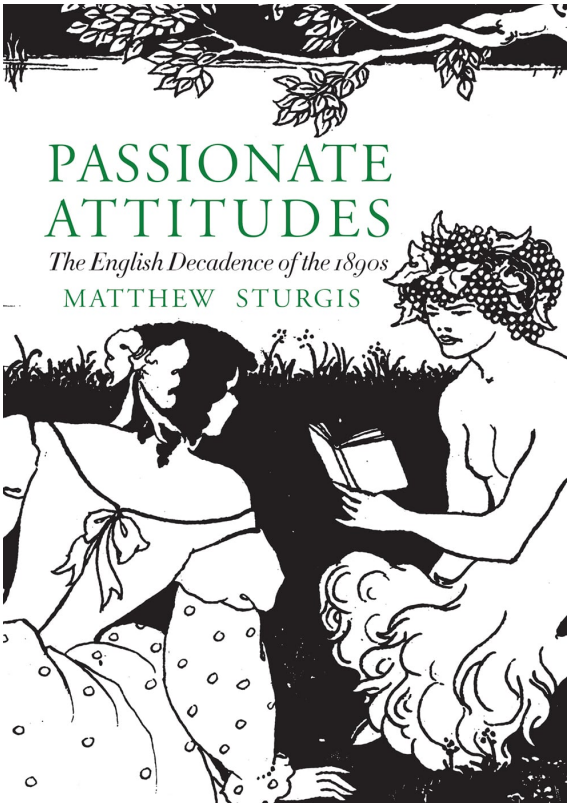
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Passionate Attitudes

The English Decadence of the 1890s

Matthew Sturgis

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- Matthew Sturgis examines the varying extents to which ambitious poets, penurious painters, canny publishers and a controversialist press all conspired to promote the notion of decadence in the 1890s

The 1890s have become legendary: the period of Wilde, Beardsley and the Yellow Book; a decadent twilight at the close of the Victorian century, when young poets weary of life sat about drinking absinthe and talking of strange sins. The provenance of this beguiling picture is peculiar, for the myth of the Decadent Nineties was created during the period itself. It was an age of artistic self-consciousness, during which writers and painters believed that they had to create not only their works but also their personalities. In ***Passionate Attitudes***, Matthew Sturgis examines the varying extents to which ambitious poets, penurious painters, canny publishers and a controversialist press all conspired to promote the notion of decadence. He explores in detail the cataclysmic effect upon English decadence of the spectacular trial and subsequent conviction of Wilde in 1895, a fall which was to cast a blight over the whole generation. As well as the luminaries Wilde, Beardsley and Beerbohm, Sturgis portrays Arthur Symons, the poet of the music halls, who divided his energies between promoting Verlaine and chasing after chorus girls; Ernest Dowson, the demoralised romantic of the Rhymers Club; Count Erik Stenbock, who kept a snake up his sleeve and went mad; and John Gray, who may have been the model for Wilde's Dorian. John Lane published most of their books; Owen Seaman and Ada Leverson parodied their manners. Elegantly written, ***Passionate Attitudes*** provides a hugely informative and richly entertaining account of the zeitgeist behind the glorious decade of excess.

Matthew Sturgis is the author of *Paperwork: Peter Clark* and *Walter Sickert: A Life*" He writes for *Independent on Sunday, Harpers & Queen, Sunday Telegraph*, and *Times Literary Supplement.*

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