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Ianthe's alt.sex.intergen 'Poems of the Week' 25th June  
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This week's theme: ACOLYTES (children and youths who serve at the altar in church and sing in the choir - it's where the boy-loving publisher Acolyte Press gets its name).

This theme is intended to illustrate that the erotics of child-loving are not unknown within the Christian Church. (Don't panic - I have *not* taken up bible-bashing ! :-)

- * Wilfred Owen (England, 1893-1918) 'Maundy Thursday'
- * John Cowper Powys (England, 1872-1963) 'Whiteness'
- * Pier Paolo Pasolini (Italy, 1922-1975) from 'David'
- * Pauline Stainer (England, born 1941) 'The Misericord'

Owen is among the 'canon' of great English poets, and his poetry is taught in schools here - though not his pederastic poems. A full-page photo of Powys recently graced the cover of the prestigious Times Literary Supplement - the poem by him here is not very 'obvious' but other poems and biographic details reveal more of his girl-loving. Pasolini was the acclaimed Italian film-director and activist. Stainer is an English poet whom critics compare with Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath - and she has links with the child-loving Brotherhood of Ruralists.

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

Between the brown hands of a server-lad  
The silver cross was offered to be kissed.  
The men came up, lugubrious, but not sad,  
And knelt reluctantly, half-prejudiced.  
(And kissing, kissed the emblem of a creed.)  
Then mourning women knelt; meek mouths they had,  
(And kissed the Body of the Christ indeed.)  
Young children came, with eager lips and glad.  
(They kissed a silver doll, immensely bright.)  
Then I, too, knelt before that acolyte.  
Above the crucifix I bent my head:  
The Christ was thin, and cold, and very dead:  
And yet I bowed, yea, kissed - my lips did cling.  
(I kissed the warm live hand that held the thing.)

Wilfred Owen

[From Owen's letter of 27th December 1914: (the 'boys' he mentions are not Owen's sons - Owen never married) "We made two journeys to church with the bath chair, and installed both the boys and ourselves inside the very sanctuary. An interesting

position for me, all mixed up with the candles, incense, acolytes, chasuble and such like... I think the efforts of the dear, darling little acolytes to keep awake was what took most of my attention there."]

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## WHITENESS

White roses set in ivory urns,  
White violets wreathed in silver cups;  
White marble founts whose moss and ferns,  
The shadow of the moon drink up.

Since I have known you and your ways,  
Things such as this are my delights.  
A whiteness glimmers on my days,  
A whiteness hovers o'er my nights.

White dews, white crescent moons, white dawns,  
White flickering feet, white-gleaming hands,  
White limbs that dream on twilight lawns,  
White limbs that dance on shimmering sands.

O child, O maiden-acolyte,  
Whose censer breathes such silvery breath,  
Pour wine white as the flesh of Christ  
Upon the altar of white death!

Then all red things shall fade away--  
Red flame, red roses, and red blood,  
And we shall voyage night and day  
The white sea of the tears of God.

John Cowper Powys

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from DAVID

May the church's blood red songs give you peace, poor little altar boy.  
How many men and lights are shining for this small body, now that  
its face can no longer burn with shame!  
No one used to see him when he made the milk pails clang at vespers, or,  
in the evening, disappeared through the fields with his friends  
and a sack for clover.  
[...]

And so, here in the church, the bright candles burn up the last smell of David.  
They burn the water where he is reflected.  
The grass where he used to run with THESE feet.  
The bed where he used to sleep with THIS body.

And remember he was a poor little altar boy:  
a primrose with a goldfinch's voice!

He used to swear with his friends, smoking behind bushes or stealing peaches  
or pears from the fields.

When I met him at evening in the pasture with the turkeys,  
he went hot all over like a pearl when greeting me,  
eaten up by his delightful shame.

"But rest in peace." Oh, little boy! The last day we met,  
he was one of the boys who ran through the village while the evening  
was thundering above the houses and trees, full of fresh rain.

I don't know which day, which evening.

He greeted me, his face burning with shame: I was horrified for him,  
poor child with no life, his tender body condemned to growing up  
in the muddied path of your sins. His mother gossiping in the yard  
with the women.

In which evening? Now you have left him to a fearful place, and my wonder  
is as great as your resignation.

O the blood red songs in the church! But outside a flower showers  
droplets of dew in the wind, a bell is dying away.

The last chimes are already in the bosom of the infinite, far away,  
like your hearts, amen.

Pier Paolo Pasolini

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#### THE MISERICORD

(A misericord is the carved  
projection of the underside of  
a hinged seat of a choir-stall  
in a church, for those incapable  
of standing for long periods.)

Turning up the misericord,  
He found the girl, the unicorn couched on her lap,  
Her arms ringed round the white belly.

The O of her arms enfolded him, cool as vellum.  
Looking up, he glimpsed the virginal boys,  
Chill children in candlelight;

White boys of differing height,  
Blanched under surplice;  
He saw the falling intervals of their beauty -

And was circled a moment  
Like the unicorn in her arms,  
By their bloodless brilliancy.

Pauline Stainer.

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For information on traditions and subcultures of boy-loving desire within the 19th and Early 20th-century English church, see:

Hilliard, David.
UnEnglish and UnManly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality.
VICTORIAN STUDIES, Vol. 25, No. 2, Winter 1982. pp. 181-210.

Koven, Seth. 'From Rough Lads to Hooligans - national culture and social reform'. IN: Parker, A. (Ed.) Nationalisms and Sexualities. Routledge. London, 1992. pp. 365-401.

(The above two articles are excellent. D'Arch Smith, below, only mentions Church boy-loving sub-cultures in passing...)

Smith, Timothy D'Arch. Love In Earnest; some notes on the lives and writings of English 'Uranian' poets from 1889 to 1930. Routledge, Keegan and Paul. London, 1970.

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I hope some readers weren't bored by this week's rather pious theme - but it *\*has\** to be more interesting than all that toxic overspill from rec.nude (which still seems to be going on - I get the headers, but the rest goes straight into the gaping jaws of my pet killfile...), or the ignorant hysterical babble about Exon.

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Feel free to re-post.

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