



Imaginary Lives

Marcel Schwob

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Marcel Schwob (1867-1905) was one of the key symbolist writers, standing in French literature alongside such names as Stephane Mallarme, Octave Mirbeau, Andre Gide, Leon Bloy, Jules Renard, Remy de Gourmont, and Alfred Jarry. His best-known works are Double Heart (1891), The King In The Gold Mask (1892), and Imaginary Lives (1896). Imaginary Lives contains twenty-two mythopoeic literary portraits of figures from ancient history, art history, and the history of crime and punishment. From demi-gods, sorcerers, incendiaries, wantons and philosophers of the ancient world, to the "poet of hate" Cecco Angiolieri and the painter Paolo Uccello, through to the pirates William Kidd and Major Stede-Bonnet, and finally Burke and Hare, the serial killers; Schwob presents a vivid array of characters who display all that is macabre, deviant and magnificently terrifying in human beings and in life. In Imaginary Lives, Schwob has created a "secret" masterpiece that joins other biographical glossaries such as Jorge Luis Borges' A Universal History Of Infamy and Alfonso Reyes' Real And Imagined Portraits in the pantheon of classic speculative fiction, of which Schwob's book is the dark progenitor. Livid with decadent imagery, Imaginary Lives resonates loudly today with its themes of temporality, myth, violence and sexuality, and stands as a major work of the fin-de-si cle.

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