



Henry B. Goodwin – A Visual Artist with the Camera as His Tool

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A German philologist who dreamt of a career in England, he instead became a photographic artist in Sweden with an international reputation. Born as Heinrich Bürgel or Buergel (1878–1931), he transformed himself into the English-sounding Henry B. Goodwin. He has been described as a complex character, driven by an uncompromising obsession that was given full vent in his photography. His obstinacy brought him many enemies, but also a strong position as a renewer of photographic art. Goodwin's provocative claims about amateur rather than professional photographers being the ones who were truly of artistic interest naturally infuriated the latter, but were ultimately a product of his own background. He appeared on the scene like a fish out of water, an academic with no professional training as a photographer.

Goodwin wanted to make photography an independent art form that could be compared to any other type of visual art, and not simply regarded as a mechanical reproductive technique – a view he shared with several other Pictorialists. As the name implied, the “pictorial” was their chief concern. Goodwin was a Romantic, with visions and inner images that took shape through time-consuming methods of printing. Employing a non-silver process, he varied the tonality and colours, manipulating the negative and using it simply as a starting point for artistic creation. The composition was concentrated by a predominantly dark tonality, at the



Fig. 1 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), Anders de Wahl (1869–1956), Actor, as Konrad Herbot in Arthur Schnitzler's "The Big Scene", Staged at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm in 1917, signed 1917. Gelatin silver print (?) on paper, 29.7 x 20.7 cm. Purchase: the gift fund of Gripsholmsföreningen av år 1937 (the Axel Hirsch Fund). Nationalmuseum, NMGrh 5165.



Fig. 2 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), *Bird Millman*. Moderna museet, Stockholm.



Fig. 3 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), *Unknown Woman*, signed “Goodwin” Gelatin silver print on paper, 23.5 x 19.3 cm. Purchase: the Ulla and Gunnar Trygg Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMGrh 5150.

same time as the detail was reduced in favour of soft outlines and a lack of sharp focus.

Goodwin’s technical skill and evocative portrayals of well-known sitters soon brought him success. The sepia-tinted magazine *Vecko-Journalen* became his shop window and arena. Goodwin himself never spoke primarily of photographs, preferring to call his works “camera pictures”. They now became a prestigious feature of every issue of the magazine. He also published getting on for a dozen lavish and beautifully designed books, with photogravure images and often with text by his wife, Ida. *Konstränsporträtt*,

published in 1917, is regarded as his most magnificent work. The title, as contemporary critic Johnny Roosval pointed out, was ambiguous. These were not just portraits of artists, but also portraits by a great artist.<sup>1</sup>

The book *Anders de Wahl*, published two years later, was similar in design. It was a tribute to the 50-year-old actor Anders de Wahl, one of the most written-about stage performers of his day. The book included a character portrait which the Nationalmuseum has recently acquired. It shows de Wahl in the role of Konrad Herbot in Arthur Schnitzler’s *The Big Scene*, staged at the Royal Dramatic

Theatre in Stockholm in 1917 (Fig. 1). In a newspaper interview the same year as the image was created, Goodwin spoke of the difficulties involved in taking character portraits: “They require a knowledge of the role, of the author, and an understanding of theatre as a distinctive art form. A conventional studio image can, at most, achieve an objective record, but never a portrait, which requires pictorial effect, composition, a proper distribution of tone, rhythm, confident framing, all of them things that require the intervention of a supervising hand.”

Goodwin’s international reputation, built up over several years through exhibi-

tions and the publication of his pictures in European and American magazines, paved the way for a trip to the United States in 1921.<sup>3</sup> His host was Condé Nast, the publishers behind both *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, which had been carrying Goodwin's images since 1915. The trip was a whole year in the planning. The Goodwins stayed for three months. They were given a royal welcome, staying at Condé Nast's Park Avenue apartment in New York, and a special studio was set up for Goodwin. Here he photographed several of the celebrities of the day, including the actress and vaudeville artiste Bird Millman. In the portrait in the Moderna Museet collection (Fig. 2), she stands on tiptoe holding a parasol, in front of an even larger one lying in shadow. In her case, the parasol was an allusion to the world of vaudeville and the circus.<sup>4</sup> It became an attribute of daring high-wire acts, and was used in advertising for Miss Millman. Here, the circular parasol also provided an interesting shape, which Goodwin exploited in his composition. Following his return home, he seems to have returned to this *japoniste* theme in his image of an unknown woman (Fig. 3). It is a reflection of the film-star portrait typical of his time in New York, but whether the parasol was in fact an allusion to the unknown subject's profession or simply a general reference to fashion/Japonisme is unclear.<sup>5</sup>

Another of the Nationalmuseum's acquisitions in recent years is an unusual portrait of the dancer and actor Jenny Hasselqvist, taken the same year as Goodwin's visit to the US, 1921 (Fig. 4). Here, the lessons he learnt in America have probably rubbed off on his representation of his favourite sitter. He has chosen to depict her as a *femme fatale*, with her head tipped back and open-mouthed. This seductive, theatrical quality is unusual in the photographer's portraits of Hasselqvist, and was probably an influence of the American cult of the silent-movie star.

A star of a very different kind was Nathan Söderblom. Appointed archbishop in 1914, he quickly became a key figure in



Fig. 4 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), *Jenny Hasselqvist (1894–1978), Prima Ballerina, Actress*, signed 1921. Photography, 19.8 x 15.4 cm. Purchase: the gift fund of Gripsholmsföreningen av år 1937 (the Axel Hirsch Fund). Nationalmuseum, NMGrh 5122.

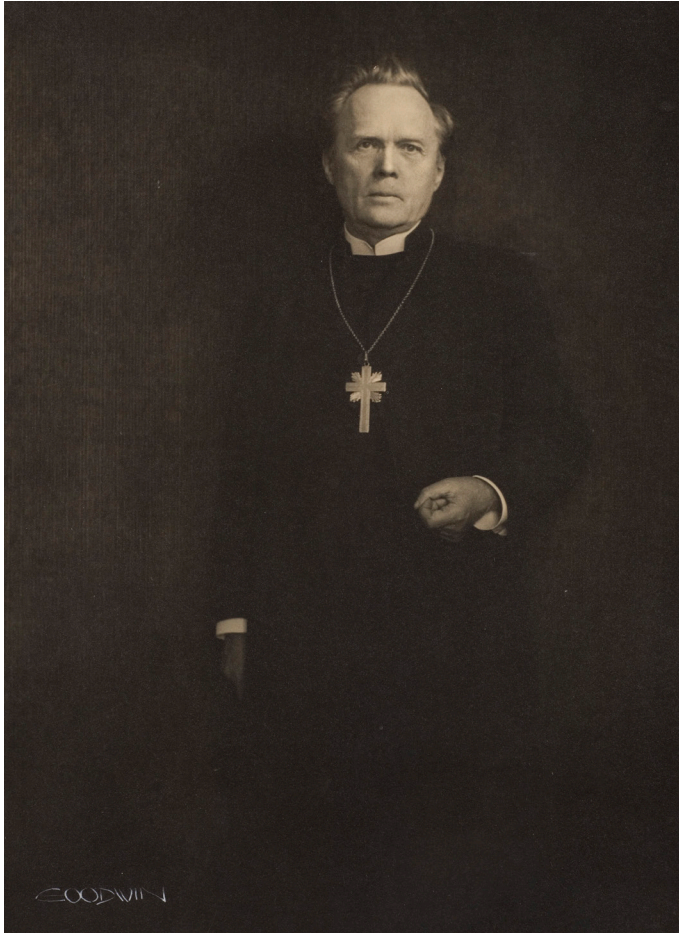


Fig. 5 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), *Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931)*, signed “Goodwin”, 1930. Gelatin silver print on paper, 40 x 28.5 cm. Nationalmuseum, NMGrh 4471.



Fig. 6 Henry B. Goodwin (1878–1931), *Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931)*, *Archbishop, Theologian*, signed 1930. Photography, 22 x 17.3 cm. Purchase: the gift fund of Gripsholmsföreningen av år 1937 (The Axel Hirsch Fund). Nationalmuseum, NMGrh 5175.

both Swedish and international Christianity, not least because of his important contributions to ecumenicalism. Early on, Söderblom was also to play a significant part in the peace movement. This was a major factor in his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930, which most probably prompted Goodwin's portrait (Fig. 6). The Swedish National Portrait Gallery also has a full-length version of it (Fig. 5). One of these images was published in an American journal, the *American-Scandinavian Review*, in spring 1931. Goodwin, himself a peace campaigner and an admirer of Söderblom, had chosen

a quote from the peace laureate's speech of thanks in Oslo to accompany the portrait.<sup>6</sup> The same year, both Nathan Söderblom and Henry B. Goodwin passed away. One wonders what the stubborn photographic artist would have made of the subsequent evolution of photography, if he had lived to see it. Like several of his fellow artists of the 1920s, he was quickly swept away by modernist tastes. A century later, it is surprising to see how innovative and bold Goodwin, the great standard-bearer of Pictorialism, actually was – characteristics that make him just as interesting to us today.

#### Notes:

1. The art historian Johnny Roosval made the comment in a review of Goodwin's first book (*Dagens Nyheter*, 5 June 1917). See further Rolf Söderberg and Pär Rittsel, *Den svenska fotografins historia*, Stockholm 1983, pp. 246–247.
2. Olle Östlind, *Den okände Henry B. Goodwin*, Stockholm 1997, p. 182.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
4. Moderna Museet, FM 1982 006 753.
5. In the weekly magazine *Husmodern* in 1923, Goodwin produced a feature on tea ceremonies, using images brimming with references to Japan (Östlind 1997, p. 284).
6. Östlind 1997, pp. 385–386.