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Olive Custance, Nostalgia, and Decadent Conservatism

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Olive Custance was one of the most prolific women poets published in *The Yellow Book*, with poems appearing in eight of its thirteen volumes.¹ She is also mentioned in several studies of the *fin de siècle*; as her 1972 bibliographer Nancy J. Hawkey states: ‘her name is invariably included in contemporary lists of representative poets’ of the 1890s.² For example, in 1925, Richard Le Gallienne fondly recalled her ‘flower-like girlish loveliness’ at John Lane’s teas and includes her in a list of prominent ‘minor poets’ of the period.³ In *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913), Holbrook Jackson groups her among ‘those poets who give expression to moods more attuned to end-of-the-century emotions’.⁴ This fosters the impression that Custance did not continue writing beyond the *fin de siècle*. Modern critics perpetuate this notion, observing her apparent poetic silence following her final volume, *The Inn of Dreams* (1911), which itself consisted largely of reprints from *The Blue Bird* (1905).⁵ However, Custance in fact continued publishing long after 1911, producing work throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, until her death in 1944. In this article, I will consider why her later work has been overlooked, contextualizing her position in the twentieth century. This investigation provokes challenging questions about how we might address the disquieting political uses to which Decadent poetry may be put.

Despite the often self-consciously ‘girlish’ tone of her letters, Custance was a shrewd negotiator of the periodical market of the *fin de siècle*; in addition to *The Yellow Book*, she published poems in the *Savoy*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Sketch*. Therefore, it is little surprise that she continued to successfully source locations for her work in the twentieth century, publishing poems in the *English Review*, the *Academy*, *Plain English*, and the *Border Standard*. But as a cursory glance reveals, these venues are contentious due to the right-wing and anti-Semitic material found within their pages. They reflect the conservative politics of Custance’s husband Lord

Alfred Douglas who used them to wage aggressive campaigns, culminating in his imprisonment for libel in 1924.⁶ The presence of Custance's lyrics in these contexts raises a series of difficult questions. What do we do when Decadent icons 'go bad'? How can we reconcile feminist recovery work with right-wing politics? Should we separate the poet from her publication context, or would doing so risk white-washing the ways in which writers are implicated in the racism of their times? What do we *do* with conservative poets like Custance, Douglas, and their associate T. W. H. Crosland? Should we simply refuse to read them? And how might reading them prompt us to redefine Decadence? To answer these questions, this article will contextualize Custance as a continuing cultural presence in the twentieth century. In the first part, I look at the self-fashioning strategies that she developed to promote her work in the Edwardian era. Utilizing photography and fashion, I show how Custance draws on romantic images of eighteenth-century women and cultivates a childlike mood that situates her Decadence in nostalgic realms, which are also echoed in her poetry. In the second part, I turn to the troubling venues in which Custance published her work. I ultimately bring both sections together to define Custance as a Decadent conservative who used nostalgia as a keynote to the politics of her persona.

The categorization 'Decadent conservative' may seem paradoxical. The Decadent is more usually associated with transgression and rebellion than conservatism. As Alex Murray explains in his work on Decadent conservatism, Decadence has long been associated with a rejection of politics in favour of individualism or, in the case of New Woman writers and female aesthetes, with progressive political activism in favour of women's rights and socialist causes.⁷ Therefore, when Decadence *has* been politicized, it is usually through its transgressive female writers – making Custance's conservative positioning even more difficult to recognize. Custance's 'Decadence' is, moreover, a contentious issue; early critics consider her Decadent 'mood' fleeting and imitative. Hawkey argues that her work is 'neither consistent nor emphatic enough to be representative of either Decadence in particular or aestheticism in general. She was, rather, a poetess of mixed moods in a period in which flamboyance was a prerequisite for fame'.⁸ We can

counter this assessment on several fronts. Firstly, one could argue that it is more appropriate to refer to Decadent *poems* rather than to Decadent *poets* since Decadence is often a mode adopted within a wider oeuvre. For example, a glance at Theodore Wratislaw's *Caprices* discloses 'Song in Spring', which sings of roses and love fulfilled, whilst John Gray's 'Green' (in *Silverpoints*) begins: 'Leaves and branches, flowers and fruits are here | And here my heart, which throbs alone for thee' – precisely the kind of topics that Hawkey claims disqualify Custance from the Decadent label.⁹ Secondly, the 'flamboyance' of the poet's life should be distinguished from the Decadent qualities of the work; Decadence is more than a matter of lifestyle. As an upper-class woman, Custance could not express her Decadence through the kind of bohemian existence lived by Arthur Symons or Ernest Dowson even if she had desired to.¹⁰ Finally, Patricia Pulham has recently argued that Custance's 'mixed moods' are precisely what makes her work Decadent: her 'mood' poems 'function simultaneously as conscious constructions of decadent artificiality and emotional expression'.¹¹ Thus, as Pulham claims, the self-conscious changeability of Custance's 'moods' reflects her adherence to Decadent artificiality, blended with Paterian impressionism and Romanticism.

I have addressed the question of Custance's Decadence then, but how could such Decadence signify a conservative position? As Murray asserts, whilst Decadence and conservatism 'seemingly make uncomfortable bedfellows [...] the lines of demarcation between conservatism and Decadence are much less clear' than we have been led to believe.¹² Particularly in the case of a poet like Custance – a female aesthete associated with both the New Woman's creative ambition and the Decadent's sexual transgression – conservatism hides in plain sight. The key to identifying Custance's conservatism lies in her belated adherence to Decadent aesthetics. Custance remained doggedly committed to Decadent poetics in the twentieth century, when such 'moods' were becoming outmoded. For example, the *Saturday Review* criticized Custance's commitment to outdated Decadent conventions in a 1906 review of *The Blue Bird*:

Lady Alfred Douglas' 'Blue Bird' is very full of honey indeed. Here the spirit and manner of a school of verse which flourished in Oxford early in the last decade, and of which Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson were the most typical representatives, are reproduced with monotonous fidelity. We have a poem on Endymion, on Hyacinthus, on S. Sebastian. [...] [We] regret that Lady Alfred Douglas should continue to believe that subservience to outworn convention of form and language can take the place of a real insight into and interest in the human soul.¹³

Lord Alfred Douglas (true to form) responded with a letter of rebuke, stating that his wife used forms such as the sonnet 'which are to be found in our best lyrical poets, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Swinburne, Blake and the rest' and mocking the reviewer's opinions on poetic innovation: 'it would be amusing to hear his views on what he would probably describe as the "latest up-to-date" forms and conventions'.¹⁴ This skirmish captures the tensions over what constituted poetry in 1906: should 'modern' poetics build on previous poetic conventions, or should it reject them? A similar tension permeates Richard Le Gallienne's later account of the 1890s. He defends the minor poets of the period, including Custance, with an aside:

the 'free verse', 'imagist', and general anti-tradition poets of the moment, morbidly afraid of 'rhetoric' [...] would do much better to go to school to one of the masters rather than attempt by wilful eccentricity to 'fake' a fictitious personality for themselves – though these and their sympathetic critics would relegate many of the poets in this list to the dustbin of superannuated song, there is little doubt in the minds of more catholic and central lovers of poetry that several of them have come to stay, and that all of them contributed something valuable to the general chorus. Almost all these poets [...] were fathered by the Bodley Head.¹⁵

In an era increasingly dominated by Modernism, to adhere to Decadent conventions could signify a multiplicity of ideological positions. As Kristin Mahoney reveals, Decadent writers in the twentieth century (such as Max Beerbohm and Vernon Lee) tended to portray themselves as detached from the times in which they lived. This strategy enabled them to coolly critique the present moment, including its hot-headed jingoism.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Cassandra Laity has argued that Modernist writers such as H.D. used allusions to their Decadent forebears to signal queer affinities, drawing on the *fin-de-siècle femme fatale* and androgyne to encode alternative sexualities.¹⁷ These examples, combined with Murray's recent study of Decadent conservatism in *The Senate*, gesture to the variety of political ends to which Decadence could be put in the twentieth century.

This suggests that Decadence as an aesthetic mode has no inherent politics and can be mobilized to express a range of ideological positions. As I will propose in the next section, in Custance's case, her continued adherence to Decadence expressed conservative nostalgia founded on a sense of inherent superiority tied to both her class and her sexual identity as an aristocrat and a queer woman. Custance's Decadent poetry repeatedly laments the loss of youth and beauty, qualities she perceives as under threat in the twentieth century. In the process, allusions in her 'child-like' poetry to an unspecified past idyll or otherworldly dreamland become ways of expressing both alternative sexualities and a conservative nostalgia that is anything but politically neutral.

'What a child I am!': Girlishness and Nostalgic Self-Fashioning, 1902-1906

The scathing criticism in a 1906 edition of the *Saturday Review* was particularly disappointing as Custance was trying to revive her career. 1902 had been an intense year, in which she eloped with Douglas, published her second volume *Rainbows*, and gave birth to her son Raymond. After a hiatus in 1903, she began publishing poems again; for example, 'The Photograph' appeared in the *Saturday Review* on 30 April 1904 (Douglas pointed out the irony of this in his response to the paper's criticism of his wife). As 1904 progressed, Custance corresponded with John Lane, asking him to source publication venues for her work (he had assisted with this when *The Yellow Book* was still active):

Would you be kind enough I wonder to place the enclosed sonnet for me in some paper or magazine. [...] I am writing as much as I can for my next volume *The Blue Bird*. [...] I hope to come and see you ... and bring my boy to show you – he is a beauty and walks alone now... [...]. I was ill and depressed all last year – but things are going very well now and I am much better – and we having such a gay and happy time – we often go into Monte Carlo.¹⁸

This letter suggests Custance was anxious to revive her career following a period of possible post-natal depression. Presumably Lane's reply was discouraging as Custance's poems were instead published in the *English Review*. This journal was under the control of T. W. H. Crosland, a close associate of Douglas. Crosland ran the paper from October 1905 to February 1906 and

established the Marlborough Press around the same time. In his sycophantic biography *The Life and Genius of T. W. H. Crosland* (1928), William Sorley Brown writes that the *English Review* ‘deserves to be specially remembered because of the excellent standard of verse that appeared in its lively pages. [...] The chief contributors of verse were Lord and Lady Alfred Douglas’.¹⁹ Custance published at least three poems in the magazine: ‘Grief’, ‘Autumn Day’ and ‘In Praise of Youth’.²⁰ ‘Grief’ – possibly the sonnet that she wished Lane to place – expresses a sense of weariness and nostalgia:

I, that was once so eager for the light,
The vehement pomp and passion of the day,
Am tired at last, and glad to steal away
Across the dusky borders of the night.
The purple darkness now is my delight,
And with great stars my lonely sorrows play,
As still, some proud and tragic princess may
With diamonds make her desolation bright.

Night has become a temple for my tears ...
The moon a silver shroud for my despair,
And all the golden forests of the spheres
Have showered their splendours on me leaf by leaf
Till men that meet me in the sunlight, stare
To see the shining garment of my grief!²¹

The melancholy speaker longs to retreat into Decadent twilight, where she will become a ‘tragic princess’ clad in stars, moonlight, and fallen leaves. This poem expresses the yearning for youth and the past and the rejection of the present, here represented by daylight that is found in many of Custance’s poems. This nostalgia is reinforced on a formal level through her use of the Petrarchan sonnet (although Custance interestingly innovates within the convention, with the sestet employing a variation on the traditional rhyming pattern). ‘In Praise of Youth’, published in the *English Review* in 1906, expresses a similar desire to avoid maturity, concluding:

... And when at last, with sad, indifferent face,
I walk in narrow pathways patiently;
Forgetful of thy beauty, and thy truth,
Thy ringing laughter, thy rebellious grace ...
When fair Love turns his face away from me ...
Then, let me die, O delicate sweet Youth!²²

The speaker desires death if they ever forget the beauty of ‘Youth’, here personified as an androgynous figure recalling Douglas’ allegorical poem ‘Two Loves’: ‘Thy whiteness, and thy brightness, and the sweet | Flushed softness of thy little restless feet ... | The tossed and sunny tangle of thy hair’.²³ But such sorrow is of course inevitable, as ageing is a fact of life. The speaker strives to hold this reality at bay by evoking a timeless dreamland in which Youth is an eternal spirit that can be continually returned to, implying that if one continues to praise ‘Youth’ (‘thy praises shall be sung | While yet my heart is young’) – presumably through writing and reading such poetry as Custance’s – maturity can be indefinitely suspended.



Figure 1. Photograph of Olive Custance by Lallie Charles, *Tatler*, 3 January 1906, p. 25.

Such nostalgia also infuses Custance's self-fashioning strategies at this time. Crosland agreed to publish Custance's third volume of poems, *The Blue Bird*, through his Marlborough Press. The first advert for *The Blue Bird* appears in *English Review* on 28 October 1905 and then in every subsequent issue. The book did not sell well, however, and in early 1906, Custance set about trying to promote this new volume herself. Photography and self-fashioning were central to her publicity strategies. She had utilized photography early in her career to pique the interest of Douglas and she continued to use her image in this manner, sending a photograph to Lane in 1906, along with a copy of *The Blue Bird*, to pass onto Le Gallienne so he would not 'forget her'.²⁴ Her portrait appears in *Tatler* in January 1906 captioned 'A Pretty Poet' [see Fig. 1].²⁵ *Tatler* was (and still is) a publication devoted to showcasing aristocratic beauty, thus the photograph promotes Custance's work via her romantic appearance. The photograph is by Lallie Charles who, inspired by the success of other female studio photographers such as Alice Hughes, opened her first studio in London in 1896. She became one of the most sought-after photographers of the Edwardian era, specializing in portraits of society women which were published in *Country Life*, *Bystander*, *The Sketch*, and *Black and White*. A piece in the latter praised her as a photographer of women, writing:

It is almost a proverb that woman is never appreciative of woman: Madame Garet-Charles is a living contradiction to that saying, for women make the greater proportion of her sitters, and that she is kind to them, in that she brings out all their good and beautiful points, is abundantly evident.²⁶

Custance clearly appreciated Charles' talent as she had other portraits taken by her. For example, another photograph by Charles of an elaborately coiffured Custance also appeared in *The Sketch* in February 1906 [see Fig. 2].²⁷



Figure 2. Photograph of Olive Custance by Lallie Charles, *The Sketch*, 21 February 1906, p. 170.

Custance evidently made concerted efforts to fashion herself as a glamorous figure. Her diary contains detailed plans for gowns and hats alongside drafts of poems. A 1906 entry describes a new dress in terms that encode the eighteenth-century aesthetics that she admired:

My dress-maker has made me a blue chiffon evening frock – which is a most glorious colour, like the blue ribbon Lady Hamilton wears in her hair in one of Romney’s pictures – a blue that – by day – makes one dream of summer skies, blue flowers and youth – and at night reminds one of peacocks, precious stones and poets ... Oh, a frock for a Princess... A mysterious frock – suggestive of many delights ... a snare for the curious eyes of Pleasure, a net for the Winged Love ...²⁸

Custance then observes that some may regard her attention to dress as ‘trivial’: ‘See! how I am inspired by a little gossamer garment ... and being a woman am not ashamed of it ... for is not everything in the world trivial and transitory ... and all our wisdom foolishness?’²⁹ This careful self-fashioning is entirely in keeping with aestheticism, in which the self becomes a work of art. Custance clearly regarded her image as a crucial aspect of her poetic career; her dresses *were* poems. Reviews also picked up on the connection between gowns and poems; in a review of *The Inn of Dreams*, *The New York Times* wrote that: ‘her singing robes are made in Paris, and are strictly up-to-date in the cling of their sentiment and the hang of their rhythm’.³⁰ Of course, this statement is incorrect on both fronts: Custance’s poetic style was far from ‘up-to-date’ and her sartorial style was also composed of historical references. The contradiction may be explained by the fact that nostalgia *was* the order of the day for many poets, particularly conservative aesthetes like Custance.

In Custance’s case, this nostalgic ideal is inflected by the eighteenth century, with her frilled, lacy, light-coloured dress and rose-trimmed bonnet in Charles’ portrait suggestive of that era [see Fig. 1]. Talia Schaffer observes that for many female aesthetes, the eighteenth century signified ‘a period of idyllic, deliciously flirtatious, virginal girlhood’.³¹ Rather than an absence or repression of sexual desire, the eighteenth century represented ‘a way of critiquing normative marital reproductive sexuality’ as it was considered a period of ‘eternal romantic courtship’ in which women could ‘flirt forever’ – with men and with each other.³² Custance’s costume therefore represents an attempt to emphasize her girlishness and express nostalgia for an earlier era, whilst also subtly conveying her flirtatious, fluid sexuality. Such nostalgia also has a conservative purpose. As Alison Light observes of Margaret Jourdain – an expert of eighteenth-century furniture and fellow contributor to Douglas’ later journals the *Academy* and *Plain English* – the eighteenth century functioned as a ‘a tidied-up patrician version of the past’ that was particularly appealing to conservatives in the early twentieth century, for ‘in the “bad times” of

social egalitarianism, this imaginary past could serve as an escape from, and indictment of, the alarming present'.³³

In Charles' photograph, Custance's performative stance – head resting on hands, face tilted, direct, longing gaze, fallen flowers on the bench before her – manages to be both innocent and knowing, a pose that she also adopts in her poetic work, using girlishness to mask self-aware seductiveness. With titles like 'The Child' and 'Angels', these poems turn wistfully away from the hardships of the world, finding refuge in innocence, angels and fairies. Contemporary reviewers anticipate Douglas Murray in deriding the 'childishly simple sentiment' and 'little girl's emotions' expressed in Custance's poetry.³⁴ But, as I have argued elsewhere, in a poem sequence like 'Songs of a Fairy Princess', writing in a child-like voice enabled Custance to project innocence whilst expressing potentially transgressive adult desires – in her case, bisexual desire for Douglas, represented as a homoerotic fairy prince.³⁵ The fairy-tale genre offered a comparable opportunity to Hellenism for enabling covert depictions of homoerotic desire; Oscar Wilde, Renée Vivien, and Douglas himself all embraced its queer potential for imagining new configurations of gender and sexuality beyond the bounds of adult judgment and censorship.³⁶

We can see how this operates in a poem like Custance's 'The Child' (1905). The poem imagines a 'dreaming girl' at sunset: 'A rose in heaven, the sunset glows | Behind her flushed and happy face; | O golden rose, and wild pink rose'.³⁷ The adjectives 'flushed' and 'wild' suggest that all is not as innocent as it may seem. Blushes were often sexualized within Victorian culture, associated with sexual self-consciousness, but also with secret vices such as masturbation.³⁸ As with other Custance poems, the ellipses throughout the poem increase this sense of suggestion. The second stanza asks: 'What does she see?' – and the answer is fluttering green leaves, like butterflies, suggestive of the fecundity of spring. However, the third stanza alludes to the 'darkening sky' above her head, hinting that this fantasy may cause the hours to waste away as the girl matures. Twilight features repeatedly in Custance's work, representing both Decadence and the liminal period between girlhood and maturity. The girl has '[b]uilded castles in

Wonderland’ – a deliberately ungrammatical line, in which Custance adopts the child’s babyish voice. The final stanza addresses the prince, who is to awaken the girl from this fairyland:

The world for her is a mystery...
Child princess of the prince to be.
(The rose has faded out the sky)
Ride swift, fair prince, by Love’s sweet grace,
To win the wild rose of her face
Before it too shall fade and die.³⁹

As with Custance’s other poems, the danger here is maturity. Though the princess is a child, her beauty and youth will soon fade. For all its infantilized innocence the poem is imbued with a sense of ephemerality and decay. It also encodes a knowing sexuality; essentially urging the prince to deflower the princess before her bloom fades.

‘The Child’ complements Custance’s photographic self-fashioning. Like Charles’ photographic portraits, it projects a nostalgic, innocent image of youth detached from the sordid modern world but is in fact highly aware of itself as a sophisticated construction. In her quest to project childishness, Custance enlisted her infant son Raymond, writing in her 1906 diary: ‘This morning Raymond and I went to be photographed together ... He was taken alone ... and I hope they will be good ... I took off all his clothes for one picture taken with me in the Melisande frock ...’.⁴⁰ This photograph, also by Charles, appears in *The Sketch* in December 1907 [see Fig. 3]. Although this whimsical image chimes with the fairy land often depicted in Custance’s poems, it also potentially raises concerns regarding Raymond’s agency in such a scenario, bringing to mind more disturbing contexts of pederastic exploitation at the *fin de siècle*, such as the photography of Wilhelm von Gloeden and the writings of Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe).⁴¹



Figure 3. Photograph of Olive Custance with Raymond by Lallie Charles, *The Sketch*, 11 December 1907, p. 277.

Although she never published poems explicitly *for* children, naivety was one of Custance's dominant poetic 'moods'. In letters and poems, she often describes herself as a changeling or fairy's child. For example, in a letter to Siegfried Sassoon of 1918 (written when she was forty-four), Custance writes with characteristic flirtatiousness:

I think it may amuse you to know what I look like? I always want to know what people look like ... so important!

I have blue eyes and short golden-brown hair ... and of course I'm rather old!

How horrible this war is ... I don't understand it and I want to stop it! – 'a pacifist!' – my father says ... but of course he is an old soldier ... and utterly different from me ... I am a changeling! as you will see by my poem ... or fairy's child really and it's always felt lonely in this world ... especially with my own people ...⁴²

These sentiments are expressed in her poem 'The Changeling' which was published in *The Inn of Dreams* (she sent Sassoon the volume along with her letter):

My father was a golden king,
My mother was a shining queen;
I heard the magic blue-bird sing ...
They wrapped me in a mantle green.

[...]

They stole the crying human child,
And left me laughing by the fire;
And that is why my heart is wild,
And all my life a long desire ...⁴³

By identifying as a changeling, Custance expresses a sense of otherness and separation from the mundane world. This can be seen in the speaker's reference to her 'wild' heart and 'long desire', echoing Custance's 'Opal Song': 'Shy and wild ... shy and wild | To my lovers I have been. | Frank and wayward as a child, | Strange and secret as a queen'.⁴⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, this poem reflects Custance's fickle nature and her queer desires. The changeling too, belongs to a royal lineage; the fairy inheritance as one of inherent superiority (a birth line even finer than the blood of Custance's 'own people', with whom she is reluctant to identify). The reference to the 'blue bird' not only refers to her earlier collection, but also to its epigraph, taken from Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying': 'over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be'.⁴⁵ Custance's speaker hears the 'magic blue-bird sing' and is therefore in tune with the time when (as Wilde's Vivian describes) Beauty becomes superior to Truth. The changeling thus has access to an alternative set of values which enables them to escape from the rules of the present:

The old enchantments hold me still ...
[...]
I dance and revel with the dead ...

[...]

'Vain lies!' I hear the people cry,
I listen to their weary truth;
Then turn again to fantasy,

And the untroubled Land of Youth.

As with 'In Praise of Youth', 'The Changeling' captures Custance's position in the twentieth century. She preferred to live in 'the Land of Youth' and to lament the loss of the past, turning to fantasy rather than the more difficult reality of the present (including her troubled relationship with Douglas, the trials of motherhood, and the war).

This begs the question: was Custance in touch with reality? Returning to her letter to Sassoon, we can discern a disturbing flippancy as she transitions rapidly from the ongoing First World War to fairy fantasy. What is the function of such childishness? In this instance, it allows Custance to blithely express ignorance ('I don't understand it!'), softening her actual political convictions ('I want to stop it [...] a pacifist') in a manner that protects her insouciantly Decadent, conservatively feminine façade. Elsewhere, in poems like 'Songs of a Fairy Princess' and 'A Child', as we have seen, it enables her to write about desire whilst evading the censorship associated with adult sexuality. Finally, Custance's use of a child's perspective permitted her to express conservative politics under the mask of innocent detachment from the world. In a similar manner to Dickens's Skimpole, Custance regarded Douglas and herself as 'mere children' – as she once wrote to him during their courtship: 'What a child I am! But you will understand because you are a child too'.⁴⁶ But whilst the child voice may seem to absolve one of adult responsibilities through its depoliticized tone, as we will now see, in reality this was far from the case.

Decadence and Anti-Semitism: *The Academy* and *Plain English*, 1907-1921

Custance's portrait with Raymond is captioned: 'Wife of the rejuvenator of "The Academy", Lady Alfred Douglas, with her son' [see Fig. 3]. Douglas ran the *Academy* from 1907 to 1910. With the help of his friend Crosland, the periodical moved from a liberal to an extremely conservative position, railing against the threats of socialism, suffragism, and frequently voicing anti-Semitic views.⁴⁷ In 1909 W. H. Smith withdrew the magazine from sale and Douglas had to

relinquish the editorship.⁴⁸ The *Academy* provided a venue for Custance's work after the folding of Crosland's *English Review*. She published twenty-three poems in the magazine between 1906 and 1909; all but one of these are reprinted in *The Inn of Dreams*.⁴⁹ Many of these poems express the same turning away from the world in favour of a land of fantasy. For example, in 'A Song Against Care' (April 1908), the speaker urges the reader to cast off 'care' as a 'cloak too heavy to be borne', arguing that it is better to be a carefree 'gay beggar' than wear such weighty finery:

O Care!

[...]

[...] thou art fair
To look at, O thou garment of our pride!
A net of colours, thou dost catch the wise;
He lays aside his wisdom for thy sake ...
And Beauty hides her loveliness in thee ...
And after ... when men know the agony
Of thy great weight of splendour, and would shake
Thee swiftly from their shoulders, cast aside
The burden of thy jewelled bands that break
Their very hearts ... often it is too late.⁵⁰

It is unclear precisely *what* the 'care' is, but the implication is that engagement with the world may come at too high a price, risking loss of 'beauty' and jeopardizing the intellectual detachment of the 'wise'. This poem praises detachment from the concerns of the world and upholds individualism: 'But some are brave ... but some among us dare | Cry out against thy torment and be free!'⁵¹ As Murray notes, individualism was 'core to both the vision of classic Conservatism [...] and to the ideals of Decadence'.⁵² Moreover, in her study of women and conservatism, Light observes that the conservative 'emphasis upon private life and personal feeling, has especial significance for women' in comparison to the 'more rigorously collective-minded outlook of socialisms'.⁵³ Custance's seemingly apolitical poem therefore expresses a covert conservatism entirely in keeping with its publication context. If we reject 'care', the poem implies, we will be happy in our lot, rather than experiencing the discontentment that could lead to activism and change. The poem echoes a 1907 article in the *Academy* on the 'conservative view of life':

The good Conservative holds that it is not only vain but wrong to aim at happiness in this world, whether through individual effort or political combination. [...] [T]hose who stake their all upon this life and waste their powers in trying to make it happy are fighting against facts and the will of God.⁵⁴

Such attempts will result in ‘confusion and shame’ – as ‘A Song Against Care’ also warns.⁵⁵

Reading articles in the *Academy* alongside Custance’s poem helps make its submerged politics explicit. The apparent rejection of politics in ‘A Song Against Care’ is itself political.

The poem was published just above Ethel Talbot’s intriguing sonnet ‘Swinburne’. Both poems hark back to an idyllic time; the ‘tender morning of the world | When the old gods had speech with common men’.⁵⁶ Custance’s poem ‘Hyacinthus’, published in the *Academy* in May 1909 evokes a similar Hellenic idyll, recounting the tragic love of Apollo and his boy lover:

Fair boy, how gay the morning must have seemed
Before the fatal game that murdered thee!
Of such a dawn my wistful heart has dreamed:
Surely I too have lived in Arcady
When Spring, lap-full of roses, ran to meet
White Aphrodite risen from the sea ...

Perchance I saw thee then, so glad and fleet;
Hasten to greet Apollo, stoop to bind
The gold and jewelled sandals on his feet,
While he so radiant, so divinely kind,
Lured thee with honeyed words to be his friend,
All heedless of thy fate, for Love is blind.⁵⁷

Custance’s poem manages to be doubly homoerotic; not only do we witness the intimacy between Hyacinthus and Apollo, we also have a union between Spring and Aphrodite, a Botticellian reference that subtly encodes lesbian desire. In Arcady, these same-sex couples live together in sensual bliss. The poem can be read in the context of Wilde and Douglas’ affair, and Wilde’s imprisonment. In one version of the myth, Apollo is responsible for Hyacinthus’ death, but Custance alludes to the version of the story in which the wind god Zephyrus, jealous of such love, causes the discus to fatally strike Hyacinthus:

For Love is blind and cruel, and the end
Of every joy is sorrow and distress.
And when immortal creatures lightly bend
To kiss the lips of simple loveliness,
Swords are unsheathed in silence, and clouds rise,

Some God is jealous of the mute caress ...⁵⁸

The swords ‘unsheathed’ give this revenge distinctly phallic undertones, whilst the ‘mute caress’ recalls Douglas’ notorious ‘love that dare not speak its name’, used in the trial. It is difficult to resist reading in this scenario the wrath of Queensbury and the public condemnation of Wilde and Douglas’ relationship. Whilst some critics have argued that such homoerotic Decadent verse became more difficult to publish following Wilde’s trial, Linda K. Hughes argues that after 1895 ‘women, already marginal, could more safely articulate thoughts that had become dangerous for men’.⁵⁹ Custance’s work shows that women poets were still publishing such poems in 1909. However, these poems did not completely escape censure. As we have seen, the enduring Decadent homoeroticism of this poem was criticized by the *Saturday Review* in 1906 – it is no coincidence that the ‘honeyed’ poems they object to most are those addressed to boy-muses: ‘We have a poem on Endymion, on Hyacinthus, on S. Sebastian’.⁶⁰ These poems attest to Custance’s commitment to keeping the Decadent homoerotic spirit alive, regardless of the disapproval of others.

However, what is most intriguing – and disturbing – is that Custance’s poems appear in the pages of a deeply right-wing magazine. For example, the same issue as Custance’s ‘Hyacinthus’ features an article (unsigned, but likely by Douglas) on ‘How the Law Favours Women’ – in tone and content, this piece is a striking anticipation of the modern Men’s Rights Movement.⁶¹ A few months earlier, Douglas writes of the ‘Tottenham Outrage’ (an armed robbery committed by Jewish Latvian socialists): ‘The Act for excluding undesirable aliens was passed with the very object of keeping out of the country such monsters [...]. But the Home Secretary [Herbert Gladstone], in obedience to the canting howl about “political refugees” which was raised in the Radical press at the bidding of certain Jews and Socialists, has rendered this wise law to no effect’.⁶² A month later, Douglas reports George Bernard Shaw’s interview with a ‘celebrated Jew’ in which Shaw praised Jewish participation in revolutionary movements. Douglas comments: ‘That last observation happens to be profoundly true, and while it explains

Mr. Shaw's love of Jews, it also explains why [...] even in England, a strong anti-Semitic feeling exists'.⁶³ Such anti-Semitic articles appeared consistently during Douglas' term as editor.⁶⁴ Therefore Custance's seemingly apolitical Decadent escapism expressed in poems such as 'Hyacinthus' is deeply entangled in the political racism of the day.

After his dismissal as editor, Douglas continued his project, following the *Academy* with *Plain English*, a weekly magazine that he started with Crosland and Harold Sherwood Spencer in 1920. He used this venue to publish deeply anti-Semitic articles, including a series entitled 'The Jewish Peril' by Major-General Count Cherep-Spiridovitch, and his own claims of Jewish conspiracies regarding the Battle of Jutland.⁶⁵ Douglas later admitted that *Plain English's* policy was 'strongly anti-Semitic'.⁶⁶ Custance once again published poems in these pages. Her poem 'The Call', for instance, appears in *Plain English* in July 1920:

Come away!
But not to the secret woods, or the wind-swept fields today,
And not to the shining sands with their little waves upcurled ...
No! let us be brave at last and wander out of the world!

Come away!
To the other side of the stars, where the Angels are at play!
And our friends shall run to meet us with laughter in their eyes,
From the perfumed galleries of Heaven, and the golden galleries ...⁶⁷

Once again, the child-like speaker urges an escape from the mundane world into a world on 'the other side of the stars', populated with angels. This seems to be a version of heaven, reflecting Douglas and Custance's Catholic beliefs. Douglas had converted to Catholicism in 1911, and Custance supposedly converted herself in 1917 but lapsed shortly after. She returned to the Church in 1924 only to lapse again by 1927. Her religious commitment does not appear to have been particularly strong, and the theological vision in her poems is vague, to say the least; the 'perfumed gardens' and 'golden galleries' in the final line sounds sensuously Decadent rather than spiritual, and the poem floats off into ellipses before more details of the afterlife can be revealed.

‘The Call’ is published on the same page as Douglas’ ‘Eve and the Serpent’, a satirical poem about the court case in which the couple (unsuccessfully) battled Olive’s father Colonel Custance for custody of their son Raymond. Douglas’ poem is an attack on the courts, and is once again anti-Semitic. He aims his barbs primarily at Sir George Lewis, Colonel Custance’s solicitor.⁶⁸ Using biblical allegory, Douglas depicts Lewis as a dragon/snake that seduces ‘Eve’ with money – a reference to Mr Justice Eve, the judge who ruled in the Colonel’s favour. In a final ‘song’ performed by a chorus of demons, Douglas emphasizes Lewis’ Jewish and ‘German’ identity, lamenting the case’s outcome:

When Englishmen pay German Jews
 To prosecute their ‘son-in-laws’,
When advocates their skill abuse
 To make the worse the better cause.⁶⁹

Custance’s ‘call’ to escape the world is therefore tethered to a context that not only reflects the tensions of her own life, but also her husband’s anti-Semitic views. Her poems and the appalling content of the magazine do not speak *directly* to one another – indeed, one suspects that Custance’s poems function as convenient filler for Douglas’ journal. Nonetheless, the mere presence of Custance’s lyrics in such a context raises the question: what sorts of work are these seemingly detached, apolitical poems of dreamland and Arcady doing in *Plain English*? These poems ask to be read apolitically, emphasizing their innocence (in every sense of the word), but they are surrounded by virulently hateful journalism. The poems and the articles taken together create a complex ideological blend, balancing Decadent feminine nostalgia, with masculine political invective. Douglas must have been aware of this on some level, even if he was partly using his wife’s poems as filler. But was Custance fully aware of the content of Douglas’ magazine, and did she endorse its views? It is difficult to say for certain; I have not found any explicit expression of anti-Semitic beliefs in her letters. But Custance clearly read *Plain English* and was aware of its contents – consider her note to Douglas in 1920: ‘what a joy, Darling, to see my poem “The Call” in your paper – a thousand thanks! And I am delighted with your Article –

is it yours? – called “The Tin Whistle” – and Stuart Ellis’ Disraeli is very good – altogether it is a capital number ... and so amusing!⁷⁰ Given that the pages preceding “The Call” feature Douglas’ attack on Lewis and the *Morning Post* (for refusing to print an advertisement for *Plain English*): ‘it is petty and mean – and *Jewish*. There’s the rub. [...] It takes a Jew or something very like one, to descend to such methods’, Custance could be in little doubt about the journal’s position.⁷¹ I suspect that making her own explicit political statements would not be in line with Custance’s particular feminine brand of conservatism; such outspokenness was reserved for men. But we must also credit her with some agency and choice in where she placed her poems and we must therefore read the inclusion of her poems in such venues as silent assent with the politics contained within their pages.

Immortal Youth!: Custance’s Late Poetics

For the rest of the 1920s, Custance lived a relatively quiet life on the Isle of Wight, where Douglas would come to visit her occasionally. In the 1930s, she moved to Hove where she and Douglas had seaside flats near to one another. She continued to write during the 1930s and 40s, until her death in 1944. For example, she crafted at least three poems in the early 1940s in response to the Second World War, entitled ‘England shall still be England’, ‘To the Wounded’, and ‘Immortal Youth’, though it is unclear if she actually published these.⁷² The latter is printed on a small card and dedicated ‘to His Majesty’s Royal Air Force’. The poem apostrophizes ‘Immortal youth!’ in a similar manner to ‘Hyacinthus’:

Immortal youth! Some people dared to say,
Hard things of you when England was at peace,
But cowering now in sorrow and dismay,
They see you as bright spirits that release,
Dread forces to protect them night and day ...
While they can only hope, and watch and pray.

Immortal youth! the earth, the sea, the sky,
Make mighty backgrounds for your victories
And your divine defeats – your chivalry,
Your gay and gallant ways ... for ever these

Shall shine undimmed, even though beauty die.⁷³

Custance thus reworks her particular brand of nostalgic Decadence for war time. This poem combines a wistful desire for ‘chivalry’ and ‘gallant ways’ with a sense of jingoistic enthusiasm – RAF bombers are transfigured into ‘bright spirits’ protecting the people of Britain. Death in wartime becomes once again a way of praising ‘youth’ and ‘beauty’. The death of these young men is a triumph for aestheticism; they die as martyrs for ‘Beauty’: ‘all that’s lovely shall be born again, | So long as age is wise and youth is brave | And Beauty shall be overthrown in vain’.⁷⁴

Thus forty-five years on from her work in *The Yellow Book*, Custance maintained her commitment to Decadent nostalgia. Her poetry troubles definitions of Decadence both historically, by extending into the twentieth century, and politically, through its alignment with extreme right-wing ideologies. But rather than concluding that Custance doesn’t fit the Decadent label, this rather suggests that we need to redefine Decadence to include such complex ideological positionings. For as Murray states:

The gamut of ideological positions held by Decadents and Aesthetes, as contradictory as they are, need to be acknowledged if we are to place Decadence effectively into its historical context, and to understand its textual strategies as engaged rather than arbitrary or solipsistic. In the case of conservatism and Decadence, it is crucial that we grasp the uneasy alliance between the two in the charged climate of late-Victorian political culture, as well as that culture’s relationship to the press.⁷⁵

To conclude, closely examining poets like Custance – those individuals associated with *The Yellow Book*, who continued publishing in the decades after – reveals the varied ways that Decadence endured in the twentieth century. In Custance’s mature work, Decadent nostalgia, homoeroticism and anti-Semitism are disturbing bedfellows. But although engaging with this work might make us uncomfortable, I believe that reconciling the queer Decadent glamour of this *Yellow Book* poet with her later manifestation as poetic filler in racist publications, is necessary, enabling us to perceive further facets of the complex functions of Decadent poetry in the twentieth century.

¹ The same number of poems as Graham R. Tomson/Rosamund Marriott Watson. As with Tomson, it is difficult to trace Custance through her various publication names (she publishes as 'Lady Alfred Douglas,' 'Olive Douglas,' and 'O.D.' among others). I have chosen to refer to her as Olive Custance throughout, as this is her most consistent authorial name.

² Nancy J. Hawkey, 'Olive Custance Douglas: Introduction to a Bibliography', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 15.1 (1972), 49-51 (p. 50).

³ Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic Nineties* (New York: Doubleday, 1925), p. 165; p. 173.

⁴ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 192.

⁵ For example, Hawkey writes that her poetic production 'ceased completely in 1911' (p. 51).

⁶ In his pamphlet entitled 'The Murder of Lord Kitchener and the Truth about the Battle of Jutland and the Jews' (later published by William Sorley Brown in the *Border Standard*, 18 August 1923), Douglas accused Winston Churchill of falsifying a 1916 report into the Battle of Jutland. He implied that Kitchener had been murdered as a part of an 'international Jewish conspiracy' and that Churchill had been corrupted by the Jews. See Stephen Heathorn, *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain: Remembrance, Representation, and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 67-73 (p. 68).

⁷ Alex Murray, 'Decadent Conservatism: Politics and Aesthetics in *The Senate*', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 20.2 (2015), 186-211 (p. 189).

⁸ Hawkey, p. 51.

⁹ Theodore Wratislaw, 'Song in Spring', in *Caprices* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1994), p. 9; John Gray, 'Green', in *Silverpoints* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1994), p. xxviii.

Hawkey dismisses Custance's work for dealing with 'roses, tender green plants, soft rain, and new love' (p. 50)

¹⁰ Although she certainly exercised her independence through her lesbian liaisons and defying her father's wishes in marrying Douglas.

¹¹ Patricia Pulham, 'Writing "end-of-the-century emotions": Decadence and Artifice in Olive Custance's Mood Poetry', *Women Writing Decadence, 1880-1920*, 7-8 July 2018, University of Oxford, p. 6 (conference paper kindly shared with the author).

¹² Murray, 'Decadent Conservatism', p. 186.

¹³ 'Little Verse', *Saturday Review of politics, literature, science and art*, 2 June 1906, pp. 694-95 (p. 694).

¹⁴ Lord Alfred Douglas, 'The Blue Bird', *Saturday Review*, 9 June 1906, p. 725. The war of words received attention in the press elsewhere: see *Bystander*, 11 July 1906, p. 67.

¹⁵ Le Gallienne, *The Romantic Nineties*, pp. 173-74.

¹⁶ Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), passim.

¹⁷ Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), passim.

¹⁸ Custance to Lane, 18 April 1904, British Library, Add MS 81728.

Custance frequently uses ellipses in both her letters and her published poetry. Whilst contemporary reviewers and modern critics often remark on how irritating this can be, I consider it yet another way that Custance can subtly imbue flirtatiousness into her work and her (often professional) interactions. It also implies what is left unsaid in ways that resonate interestingly with Douglas' 'love that dare not speak its name'.

¹⁹ William Sorley Brown, *The Life and Genius of T. W. H. Crosland* (London: C. Palmer, 1928), p. 183.

Sorley Brown also authored *The Genius of Lord Alfred Douglas: An Appreciation* (Galashiels, Scotland: W. Brown, 1913).

²⁰ 'Grief' (21 October 1905, p. 15); 'Autumn Day' (28 October 1905, p. 40), and 'In Praise of Youth' (3 February 1906, p. 348), all signed 'O.D.' in *English Review*.

²¹ 'Grief', *English Review*, 21 October 1905, p. 15.

²² 'In Praise of Youth', *English Review*, 3 February 1906, p. 348.

²³ Ibid.

In Douglas' poem, the figure of Love is 'fair and blooming, [...] | His eyes were bright, and 'mid the dancing blades | Of golden grass his feet did trip for joy' whilst the first figure encountered has 'wind-tossed' hair and shields himself from the sun ('Two Loves', *Poèmes* (Paris: Edition du Mercure de France, 1896), pp. 104-111). Like Douglas', Custance's poem is also structured as an allegorical journey in which she is accompanied by 'Life' and encounters 'wild Folly' as well as 'Youth'.

²⁴ Custance to Lane, 13 October 1906, British Library, Add MS 81728.

²⁵ *Tatler*, 3 January 1906, p. 25.

²⁶ *Black and White*, 16 April 1898, p. 528.

²⁷ *The Sketch*, 21 February 1906, p. 170. Custance's portrait appears alongside a photograph of 'Miss Whitelaw Reid,' also by Charles, with the same bench and a near-identical composition. The same photograph appeared in the *Bystander*, 11 July 1906, p. 67, in a feature recounting Douglas' skirmish with the *Saturday Review*.

- ²⁸ 7 July 1906, Holograph Diary 1906-1909, Berg Collection, New York Public Library. See also the entry on the Melisande frock inspired by Maeterlinck's play (13 February 1906).
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ 'Sophisticated Verse', *The New York Times*, 26 November 1911, p. 744.
- ³¹ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 99.
- ³² Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, p. 101; p. 99.
- ³³ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 35; p. 57.
- ³⁴ Douglas Murray, *Bosie: A Biography of Lord Alfred Douglas* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 149.
- ³⁵ See Sarah Parker, "'A Girl's Love': Lord Alfred Douglas as Homoerotic Muse in the Poetry of Olive Custance," *Women: A Cultural Review*, 22.2-3 (2011), 220-40.
- ³⁶ Douglas published a Uranian poem entitled 'Prince Charming' (1892), whilst at Oxford. Renée Vivien also wrote a short story entitled 'Prince Charming' (1904), in which a girl masquerades as her brother and marries a princess. Wilde's fairy tales are well known.
- ³⁷ 'The Child', *The Blue Bird* (London: Marlborough Press, 1905), p. 19.
- ³⁸ See for example, Diane Mason, *The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Fiction and Medical Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 57.
- ³⁹ 'The Child', *The Blue Bird*, pp. 19-20.
- ⁴⁰ 22 February 1906, Holograph Diary 1906-1909, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- ⁴¹ Custance was an admirer and defender of Corvo, praising Mr A. J. A. Symons's biography: 'And I fancied to myself that he was a rich but melancholy widower!!! living in Italy surrounded by lovely boys ... [...]. I do think that he was most unfortunate in youth ... &, of course, abominably treated by all sorts of mediocre people' (Custance to A. J. A. Symons, 9 January 1932), Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware. Corvo also contributed to Douglas' *The Academy*.
- ⁴² Custance to Siegfried Sassoon, 23 August 1918, Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware.
- ⁴³ 'The Changeling', *The Inn of Dreams* (London: John Lane, 1911), p. 11.
- ⁴⁴ 'Opal Song', *The Inn of Dreams*, p. 47.
- See my reading of the poem in *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889-1930* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 85-86.
- ⁴⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', *The Decay of Lying and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 1-38 (p. 35).
- ⁴⁶ Custance to Douglas, c. October 1901, British Library, Add MS 81703.
- ⁴⁷ See, for example, the 'Life and Letters' column (unsigned, but very likely by Douglas) which condemns suffragists, socialists and Jews, *Academy*, 13 February 1909, pp. 771-73.
- ⁴⁸ See 'Ourselves and W. H. Smith', *Academy*, 21 August 1909, pp. 437-39.
- ⁴⁹ This poem is entitled 'The Visible God', *Academy*, 14 September 1907, p. 885.
- ⁵⁰ 'A Song Against Care', *Academy*, 4 April 1908, p. 633.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Murray, 'Decadent Conservatism', pp. 201-02.
- ⁵³ Light, *Forever England*, pp. 13-14.
- ⁵⁴ Arthur Clutton-Brock, 'The Other Point of View', *Academy*, 28 December 1907, pp. 290-91.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 291.
- ⁵⁶ Ethel Talbot, 'Swinburne', *Academy*, 4 April 1908, p. 633.
- Talbot is today remembered as an author of girls' school stories, and she lived with an intimate friend, Edith Mary de Foubert, also an author of school stories. Murray describes the older Swinburne as a 'Decadent Conservative of sorts' (p. 190).
- ⁵⁷ 'Hyacinthus', *Academy*, 1 May 1909, p. 54.
- This poem was originally published in *The Blue Bird* (1905) and was later reprinted in *The Inn of Dreams* (1911).
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Linda K. Hughes, 'Women Poets and Contested Spaces in *The Yellow Book*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44.4 (2004), 849-72 (p. 859). Hughes cites Custance's poems 'A Madrigal' (July 1895) and 'The White Statue' (October 1896) as proof that risqué work could still be published in *The Yellow Book* after May 1895.
- ⁶⁰ 'Little Verse', *Saturday Review*, 2 June 1906, p. 694
- ⁶¹ 'How the Law Favours Women', *Academy*, 1 May 1909, pp. 61-62.
- ⁶² 'Life and Letters', *Academy*, 30 January 1909, p. 724.
- ⁶³ 'Life and Letters', *Academy*, 13 February 1909, p. 772. The 'celebrated Jew' was playwright was Reuben Brainin.
- ⁶⁴ See for example Rowland Strong, 'Israel in Europe', *Academy*, 27 July 1907, pp. 730-31.
- ⁶⁵ See endnote 6.
- ⁶⁶ *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas* (London: Martin Secker, 1931), p. 302.
- ⁶⁷ 'The Call', *Plain English* (17 July 1920), p. 30.

⁶⁸ Lewis had previously been involved in covering up a blackmail scandal on Douglas' behalf in 1893 (at Wilde's behest). He was also approached by both Wilde and Queensbury in relation to the first libel trial. He declined to act for either, perhaps because he knew the case was doomed to fail. See H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1962), p. 79.

⁶⁹ Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Eve and the Serpent', *Plain English*, 17 July 1920, p. 30. Lewis was not actually German, but his wife was, and Douglas believed Lewis too was of German descent.

⁷⁰ Custance to Douglas, 21 July 1920, British Library, Add MS 81703.

⁷¹ 'Life and Letters', *Plain English* (17 July 1920), p. 28.

⁷² 'To the Wounded' (c. 1940) and 'England Shall Still Be England' (December 1940), both Berg Collection, New York Public Library. 'Immortal Youth' (c. 1940), MC: P204/2/1MS/4, Magdalen College, University of Oxford.

⁷³ 'Immortal Youth'.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Murray, 'Decadent Conservatism', p. 190.