 98.
89 Nichols, *Patchwork*, pp. 22, 60.
90 *Ibid.*, pp. 171–72.
91 *Ibid.*, p. 284.
92 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
93 A.C. Benson, quoted in Hilary Perraton, *A History of Foreign Students in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 151.
94 Dominic Janes, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom*, pp. 145–47.

late nineteenth century. Examples of this come from the pen of George du Maurier (who frequently lampooned Wilde) in cartoons such as 'The Cimabue Browns'—notice the chromatic bathos of the surname—published in *Punch* in 1881, where the down-to-earth grandfather 'fresh from Ceylon' (where he, we assume, did not 'go native') is bemused by the aesthetic tastes of his younger relatives.[95]

The styles and colours of the decadent nineties seem to have a provided a template on which students could base their nascent queer personas. Just a year after Wilde's death, *'Varsity* had announced that there was a rumour that a new club would be formed of those 'dreaming of sins I simply daren't commit'.[96] Its uniform would take the form of a brown, green and gold dressing gown. Late Victorian aestheticism had a subversive appeal for successive generations of students. Student periodicals consoled their 'average' readers with the thought that this was just posing at perversion on the part of young men who do no more than 'dream of every form of vice'.[97] Moreover, as in the Victorian satires, some of these seeming attacks may have been self-parodies that aimed to mock the unsophisticated. What seems clear, however, both pre- and post-World War One, is the idea that decadence required a leisured combination of outré literature and exoticised material culture.[98] A writer explained the 'symptoms and cure' of decadence in *Isis* in 1927. This disease is described as beginning at school with a phase of religious enthusiasm, before moving to a craze for art and philosophising. This leads to the discovery of sex. Thrilled but puzzled, the youth looks to literature and reads his way through Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* (1923), Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* (1924), and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–1891). He then arrives at a perfect pitch of decadence at Oxford as he works his way through Joyce, Freud and Havelock Ellis. At this point, the patient 'affects ties of a languid mauve, cushions of jade green and gold-tipped cigarettes'.[99] The treatment for all this takes

95 Evangelista and Ribeyrol, 'Colour for Colour's Sake', pp. 182–83, and fig. 159.
96 B., 'The Last of the Decadents', *'Varsity*, 19 November 1901, 339.
97 Editorial, 'The Author', 'Are We Sensual?' *'Varsity*, 7 December 1905, 117 and 119 (p. 117).
98 For an extended discussion of the interwar period, see Dominic Janes, '"Chromatics and Vice": Male Students, Race and Queerness at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, 1890s to 1930s', *WerkstattGeschichte* 89 (2024), 73–92.
99 B.J.B, 'Decadence: Its Symptoms and Cure', *Isis*, 9 November 1927, 12.

the form of frequent doses of football, folk-dancing, Kipling, artistic leatherwork, Swedish drill and rowing.[100]

Conclusion

It is clear that colour needs to be understood as part of the material culture of student life. Decadent performances linked the material realms of the desiring body and colourfully seductive adornments in a rejection of adherence to a disciplined code of exercise, behaviour and dress. Bright colour was allowed to the normative male, and even expected, when it signalled hard work—from an athlete's confident uniform to the vivid pink glow of his cheeks.[101] It could even 'redeem' the presence of otherwise 'dubious' tones of 'man colour' from elsewhere around the globe.[102] Colour was least troubling when it could be interpreted as an immaterial label. Normative whites could dissociate themselves from tones by simply undressing, while people of colour could not because hue was viewed as a material aspect of their bodies. The decadent white person was someone who allegedly showed such an unhealthy fascination for colour tones that they wanted to be materially stained and permanently defined by them—to become, artificially, of colour themselves. They thereby uncomfortably highlighted the dangerous potential of scientific modernity and its colour-fast dyes. Wearing attire of an ambiguous colour without an overt meaning raised the question, like that of the green carnation, of which recondite club it was a badge. The effect of the aesthetic embrace of subtle, strange and exotic hues was to problematise binary thinking and labelling implied by simplistic divisions between masculine and feminine, natural and artificial, and western and eastern. The colours of 'Oriental' leisure continued to signify queer decadence in a new, post-war age when the conservative public-school blues of the Oxbridge sporting establishment were widely identified as being politically opposed not only by Blacks and Indians but also by communist 'reds'. Such, it seems, was the enduringly subversive efficacy of mysterious hues as a means either to flaunt an aura of queerness or merely suggest it by means of 'the least hint of heliotrope'.[103]

100 Correspondence, *Isis*, 16 November 1927, 19.
101 H.M.R., 'Song of a Pale Person', *Isis*, 25 May 1901, 302.
102 Editorial, 'Thoughts that Occur', p. 45.
103 H.L.H., 'Man Æsthetic', p. 93.

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