Symonds Reprismed: Science and Religion in the Poetry and Prose of John Addington Symonds

AHMED, AALIA

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Aalia Ahmed

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Abstract

The dominant critical perspective in scholarship of John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) focuses on his homosexuality, but there remains no sustained analysis of his engagement with religious, scientific, and philosophical thought, contemporary and inherited. This thesis redresses the balance by being the first to undertake a sustained close reading of Symonds's poetry, essays, and letters that demonstrates his consistent interest in the conciliation of religion, philosophy, science, and poetry as part of his 'new metaphysic'. The present study revaluates the achievements of his poetry alongside his prose, which has generally been more highly regarded. In Symonds's thought, faith and science were not in conflict but rather interdependent realities that informed one another and strengthened his fundamental belief in God as Law.

Chapter one traces the evolution of Symonds's protean religion which absorbed and adapted the theories of his various influencers and influences. This creates a framework necessary to understand the interdisciplinarity of Symonds's literary output, his attempt to harmonise philosophy, science, and poetry that is analysed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter two presents Symonds as cultural anthropologist, focusing on *Palumba: A Mexican Tale* (1878), a poem hitherto unexplored in literary criticism, to consider his interrogation of *phusis* ('origins') through the evolution of symbols, that contract within them religious and scientific significances. Chapter three analyses the interrelations of Symonds's poetry, especially *Animi Figura* (1882), and the science of astronomy, examining the reciprocal nature of the physical environment and his thought processes, to present Symonds as a nature poet. Chapter four situates Symonds in the poetic tradition of the poet-prophet figure, presenting him as a visionary adopting the philosophical principles of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Walt Whitman to give shape to his personal conception of and unwavering faith in a democratic vista of the future.

Statement of Copyright

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university. The work is solely that of the author, Aalia Ahmed, under the supervision of Dr Peter Garratt.

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Abbreviations and Note on the Text

AF	John Addington Symonds, *Animi Figura* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1882)
BV	John Addington Symonds, *Blank Verse* (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1895)
ESS	John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890)
GP	John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1873-1876; revised and expanded New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1880)
L	Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, eds, *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, 3 vols (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967-1969)
Lubbock	John Lubbock, *Fifty Years of Science, Being the Address Delivered at York to the British Association August 1881*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan and Co., 1882)
MBTC	John Addington Symonds, *The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1878)
Memoirs	Amber K. Regis, ed., *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds: A Critical Edition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)
MM	John Addington Symonds, *Many Moods, A Volume of Verse* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1878)
'New Spirit'	John Addington Symonds, 'The New Spirit', *The Fortnightly Review*, 53: New Series (March 1893), 427-44
NO	John Addington Symonds, *New and Old, A Volume of Verse* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1880)
PL	*Paradise Lost* (consulted from *The Major Works* (Oxford, 2008); see below)
Prescott	William Prescott, *A History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilisation and the Life of the Conqueror Hernando Cortéz*, ed. by John Foster Kirk (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843; repr. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949)

Renaissance	John Addington Symonds, *The Renaissance, An Essay Read in the Theatre, Oxford, June 17, 1863* (Oxford: Henry Hammans, 1863)
Shelley	John Addington Symonds, *Shelley* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887)
SSI	John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1879)
VL	John Addington Symonds, *Vagabunduli Libellus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1884)
WW	John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman: A Study* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893)

All references to Symonds's poetry are from the first published editions of each volume which are freely available online, as there are no modern authoritative texts of his poetry. For ease of access to readers of this thesis, I have supplied line numbers for all of his poetry, which the original publications do not provide. In some cases, line numbers are supplemented by a reference to the volume and page number, to specify which volume is under consideration, as Symonds republished the same poems in various publications. *Studies of the Greek Poets* is consulted from the American edition (New York, 1880) as Symonds rearranged and edited it into a more complete study than that in the English version.

Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* is cited from Allen Mandelbaum's translation (London: Everyman's Library, 1995); and John Milton from Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; reissued 2008). Percy Bysshe Shelley is quoted from Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, eds, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; reissued with corrections 2009). Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* is consulted from the above, and references to it are given parenthetically as *SMW*. All Greek and Latin references, unless otherwise specified, are from the relevant Loeb Classical Library (LCL) volume which is given parenthetically. The Bible is cited from the Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; reissued 2008). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is consulted as an electronic resource (www.oed.com).

This thesis follows the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) style guide for all references in footnotes and the bibliography. It differs from the style guide in two aspects: (a) references to quotations from the Bible have the chapter and verse separated, without spacing,

by a colon (e.g. Genesis 1:1); and (b) the issue number has been added to nineteenth-century periodicals, though not an MHRA requirement, for comprehensiveness. All emphases in biblical quotations are original, unless otherwise stated.

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Introduction
John Addington Symonds: A New Critical Perspective

On 17 March 1895, the Manx poet and theologian Thomas Edward Brown wrote to Sidney Thomas Irwin with his impressions of the recent biography of John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) by Horatio Forbes Brown, Symonds's friend and literary executor. The book was, he complained, a laudable yet skewed portrait of Symonds's personality:

> Symonds' life is with me. Brown has done his work well: the book is even fascinating. But I have one serious complaint, and I have laid it before the author. Symonds I always thought of as eminently a *literary man*. What I had looked forward to in the Biography was the picture of literary joys or solaces. Well, Brown shows him abundantly as working away in feverish haste *to get a lot done*, not as exulting in the literary energies and appreciations (don't they call them?); but the man, the essential man, according to Brown, is the *agonizing* searcher after the *absolute*. I think I just recognize him in that phrase, one of his 'many moods,' but to make that the key-note of Symonds is surely a total mistake.[1]

The task of any biographer – presenting a written account of an individual life which forms a complete and impartial picture of his or her subject – is usually difficult. Particular traits and characteristics of the subject must either be foregrounded or minimised in order for there to be a narrative history of the self. For Thomas Brown, this first biography of Symonds failed in this respect, erroneously portraying the 'essential man' as one whose life was dictated by mental agony and strife. The closing remark of his letter is especially instructive, making clear that understanding Symonds involves reckoning with a restless, multifaceted figure, not a single, dominant element of character. The life of Symonds had no such 'key-note', but rather 'many moods'. Assessing his mind and work, where these many moods find expression, requires abandoning reductive psychology and simple categorisation.

Since the first biography, however, there has been a discernible key-note in studies of Symonds: his sexuality. Sexuality, and sexual identity, have emerged as the single most

[1] *Letters of Thomas Edward Brown*, ed. by Sidney T. Irwin, 2 vols (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1900), II, pp. 95-96.

important aspect of his life and work, sometimes seemingly the only facet properly to be explored. What was a vital part of Symonds's identity, and indeed undoubtedly crucial to his personal conception of his own self, has become the dominant critical perspective in scholarship. The strength that the narrative of his homosexuality carries in literary history and criticism has had the effect of excluding from view the philosophical and religious life of the man, which feature with great prominence in his prose and poetry. Aware of this critical context, this thesis aims to examine Symonds's engagement with religious, scientific, and philosophical thought, contemporary and inherited, as it is vital for the understanding of his literary creativity and spiritual feelings. The analysis of his 'path of self-construction' (*Memoirs* 467) conducted in this thesis has in view the understanding of the process of Symonds's spiritual evolution – from wrestling with inherited dogmas and an instinctual belief in a pantheistic power, to acceding to an acceptance of his place in the cosmos, to ultimately finding resolution in the Goethean dictum, '"to live resolvedly in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful"' (*Memoirs* 469).

The thesis's title, 'Symonds Reprismed', has a twofold implication. It alludes, on the one hand, to the new critical perspective it offers which invites a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of Symonds. Bringing to the fore the different facets of his spiritual mood, the thesis will shed new light on Symonds's life and works, extending analysis beyond the critical frameworks associated with queer studies and the history of nineteenth-century sexuality in which the writer is usually studied, as will be discussed in more detail below. On the other hand, 'reprismed' speaks to how Thomas E. Brown understood Symonds and, indeed, to how Symonds understood himself: it was his 'many moods' that refracted an image of the self and that his works illuminate – 'many moods' was, in fact, the title that Symonds chose for his 1878 volume of poetry. It is the various dispositions and facets of his personality that this thesis studies, focusing on his engagement with religious, scientific, and philosophical thought, but the intention is not, however, to be prescriptive or to present this engagement as the ultimate, singular, or prevailing tone of his life and works. Symonds will emerge as a writer whose imagination adapts the language of science and religion to figure and express his own singular poetic vision. Symonds's poetry sought to revive the positive genius of the antique world and combined it with the modern scientific spirit of the Victorian age, to give form and substance to that hybrid which he called the 'new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412).

Few critics are alert to the extent to which discussions of Symonds's sexual identity dominate accounts of his life and analyses of his works, especially of his poetry. Carl Markgraf,

in his review of Phyllis Grosskurth's *The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of John Addington Symonds* (1964), suggests that Symonds's sexuality dominates the narrative of Grosskurth's work, outweighing other personality traits. According to Markgraf, a more 'rounded picture' of the man is still required: 'On the whole, she manages the new material on Symonds' homosexuality very well; yet one feels that she has allowed it to overshadow other aspects of Symonds' personality, particularly the intellectual power which made him an influence upon such diverse Victorians as Stevenson, Wilde, Lear, and Gosse.'[2] Whatever valuable insights Grosskurth's work has brought, such forms of reading do not exhaust Symonds as a subject of critical inquiry. This thesis, then, attempts a fuller – yet still incomplete – estimation of John Addington Symonds, stressing the importance of recognising that discussions of his sexual development have to be in concordance with and underpinned by examinations of his intellectual and religious development, the understanding that the sexual, intellectual, and religious aspects of his life are components equally essential to nearing a more comprehensive study of the man and his works. This thesis will harmonise his homosexuality with his humanistic impulse of a universal brotherhood, with his scientific, philosophical, and religious thought.

One of the main aims of the present study is to foreground Symonds as a poet. Symonds struggled with his identity as a poet, oscillating between moments of self-doubt and self-confidence. Whether his self-doubt was instinctual or influenced by external factors (not least unfavourable reviews), it did not stifle his creativity or deter his productivity in verse. Poetry was a vocation to which he attached lofty associations; for him, it was the highest form of art and the expression of human capability:

> But language being the storehouse of all human experience, language being the medium whereby spirit communicates with spirt in affairs of life, the vehicle which transmits to us the thoughts and feelings of the past, and on which we rely for continuing our present to the future, it follows that, of all the arts, poetry soars highest, flies widest, and is most at home in the region of the spirit. […] Its significance is unmistakable, because it employs the very material men use in their exchange of thoughts and correspondence of emotions. […] It is the metaphysic of the fine arts. […] Poetry is therefore the

[2] Carl Markgraf, 'The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of John Addington Symonds', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 65 (1966), 151-52 (p. 152). See also Carl Markgraf, 'John Addington Symonds: Update of a Bibliography of Writings about Him', *English Literature in Transitions, 1880-1920*, 28.1 (1985), 59-78 (p. 65).

> presentation, through words, of life and all that life implies. ('The Provinces of the Several Arts', *ESS*1 143-44)

Such belief infuses his own poetry, but self-doubt threatened any stability that self-confidence could induce. Writing, on 4 March 1869, to his younger sister Charlotte Byron Green, wife to the Oxford professor and philosopher Thomas Hill Green, Symonds revealed that he 'exercised great selfdenial for a poet' and that he placed 'a Volume, of about 10,000 lines' in an iron box, 'threw the key into the Avon, & put the box itself beyond my own control' (*L*2 47). He followed this revelation by expressing an inner conflict between moods of self-doubt and actions that suggest a desire to be acknowledged as a poet, and for his words to find a reader: 'There immured [they] will lie until I have force to burn them or until I am dead the only fancies with wh [*sic*] nature has blessed me, my only hope of being known as a poet. For in some of those poems I was a poet' (*L*2 47).[3] The fact that he is, on the one hand, expurgating his own work, locking his unpublished verses 'on one terrible & tragic subject (not that all were terrible & tragic)' (*L*2 47) out of public sight, and, on the other hand, documenting their existence in a letter, making the existence of this poetry known to a potential reader, betrays a longing for his works to find a readership – or, as he saw it, for his soul to speak to another soul. It is through the dissemination of thoughts in poetry, the versified reflection of the soul, assimilated by a sympathetic reader, that one spirit connects with another: 'If we are right in defining art as the manifestation of the human spirit to man by man in beautiful form, poetry, more incontestable than any other art, fulfils this definition and enables us to gauge its accuracy' ('Several Arts', *ESS*1 144).

Throughout his writing, including his correspondence and autobiographical work, Symonds returned to the subject of himself as poet, expressing the internal strife that characterised his poetical career. The unfavourable criticism that his poetry received did not supress his prolific poetical output, an efflorescence of passionate verse resulting from his innate enthusiasm to compose poetry. It did, however, influence his continuous reiterations of his inability to compose poetry of 'first-rate quality' (*Memoirs* 418), of how he was not a true poet:

[3] The parenthetical 'they' is not originally Symonds's, but, rather, was (incorrectly) added by Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters to complete what they understood to be Symonds's incomplete sentence.

> I find a pleasure in expression for its own sake; but I have not the inevitable touch of the true poet, the unconquerable patience of the conscious artist. As in other matters, so here, I tried to make the best of my defects. (*Memoirs* 418)

The internal strife, then, is based on a conflict between judgement, of his poetry by others and of himself through others, and instinct, his natural inclination to reflect his many moods in poetic form. In 1864, in a reply to his friend, the translator and Assistant Master of Clifton College Henry Graham Dakyns, Symonds reflected on his poetical abilities through a metaphor that evokes Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820): 'Please be content to know me now in my autumn & do not rake up old embers. I am not a poet: this I know emphatically: so you suffer no literary loss: you are only spared a long & sickening recital of disease & disappointment, delusion, suffering' (*L*1 450). A similar despondent use of Shelley's ode drives the writing of Symonds's 'Autumn Years', a sonnet included in the 'On Themes of Meditation' section of *Vagabunduli Libellus* (1884):

> Pestilence-smitten multitudes—sere leaves
> Driven by the dull remorseless autumn breath
> Of storms that sweep summer to wintry death:
> Such are our days. The charnel odour cleaves
> To these decaying thoughts. (ll. 1-5)

The invigorating and re-energising force of the West Wind, the 'breath of Autumn's being' that drives the 'Pestilence-stricken multitudes' ('Ode to the West Wind', ll. 1, 5) of leaves in the opening sonnet of Shelley's ode, has lost its strength in Symonds's own sonnet, becoming a 'dull remorseless autumn breath' that cannot reawaken the 'old embers' of his 'decaying thoughts' or drive the 'Pestilence-smitten multitudes' of 'sere leaves'. This dejected mood extends to other compositions in the volume. In the 'Winter Nights in the High Alps' cluster of the 'Among the Mountains' section, the external environment has a direct impact on Symonds's mental temperament, amplifying the sense of what he understood to be a fated solitude in Davos to encompass the inability of his verse to find an audience:

> I therefore, doomed to weave my lonely rhyme,
> Here 'mid these pines, these moon-scenes desolate,
> Have found therein a joy that mocks at fate. (III. 3-5)

Symonds's preoccupation with the fortuitous legacy of the poet evokes a similarly powerful sentiment expressed in a letter of 4 July 1881 to the art critic and poet Cosmo Monkhouse, regarding the transmission of the anonymous epigrams of the *Greek Anthology*. It is, Symonds concluded, 'the reader's fancy [that] makes the fate of books', or '*habent sua fata libelli*' (*L*2 680).[4] It seems that the fate of Symonds's poetry, too, was always consigned to the part played by 'accident' (*L*2 680) in literature. His belief that his poetry was unattractive to readers is inextricably linked to his perception of himself as a lesser poet, expressing it as the workings of a fate that dictated that he was to 'weave my lonely rhyme', in a mythological image reminiscent of Penelope's continuous tapestry weaving. Symonds repeated the metaphor in a letter to Arthur Hugh Clough's wife of 9 December 1871: 'I am become a real Penelope of literature—weaving subtle embroideries of verse & then unravelling what I weave. It is vexatious very. But a Cuttlefish can only eject Sepia—not Magenta or some other pretty dye' (*L*2 183-84). Although fate, as Symonds understood it, condemned him to solitude, without any external readership beyond his family and intimate friends, he found resolution in the way in which he navigated this pre-destination. He did not defy fate, but rather, practising a Stoic-Epicurean endurance, as will be discussed in chapter one, he chose to find 'therein a joy that mocks at fate' ('Winter Nights in the High Alps', III. 5), continuing to instil, in verse, his creative imagination and becoming his own audience. The problem of reconciling these two notions, of reflecting in poetry the sentiments of the soul and the insensitive judgements of others, was extended by Symonds to include all his literary creations in another sonnet sequence from *Vagabunduli Libellus*, 'The Envoy to a Book':

> Who knows what pangs begot thee, what throes shook
> Thy cradle?
> […]
> Thy face, O friend,
> Hath for my soul a story, which 't were vain
> To ask the unkindly world to comprehend. (VI. 5-12)

[4] Symonds's reference, Schueller and Peters explain, comes from Terentianus Marus's *De Litteris, de Syllabis, de Metris*, I. 1286 (*L*2 681fn3).

Here, Symonds reflects on the creative process and reception of his *magnum opus, Renaissance in Italy* (1875-1886), lamenting the hopelessness of asking 'the unkindly world' to show empathy towards the 'pangs' and 'throes' that originated the work.[5] Symonds exerts his power as poet, modelling 'the alabaster vase of language' ('Several Arts', *ESS*1 147), shaping his words, like a sculptor shapes clay, into a form of poetry that reflects his personal utterances, to endow language with a 'face' in an extended metaphor that anthropomorphises the book that is the addressee of the poem.

In another letter to Dakyns, in spring 1871, Symonds speaks of his profuse poetic output, reflecting on the workings of the imagination, in botanical metaphors:

> The Poems accumulate. The Song of the Sheepfold was written P.M. yesterday & A.M. today David's Epilogue begun. But it is as bad as botanizing on one's mother's grave to put these sacred flowers into my Hortus siccus [dry garden]. I go on doing so because thus best does their pure fragrance find me.[6] (*L*2 137)

An allusion to William Wordsworth's 'A Poet's Epitaph' (published in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, 1801) informs Symonds's meditation on a personal process of creating poetry. The effort made by the intellect to conjure images, to create anew these 'sacred flowers' of poetry, is perceived negatively by Symonds, in this instance, 'as botanizing on one's mother's grave', disturbing or defiling the solemnity of the creative imagination, the 'Hortus siccus' or dry garden of the mind. The botanical metaphor is an appropriate one: the presentation of poems as flowers has Greek origins, as Meleager of Gadara, in his original composition of the *Greek Anthology* (60 BC), attributed a flower to each epigrammatic poet that he included in his collection, an attitude that is reflected in the work's title, *stéphanos* (meaning garland).[7] Symonds's apprehension towards the reawakening of his dormant imagination, fatigued from physical and mental maladies, is evocative of his previous warning to Dakyns against inciting him to create, 'do not rake up old embers.' Whereas in March 1864, Symonds affirmed that he was not a poet, in the spring of 1871, while still not explicitly asserting he was one, he accepted that composing poetry was vital to his manner of living, confessing that he continued to write

[5] Symonds revealed that 'This origin of my magnum opus is hinted at in sonnets called "The Envoy to a Book"—*Vagabunduli Libellus*' (*Memoirs* 440).
[6] The square brackets are Schueller's and Peters's.
[7] Symonds explained, in his comprehensive and elucidating account of the convoluted history of the *Greek Anthology*, that Meleager 'called this compilation by the name of *στέφανος*, or wreath, each of the forty-six poets whom he admitted into his book being represented by a flower' ('The Anthology', *GP*2 283).

poetry, ‘I go on doing so because thus best does their pure fragrance find me’, as it is the best way to express his spiritual moods.

For Symonds, poetry was the most sacred of all the arts, the form by which the soul was most truthfully rendered. For his mentor Benjamin Jowett, the Regius Professor of Greek and Master of Balliol College, Oxford, as well as godfather to Symonds’s daughter Charlotte, Symonds was an eminent writer with the potential to share in the excellence of his great contemporaries if only he adapted the way in which he expressed his truth, as Jowett put it in a letter of 2 March 1887:

> You have great stores of knowledge and a wonderful facility and grace of style. But I want you to write something stronger and better, and in which the desire to get at the truth is more distinctly expressed. […] Let me add, what I am equally convinced of, that you may not only ‘rise to eminence’—that is already accomplished—but that you have natural gifts which would place you among the first of English contemporary writers if you studied carefully how to use them.[8]

Symonds expressed his thoughts on Jowett’s comments to Horatio Brown in a letter of 15 March 1887, which reveals his perception of the particularities and worth of rising to ‘“eminence”’. He presented himself as someone who struggled to naturally integrate with such distinguished figures, who ‘was born out of sympathy with the men around me’ (*Memoirs* 418): ‘But I am an old panting cab-horse; and can’t bear to be flogged up the last hill with the prospect of most dubious bays to crown my carcass at the top’ (*L*3 211). For Symonds, achieving literary eminence loses its precedence in the context of the severe physical illnesses and mental ailments with which he battled daily. The quest for literary distinction is an upwards toil that deceives and illudes by visions of fame, a struggle that inevitably leads to the loss of vitality (physically and figuratively).

Another of Symonds’s professors at Oxford to offer similar ‘well-meaning exhortations’ (*L*3 211) was Matthew Arnold, who recommended Symonds to win the Newdigate Prize for his poem ‘The Escorial’, recited in The Theatre, Oxford, on 20 June 1860. Arnold, like Jowett, praised the individually unique talent that transpired in Symonds’s poem,

[8] *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, eds. Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, 3rd edn, 2 vols (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1897), II, p. 320.

emphasising Symonds's remarkable comprehension of the subject over the style in which it was expressed:

> When I came to recite my poem in the rostrum, Matthew Arnold, then our Professor of Poetry, informed me very kindly, and in the spirit of sound criticism, that he had voted for me—not because of my stylistic qualities, but because I intellectually grasped the subject, and used its motives better and more rationally than my competitors. (*Memoirs* 180)

Symonds received Arnold's comments positively, recognising that Arnold's 'sincere expression of a distinctive judgement was very helpful to me. It gave me insight into my own faculty, and preserved me from self-delusion as to its extent' (*Memoirs* 180). Symonds's acknowledgement of the sincerity of Arnold's remarks contrasts with the scathing comments made by his closest acquaintances at Oxford shortly after receiving the Newdigate Prize that publicly recognised his talent. Symonds recounts in his memoirs a trip to lake Coniston in the summer of 1860 with John Conington, Thomas Hill Green, Albert Oslif Rutson, and Christopher Cholmeley Puller. In his short description of the trip with the reading party, Symonds highlights an incident which, although 'trifling', was necessary to record in his autobiography 'because it is more powerfully imprinted on my memory than all the other details of those weeks' (*Memoirs* 180). Returning to the farm-house they all shared, Symonds overheard a private conversation between Conington and Green that scrutinised his literary and physical character:

> I returned to the little room in the farm-house, where I pursued my studies. There I sat and read. Conington and Green were conversing in the paved kitchen, used by us as a dining room; and perhaps they were not conscious of my presence. There was only a door between the two chambers. Conington said: 'Barnes will not get his first.' (They called me Barnes then, and I liked the name, because they chose it.) 'No,' said Green, 'I do not think he has any chance of doing so.' They then proceeded to speak about my aesthetical and literary qualities, and the languor of my temperament. I scraped my feet upon the floor, and stirred the table I was sitting at. Their conversation dropped. But the sting of it remained in me; and though I cared little enough for first classes, in comparison with lads' love, I then and there resolved that I would win the best first of my year. (*Memoirs* 180-81)

Symonds went on to win his first, 'the best first of my year, I was told, and as I promised myself at Coniston' (*Memoirs* 182). Whereas Arnold's comments incited in Symonds a mental process that allowed him to exercise rational and fair judgement of his capabilities, Conington's and Green's remarks aroused an antagonism that was the immediate reaction to a painful situation, as suggested by his use of 'sting' and 'spur' (*Memoirs* 181). Symonds catalogued several 'excellent people' who, too, made slighting remarks upon his mental and physical temperament that stimulated his 'rebellious manhood':

> It was the same spur, as when Rendall wrote home of me 'wanting in vigour both of body and mind', and Conington once more in the course of a long Clifton walk remarked upon my 'languor', and Jowett told me I had 'no iron to rely upon', and Fred Myers said I had 'worked myself out in premature culture', and an M.P. at Mr North's indulgently complimented me on 'writing for the Magazines.' All these excellent people meant little by what they said and assuredly forgot soon what fell so lightly from their lips. But they stimulated my latent force by rousing antagonism. (*Memoirs* 181)

In the manuscript of *Memoirs*, Symonds replaces 'helped me' for 'stimulated my latent force', as it now stands. The substitution redirects from the 'excellent people' to Symonds the power of and control over his reaction, to actively oppose those who doubted him. This reaction, however, had a detrimental effect on his physical and mental health, aggravating a fatigue that would remain with him until the end of his life: 'The strain of so much head-work, so much society, so much travel, and such perpetual conflict with emotion, left me weak' (*Memoirs* 182).

From this context, then, emerges this thesis's concern with Symonds's views on poetry and his preoccupation with his own role as a poet. The prominence that poetry had in Symonds's life and literary career is not only evidenced by his prolific creative output of original and translated poetry but, more importantly, it is shown in his masterful engagement with and profound understanding of poetic genres and forms. Symonds's partiality for the sonnet, and his creation of sonnet sequences, is well situated within the Victorian sonneteer tradition, as William T. Going and John Holmes have examined and documented.[9] The

[9] See William T. Going, 'John Addington Symonds and the Victorian Sonnet Sequence', *Victorian Poetry*, 8.1 (1970), 25-38; and John Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence: Sexuality, Belief and the Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

influence of his Romantic predecessors, particularly Shelley, is seen in Symonds's *Callicrates* (*MM* 91-102), a lyrical drama in blank verse inspired by two stories from Herodotus. *Callicrates*, as its author put it in a letter to Walt Whitman (25 February 1872), to whom Symonds sent a copy, 'presupposes much Knowledge of antiquity' (*L*2 205): its backdrop is the battles of Thermopylae and Platea, and it was during the latter that the eponymous character and Aristodemus are slain, who, meeting at the gates of Hades, have a conversation with Minos, on which the poem focuses. Blank verse would be the focus of a book-length study, posthumously published in 1895 by Horatio Brown upon Symonds's request, but which had already appeared in print twice before as an appendix to *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879) and to the second volume of *Sketches and Studies in Southern Europe* (an American edition published in 1880 that compiled essays Symonds had published in different volumes in England). In blank verse Symonds also wrote, for instance, the short lyric 'Any Sculptor to Any Model' (*NO* 18-19). For *The Love Tale of Odatis and Prince Zariadres* (*NO* 75-114), a Hellenistic adaptation of a Persian story, Symonds employed rhymed couplets, but for 'Martyrdom' (also from *NO* 67-68), composed of seven quatrains in rhymed iambic tetrameters, he adopted a ballad tone to expand on an epigram by Meleager (*Greek Anthology,* XII. 132; LCL 85).

Symonds's 'A Vista' (*NO* 225-28) is also distinctively Shelleyan in its form, adopting the ballad aspect of *The Mask of Anarchy* (composed in 1819), but especially in its content and sentiment, with its echoes of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) Act III scene 4. Shelley's millennial vision of man being 'the king, | Over himself' (*Prometheus Unbound,* III. 4. 196-97), of goodness, love, and fraternity for humanity, finds a parallel in Symonds's own millennial 'vista' of love and democracy being expressed in 'The pulse of one fraternity' (l. 28). For 'Pantarkes' (*NO* 69-74) and *The Valley of Vain Desires* (*NO* 229-41) Symonds employed the Dantean *terza rima*, a 'complicated' metre in which to compose poetry, but which has 'a powerful continuity of rhythm'.[10] *Terza rima* would also prove useful to compose *Palumba: A Mexican Tale* (*MM* 207-48), of which the second chapter in this thesis is the first in-depth study. The particular case of *Palumba* illustrates Symonds's masterful command of poetic form: *terza rima* is combined with the use of epithets, inherited from the Greek tradition of formulaic diction, in a lyrical romance framed by a prologue and an epilogue. *Palumba* is, above all else, an epic poem, whose action is set in time immemorial but whose influence has

[10] John Addington Symonds, *An Introduction to the Study of Dante* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1872), pp. 213, 230.

repercussions upon the ages that follow, as the admonishment in the prologue reveals: 'Not for us alone | Are fair things holy; nor are we the first | To weep o'er youth's frail blossom overblown' (ll. 1-3). Following the epic tradition in the manner of Homer, Virgil, and Dante Alighieri, Symonds's protagonist, Palumba, descends into the hell of the tale's mythological structure, where he encounters maimed, diseased, and perturbed people that cause him to reflect on loss and death. The diversity of poetic forms and genres which Symonds employed is not a sign of indecisiveness or lack of confidence. It shows, rather, his awareness of his audience and his attention to the ways in which form complements and is tailored to the subject-matter of the compositions, as well as being a sign of his engagement with his literary predecessors and contemporaries. The variety of form and genre in Symonds's poetic oeuvre is only equalled by the variety of its themes and concerns, which extend far beyond his interest in understanding the particularities and implications of same-sex love.

The analysis of Symonds's religious, scientific, and philosophical thought as expressed in his poetry and prose that this thesis conducts will be correlated with what he termed 'a new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412), a philosophic system that draws into its imaginative network Hellenic ideas of nature and universal law, instinctive conceptions to the Greeks, the morality of Christ, and the science of his time at its most advanced stage. Symonds did not employ 'a new metaphysic' to describe his own poetical output; however, a careful analysis of this oeuvre, like the one conducted in the present study, reveals the extent to which his poetry experimented with ideas of science and religion, and, consequently, realises what he identified, in other poetic luminaries such as Alfred Tennyson and Roden Noel, as 'majestic poetry' ('A Comparison of Elizabethan with Victorian Poetry', *ESS*2 272). Although he acknowledged that the time was 'not yet ripe for poetry to resume the results of science with imaginative grasp' ('Comparison', *ESS*2 271), he created a philosophy that recapitulated his views of faith, truth and fact, and the creative imagination, a synthesis that Symonds foresaw as 'the prelude to a more majestic poetry […] than the world has ever known' ('Comparison', *ESS*2 272). This image of Symonds as poet-prophet, a legislator of a new phase of theology, is one that is extended beyond his poetry and into his prose work, namely *Memoirs, Essays Speculative and Suggestive,* and the second volume of *Studies of the Greek Poets,* as will be made evident throughout the analysis.

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An overview of the history of reception of Symonds is necessary as an insightful gateway into the comprehension of the imbalance in criticism, of how the examination of Symonds, as man and writer, has either taken as its focus his homosexuality or what are considered to be his shortcomings as a poet. Tracing the convoluted history of transmission of Symonds's *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds Written by Himself*, the autobiography he wrote and continuously revised between 1889 and (at least) 1891, is helpful in the identification of trends in literary criticism of Symonds. In the preface to *Memoirs*, Symonds expressed his wish for this work to never be published as he did not perceive it as a valuable contribution to literature or public interest:

> Mine [memoirs] are sure to be more useless than his [Carlo Gozzi]; for *I* shall not publish them; [and it is only too probable that they will never be published]—nobody's humility or pride or pecuniary interests being likely to gain any benefit from the printing of what I have veraciously written concerning myself.[11] (*Memoirs* 59)

Two years later (29 December 1891), in a letter of instruction to Horatio Brown, Symonds retracted his earlier wish, stating that the 'autobiography shou|ld| not be destroyed'[12] and 'its publication [postponed] for a period when it will not be injurious to my family' (*Memoirs* 534). Brown inherited the manuscript after Symonds's death and was instructed to 'take them freely, to deal with them as you like, under my will. […] Still, I see the necessity for caution in its publication' (*Memoirs* 534). The use of 'caution' sheds light on, while simultaneously obscuring, Symonds's intention as it could, on the one hand, mean that Brown, if he is to publish the manuscript, should censor it, and, on the other hand, be a warning for the negative backlash of publishing the work in its entirety. From Phyllis Grosskurth's 1984 publication of *Memoirs*, we learn that Brown censored Symonds's autobiography, removing sections and events, mainly those pertaining to his homosexuality, which Brown considered detrimental to Symonds's reputation and his later reception. The first edition of *Memoirs*, then, appeared in the form of Brown's two-volume *John Addington Symonds: A Biography Compiled from his Papers and Correspondence* (1895), which he followed with *Letters and Papers of John*

[11] The square brackets '[and it is only too probable that they will never be published]' belong to Amber Regis. She explains that this sentence is underlined in the manuscript and 'accompanied by a marginal note: "NB HFB" (MS i)' (*Memoirs* 61fn3).

[12] Following the notations as they appear in Regis's edition of *Memoirs*, the 'double vertical bar indicates missing material or a break in the narrative' (*Memoirs* xiii), with words that are missing from the text being inserted between the bars. In this particular instance, Regis notes that the 'missing letters are supplied by Brown' (*Memoirs* 561fn11).

Addington Symonds (1923). Brown published the earlier work as a biography of Symonds, rather than as his autobiography; it is not Symonds presenting his own version of himself, but rather Brown presenting his version of Symonds. Censoring *Memoirs*, a personal history conventionally assumed to be an authentic record composed by the subject, thus tampers with the nature of the genre by only revealing certain aspects of a complex psyche that Brown perceived as important to divulge to the reader, creating a fragmentary portrait. He acknowledged, however, the difficulties associated with literary portraiture and the shortcomings of his own works on Symonds. In *Letters and Papers*, Brown stated that his 'chief purpose in making this selection has been to present a portrait—not the only possible portrait, of course, no portrait is ever that—of a singularly interesting and even challenging personality'.[13] Brown's biography is a fragmentary record complemented, but not completed, by his *Letters and Papers*, a 'sketch' that Grosskurth only partially completed by restoring some of the passages expurgated by Brown with the intention of rendering a fuller and more complete picture.

The socio-political, religious, and historical conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that Brown could not publish *Memoirs* in its entirety, especially those sections related to Symonds's sexuality, as Amber Regis acknowledges in her introduction to *Memoirs*. Commenting on Brown's editorial practice, Regis concludes that in his reworking of *Memoirs* into a biography of Symonds, 'religion was employed to overwrite and disguise Symonds's sexual self-scrutiny' (*Memoirs* 19). Yet Brown's omission of Symonds's homosexuality is, above all else, largely a consequence of the time in which Brown published the work and does not imply that his intention was to emphasise the centrality of religion in Symonds's conception of self and the universe. It is important to understand the nuance that underlies Symonds's conception and investigation of religion, for his sexuality and his sense of religion were intrinsically bound. Symonds's notion of 'religion', complex and constantly evolving, entailed a combination of a stoical acceptance of his place in the world and a 'ruling passion for the male' (*Memoirs* 341).

To his essay 'The Limits of Knowledge' (*ESS*2 285-91), Symonds appended verses that meditate on death and immortality, and reveal the poet's Stoic-Epicurean faith that accepts the process of decay and life that permeates all organic matter:

Oh, cease with weak, persistent will

[13] Horatio F. Brown, *Letters and Papers of John Addington Symonds* (London: John Murray, 1923), p. vii.

> To storm the heights of nature. 'Tis enough
> That living, suffering, we must climb the hill.
>
> Make the plain ways of life less stern and rough:
> Build not cloud-castles on the inconstant air;
> Nor strive in vain to cast the viperous slough
>
> Of fate that clings around these limbs so fair.
> Kiss the rod rather; learn to face the doom
> Which we with all things that have beauty share. ('Limits', *ESS*2 289)

The verses first appeared, with some stylistic alterations, in the epilogue of *Palumba*, published twelve years earlier in *Many Moods*, as will be discussed in chapter two of the thesis. 'Cloud-castles' is a variant of 'Cloudcuckooland', a translation from the Greek *Nephelokokkygía* (*Νεφελοκοκκυγία*), which Aristophanes used, in *Birds* (414 BC), to refer to the city that signified the absurdly over-optimistic idealisation of the existence of a perfect realm (ll. 819, 821; LCL 179). That Symonds used this metaphor of the 'cloud-castles' is particularly relevant to understanding his spiritual mood, one that maintains its belief in the notion that religious truths are the reflections of the collective mind of nations that are ever-changing and transient ('inconstant air'), and constantly adapting themselves to suit the emerging theories of modern science. Childhood catechisms, including the redemption of the spirit attained by an unwavering faith in the Church's Christ, constructed, in the clouds of religion, such an imposing *nephelococcygia* that led Symonds to question, in his early years, 'the ground principles of social ethics' (*Memoirs* 464). He did not, however, become 'irreligious' (*Memoirs* 464): 'I never said there is no God. It would be a mad or rather an idiotic thing to say' (to A. O. Rutson, 24 May 1865; *L*1 540). He, rather, endowed his previously cynical scepticism with an eagerness to willingly submit to the law of the universe, thus, moulding his thought to suit his speculative nature, approaching ever-closer to a state of existence that was in concordance with universal law.

> When this thought [of nothing 'but the bare thought of a God-penetrated universe' of which himself and other things are an essential part] flooded me, and filled the inmost fibres of my sentient being, I discovered that I was almost at rest about birth and death

> and moral duties and the problem of immorality. These were the world's affairs, not mine. (*Memoirs* 467)

This thesis is concerned with matters of faith, as conforming to the laws of convention and as they appeared to Symonds as personal constructs of the mind, since they are necessary for a fuller estimate of the man.

Every Symonds scholar is indebted to the work conducted by Brown as the first biographer, a debt acknowledged by his second biographer, the American literary critic and historian Van Wyck Brooks. Brooks's *John Addington Symonds: A Biographical Study* (1914) is not a work with which contemporary criticism engages, but the importance of his text, in the context of gaining a fuller understanding of Symonds, should be recognised. This biography has as subject-matter Brooks's perception that 'Psychologically the case of Symonds has a unique interest',[14] which appears to accede to Symonds's own wishes in composing *Memoirs*, that his autobiographical account become working material 'for the ethical psychologist and the student of mental pathology' (*Memoirs* 361). Brooks, of course, only had access to *Memoirs* through Brown's abridged biography, which omitted his homosexuality, so his psychological study of Symonds is partial for it cannot take this facet of the man's life into consideration. However, even with the now extensive development in knowledge of the particularities of Symonds's sexuality, Brooks's judgement of the man's interests and preoccupations regarding the intellectual thought of his time is one that still remains highly relevant:

> One cannot read extensively in Symonds without discovering two facts: first, that the matter of ever-uppermost concern with him is religion, the emotional relation which man bears to the whole scheme of things; and, secondly, that his way of conceiving this relation repeats itself constantly in similar statements and in references to a clearly defined circle of historic thought.[15]

Brooks presents Symonds in light of his many influences (Cleanthes of Assos, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Giordano Bruno, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walt Whitman, Charles Darwin, Benjamin Jowett) and varied systems of thought (evolutionary theory, Stoicism, Scepticism) with specific references to his work (including *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 'The Philosophy of

[14] Van Wyck Brooks, *John Addington Symonds: A Biographical Study* (London: Grant Richards, 1914), p. ix.
[15] Brooks, *Study*, p. 211.

Evolution', 'Notes on Theism'). From this biography, Symonds emerges as a unique Victorian, offering a singular perspective that simultaneously distinguishes him from his contemporaries and even anticipates modernist views: 'Symonds again was one of the first English men of letters to grasp what may be called the optimism of science.'[16]

Invited by the London Library, the custodians of the manuscript of *Memoirs* upon Brown's bequest, before the embargo on the manuscript was lifted, Grosskurth was the first scholar to exhume (with the aim to publish) the manuscript, eighty-nine years after the appearance of Brown's 1895 biography, making the decision to publish an abridged version, omitting two-thirds of the material present in the manuscript.[17] Her work, like Brown's before her, is selective as 'roughly one-fifth of the text' is omitted, merely keeping what she considered to be of importance for an accurate understanding of Symonds, focusing on his narrative of sexual development and eliding, among other material, some of the poetry, letters, and diary entries that are included in the manuscript.[18] Grosskurth's 1964 biography of Symonds stresses his torments and deprivation as a homosexual man, 'A man hidden behind a mask, a writer who never attained first-rank, he suffered the tormented struggle of a homosexual within Victorian society.'[19] She makes only a fleeting comment regarding his vast array of interests, a remark embedded in a discussion of his sexual proclivity, 'The riotously catholic nature of his literary production reflected a man with a wide range of interests: poetry, biography, history, aesthetics, science, and philosophy.'[20]

Grosskurth's review of the 1967 publication of the first volume of Symonds's *Letters* by Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters reveals the extent of her partisan critical approach to the study of Symonds. The review reflects the utterances of a mind which has contradicting views about Symonds: as a specialist of Symonds – arguably one of the most central figures in studies of this author for her resurrection of *Memoirs* and, in effect, of his name – she doubts the necessity of further and extensive research on Symonds, of anything beyond the 'modest biography and a single volume of judiciously selected letters'.[21] She defines a narrow field of study for the author, suppressing his potential emergence from the confines of a minor figure

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[16] Brooks, *Study*, p. 231.
[17] For a detailed account of the history of transmission of *Memoirs*, its fifty-year embargo and readers, see *Memoirs* 17-47.
[18] John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. by Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 11.
[19] Phyllis Grosskurth, *The Woeful Victorian: A Biography of John Addington Symonds* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 4.
[20] Grosskurth, *Woeful Victorian*, p. 2.
[21] Phyllis Grosskurth, 'Review: The Letters of John Addington Symonds: Volume I: 1844-68 by Herbert M. Schueller, Robert L. Peters and John Addington Symonds', *Victorian Studies*, 12.2 (1968), 264-66 (p. 266).

relegated to the periphery of the canon. He is not, for Grosskurth, as interesting as Oscar Wilde, 'Symonds is no Oscar Wilde and these letters cannot be compared with the searing despair of *De Profundis*', or Lytton Strachey, 'If Symonds had been a figure of the stature of Lytton Strachey, one's interest in the subject might be revived.'[22] According to Grosskurth, his appeal, rather, remains tethered to his more celebrated acquaintances. This volume of the letters is, for Grosskurth, filled with 'endless outpourings of self-pity and histrionic posturing' that are the result of 'maudlin self-analysis', views which are in line with her styling of Symonds as a woeful Victorian.[23] This thesis, conversely, emphasises the importance of understanding the facets of his psyche – his 'many moods' – for an appreciation of his impressively ratiocinative progress towards a firm acceptance in the Stoic-Epicurean philosophy of how to live well. Grosskurth debases the strenuous enterprise of compiling Symonds's letters by her belief that such an exercise is worthless, even wasteful: 'If such complaints can be levelled against a complete edition of the letters of a giant like Joyce, what justification can be found for the compilation of the entire correspondence of a minor figure, John Addington Symonds? […] But did we need all these expensive, cumbersome volumes to tell us this?'[24] This sentiment is not restricted to the publication of *Letters,* as it extends to the 1974 publication by Robert L. Peters and Timothy D'Arch Smith of *Gabriel: A Poem*. In her review of this work, Grosskurth reiterates her disapproval in terms that are surprisingly vitriolic:

> I can see absolutely no reason for its publication except that (a) it has never been published before, and (b) the assumption that anything by or about a homosexual is bound to be interesting. Since the poem is so execrable I can find no justification for its seeing the light of day.[25]

Her mixed views about the worth of disseminating works by or about Symonds is symptomatic of the continued reservations that his work has aroused since the Victorian period, which has reverberated into present-day perceptions of Symonds as a critic and minor Victorian intellectual. That Grosskurth held these discordant considerations about her subject of study is all the more alarming because she was, and is still considered to be, a leading authority on Symonds, and her words have the potential to discourage possible readers from a serious

[22] Grosskurth, 'Review', pp. 265-66.
[23] Grosskurth, 'Review', p. 265.
[24] Grosskurth, 'Review', p. 264.
[25] Phyllis Grosskurth, 'Review: Gabriel: A Poem by John Addington Symonds, Robert L. Peters and Timothy D'Arch Smith', *The Modern Language Review*, 72.1 (1977), 163 (p. 163).

engagement with his work, or at least one that requires more than the perusal of his biography and the consultation of selected letters, as she expressed in her review. Carl Markgraf shares this impression in a review of her edition of *Memoirs*: 'If a specialist in this subject like Professor Grosskurth was appalled at the expense of time and effort in producing Symonds' letters, what will other Victorian scholars think of this present effort?'[26]

Grosskurth's remarks are representative of the prevalent mood that dominated the critical reception of Symonds during and after his lifetime. The criticism of Symonds's oeuvre is varied, sometimes complementary and at others punitive; however, whether positive or negative, most portraits of the author make salient his brilliance as a historian and translator, and/or his deficiency as a true poet. Richard Le Gallienne, writing in January 1895, sees Symonds as 'passionate to be a literary creator, an original poet; he had to rest content with being a sensitive and catholic critic' who 'came close to being the ideal critic'.[27] An 1895 review in *The Critic* suggests that Symonds was 'Over-educated, crammed with futile erudition, destitute of real intellectual gymnastics in his youthful training' making him 'the apostle of fatal fluency, many-colored tropes and inaccu-omniscience'.[28] A 1925 review of Margaret Symonds's memoir *Out of the Past* (1925) considers that Symonds 'was a poet who could not write poetry' so he 'plunge[d] into great literary undertakings, for the perfecting of which his strength was not sufficient'; and a 1968 review of the first volume of his letters, echoing Grosskurth's sentiments denouncing the necessity of publishing complete volumes of his letters, qualifies his poetry as 'anaemic' after stating that 'None of his books except *The Renaissance in Italy* is now read'.[29] For Percy Babington,

> Two things militated against his joining the ranks of the great writers. First, his continual contributions to periodicals. Second, his undue affection for his early work and consequent readiness to reprint it. But he has an assured place in the first rank of

[26] Carl Markgraf, 'Memoirs of Symonds', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 29.1 (1986), 100-01 (p. 100).
[27] Richard Le Gallienne, 'J. A. Symonds: H. F. Brown's Biography', in *Retrospective Reviews: A Literary Log by Richard Le Gallienne*, 2 vols (London: John Lane, 1896), II, pp. 207-10 (p. 207).
[28] [Anon.], 'John Addington Symonds; biography compiled from his papers and correspondence', *The Critic*, 26, 29 June 1895, p. 472.
[29] Harold Hannyngton Child, 'John Addington Symonds', *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 1212, 9 April 1925, p. 251. Kenneth Allott, 'Jack of All Trades, Aesthetical', *The Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 3443, 22 February 1968, p. 183.

> English translators and, throughout his writings, the seeing eye can behold the reflection of a rarely gracious and sympathetic personality.[30]

Lawrence Poston III, reviewing the second and third volumes of Symonds's *Letters*, concludes that he remained 'a hopelessly lesser Victorian, whose enormous industry resulted in little tangible achievement by the standards of either great historiography or great poetry' but, nonetheless, 'Symonds succeeded, with now forgotten Victorians like Carpenter, in having some indirect effect on that activist world from which, by a combination of circumstances, he was excluded in his own lifetime.'[31] Included in J. C. Maxwell's review of volume one of the *Letters* are James Bertram's supplementary comments which, although unenthusiastic about Symonds as a writer, anticipate his own considerations in *Memoirs*: Symonds 'may have been a second-rate writer, but he is certainly a first-rate case history for the psychologist'.[32] Ian Fletcher is more overtly unrelenting: Symonds was, for Fletcher, 'a distinctly second-rate and derivative historian of culture—though his high vulgarization proved enlarging—a second-rate translator and—generously—a third-rate poet; his travel pieces are pleasurably evocative; his criticism uneven; his style insecure; his mind not of the first order.'[33] William T. Going reflected on Symonds's innovative use of the Victorian concept of sonnet sequence, but brought into relief what he considered to be the weakness of his poetic expression, 'The quality of his sonnets as poems is not of a high order', something Going believed to be a 'fact', even if 'his individual sonnets are structurally interesting'.[34] These illustrative examples are a mere sample of the image that has been created posthumously of Symonds in criticism.

Much recent criticism of Symonds is driven by an assessment of the poet's life and ideas on homosexuality. The publication by Amber Regis in 2016 of the original text of *Memoirs* in its entirety, as created by Symonds, is a consequence of this interest in recent scholarship. Regis's edition includes the remaining 50,000 words excluded by Grosskurth together with the accompanying letters, diary, and additional material that the manuscript of *Memoirs* contains.[35] This latest edition of *Memoirs* thus provides the reader with a faithful

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[30] Percy L. Babington, *Bibliography of the Writings of John Addington Symonds* (London: John Castle, 1925; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), p. ix.
[31] Lawrence Poston III, '"Born Dipsychic": The Symonds Letters Completed. The Letters of John Addington Symonds, Volumes II (1869-1884) and Volume III (1885-1893) by Herbert H. [*sic*] Schueller and Robert L. Peters', *Prairie Schooner*, 44.3 (1970), 268-70 (pp. 269-70).
[32] J. C. Maxwell, 'The Letters of John Addington Symonds, I', *Notes and Queries*, 17.1 (1970), 24-33 (p. 26).
[33] Ian Fletcher, 'Review: The Letters of John Addington Symonds by John Addington Symonds, Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters', *The Modern Language Review*, 65.2 (1970), 405-06 (p. 405).
[34] Going, 'John Addington Symonds and the Victorian Sonnet Sequence', p. 28.
[35] Amber K. Regis, 'The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds', *London Library Magazine*, 35 (2017) 12-15.

representation of his autobiography, one that is in concordance with the work's full title, as Symonds's intended it to stand: 'The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds Written by Himself'. Regis's edition is indeed original, and the 'first to reproduce all materials contained within the manuscript, but the intention has been (as far as possible) to acknowledge and reveal the source text's eccentricities and uncertainties' (*Memoirs* x). More than the originality of the material reproduction of the text, what is commendable in this edition is how meticulous and scholarly annotation and research are combined with Symonds's own words in a way that does not silence or overpower his personal expression. The publication of *Memoirs* within the 'Genders and Sexualities in History' series, however, continues the tradition that has for so long confined Symonds to being studied through a particular (and ultimately narrow) critical lens. The general editors to the series, reflecting on Symonds's autobiography, present it as 'a fascinating resource for anyone interested in the development of concepts of homosexuality at the *fin-de-siècle,* and in nineteenth-century literary lives' (*Memoirs* vii). Yet *Memoirs,* as this thesis shows, is equally concerned with the development of concepts in many areas of human thought, including religion, science, politics, philosophy, and art. Regis's repetition of phrases such as 'narrative of sexual development' (*Memoirs* 7), and variations of it, frame *Memoirs* within a narrative arc that ironically focuses upon one and the same trait of the man in its attempt to openly promulgate knowledge of 'all materials' written by Symonds to comprise his written life. This side of Symonds is, undoubtedly, essential to the understanding of his complex personality and is, most importantly, vital to Symonds's personal understanding of himself – for instance, he identified his first meeting with Willie Dyer, a chorister at Bristol Cathedral, as 'the birth of my real self' (*Memoirs* 157). His sexuality, however, is not the end-point of analysis.

The resurgence of interest in Symonds that has taken place in the past two decades has been focused on re-evaluating the author's life and works and yet, although conducted with such intention, only few works have redressed the imbalanced critical perspective through which Symonds has been examined. John Holmes is one of the few critics who conducts a sustained analysis of Symonds's poetry. His inclusion of Symonds in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence* (2005), *Darwin's Bards* (2009), and 'Victorian Evolutionary Criticism and the Pitfalls of Consilience' (2011) reinforces Symonds's importance in the context of literary criticism in the late-nineteenth century that attempted to reconcile the arts and the sciences, which is one of the primary concerns of this thesis. In a discussion of Victorian evolutionary criticism and the function of biopoetics, Holmes proposes Symonds's scientific approach to literary criticism, expounded in *Essays Speculative and*

Suggestive (1880), as showing 'promising glimpses of fresh approaches to evolutionary criticism'.[36] Holmes also acknowledges that *Animi Figura* (1882) is 'the fullest and most sympathetic Victorian exploration of homosexuality in verse', but his chapter also recognises, in line with Symonds's own perception of the poem as 'the Portrait of a Mind' (*AF* vii), that this sonnet sequence is 'an eloquent and highly intelligent engagement with the spiritual crises of its day, and a pioneering representation of the human mind which anticipates aspects of structuralism and analytic psychology'.[37]

That interest in Symonds has increased is illustrated by the fact that two academic conferences with an exclusive focus on Symonds have taken place to date. 'John Addington Symonds: The Private and the Public Face of Victorian Culture', held in April 1998 at the University of Bristol, led to the publication of *John Addington Symonds: Culture and Demon Desire* (2000), a collection of critical essays edited by John Pemble. Pemble is alert to how scholarship 'rediscovered' Symonds, but 'only' for him 'to be remarginalized', as 'there has been a tendency to overlook or underestimate the range and significance of Symonds's work, the sadness of his circumstances, and the depth of his commitment to the cause of reform'.[38] He observes that his critical writings have never achieved the repute in scholarship that those of Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and John Ruskin have received, and furthermore Pemble recognises that 'there has been no attempt to test the validity of Phyllis Grosskurth's summary verdict on his poetry ("execrable")', but which this thesis rectifies, by being the first sustained study of Symonds's poetry.[39]

The second conference, organised in 2010 by Amber Regis and David Amigoni, at Keele University, was appropriately entitled '(Re)Reading John Addington Symonds', as it engaged with the variety of academic and creative disciplines to which Symonds contributed. The symposium opened a discussion that continued into journal publications: from its panels on philosophy, criticism, contemporaries and influences, masculinities and sexualities, emerged volume 94.2 of *English Studies*, in 2013, with an entire issue dedicated to studies of Symonds's sexuality, epistolary activity, interest in Italy, and considerations on art. There was also an article by Odin Dekkers on 'John Addington Symonds and the Science of Criticism' in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 43.1-2 (2016), which, on the one hand, acknowledges Symonds as

[36] John Holmes, 'Victorian Evolutionary Criticism and the Pitfalls of Consilience', in *The Evolution of Literature: Legacies of Darwin in European Cultures*, ed. by Nicholas Saul and Simon J. James (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 101-12 (p. 102).
[37] Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence*, p. 121.
[38] John Pemble, 'Preface', in *John Addington Symonds: Culture and Demon Desire*, ed. by John Pemble (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. xi.
[39] Pemble, 'Preface', p. xi.

'one of the most scientifically minded authors of the late nineteenth century' and, on the other, perpetuates the image of Symonds as the ambivalent critic with an 'ambiguous attitude towards science'.[40] The close reading of Symonds's poetry, essays, and letters in the present study will, however, reassess his confident apprehension of scientific theory, especially the principle of Darwinian evolution, and the ways in which he conciliated and harmonised it with his religious mood to determine and support his belief in 'God as Law' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287).

Sean Brady's *John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) and Homosexuality* (2012) reproduces unabridged versions of essays and correspondence of Symonds, focusing on homosexuality as the central facet of the man. 'The neglect of Symonds' relevance and weight to both late Victorian scholarship and the reading public of his own day is gradually being readdressed', Brady explains, but this re-evaluation is taking place within a specific context.[41] Grosskurth states that Symonds's 'writings can be analysed as the expression of the unreconciled elements in his nature', which is largely true but in a way that extends to other facets of Symonds's life struggles.[42] He was a man, as this thesis will show, whose thinking was permeated with antagonisms and contentions; he unceasingly questioned the place of humanity in the universe and his relevance in the presence of an inscrutable Something. He struggled to reconcile the Christian maxims taught to him in his childhood with the perpetual inquisitiveness of a sceptical mind that grew with his age, ever-widening and ever-broadening to assume sentiments that suited his spiritual mood. The 'unreconciled' element of his sexuality was a crucial portion of a larger existential struggle concerning the man.

With its focus on the importance of Greek epigram in late Victorian culture, Gideon Nisbet's *Greek Epigram in Reception: J. A. Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and the Invention of Desire, 1805-1929* (2013) recovers the importance of *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Nisbet frames Symonds's work through an analysis of the twelfth book of the *Greek Anthology*, often perceived as incompatible with the rest for its subject-matter, the love of men for striking youths. What made the *Greek Anthology* unique for Symonds was the fact that it could be perceived as an authentic record of everyday Greek life for its treatment of topics that extended beyond politics and religion, which made it, in his view, the 'most precious relic of antiquity' ('The Anthology', *GP*2 285), superior to works by celebrated authors such as Homer and Aeschylus.

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[40] Odin Dekkers, 'John Addington Symonds and the Science of Criticism', *Nineteenth-Century Prose,* 43.1-2 (2016), 339-55 (pp. 340, 349).
[41] Sean Brady, *John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) and Homosexuality: A Critical Edition of Sources* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5.
[42] Grosskurth, *Woeful Victorian,* p. 324.

The two most recent critical examples with a focus on Symonds take queer aesthetics as their (exclusive) focal point: Naomi Wolf's *Outrages: Sex, Censorship and the Criminalisation of Love* (2019) and Fraser Riddell's 'Disembodied Vocal Innocence: John Addington Symonds, the Victorian Chorister, and Queer Musical Consumption' (*Victorian Literature and Culture*, 48.3 (2020), 485-517).

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Symonds was a man of catholic interests and knowledge which manifested themselves in a profuse literary output. To determine from the vast array of possibilities in his oeuvre the material to be discussed in the following chapters, I have necessarily exercised a degree of selectivity. My intention has not been comprehensiveness, as if to encompass the entire literary production of Symonds, but rather to engage in a discussion with those works which elucidate his delicately textured 'many moods'. A dialogue between the main argument and its footnotes is maintained throughout for the purpose of extending the discussion to other works which are not discussed *in extenso*, a practice that proves crucial to reveal that Symonds revisited similar ideas in different works. The argument of the thesis moves from a general examination of Symonds's religious development in the opening chapter, to a more focused analysis of the case studies offered in chapters two and three, before returning, finally, to a more general examination of Symonds's positive and optimistic outlook concerning the poetry of the future.

Chapter one of this thesis investigates the protean nature of Symonds's nuanced and complex faith, one that absorbed and adapted Hellenic principles – especially the celebration of nature – and aligned them with the progressive scientific theories of the nineteenth century, in an attempt to reconcile his personal faith with the universal law that determined that all things are in process. The chapter uses the 'Religious Development' section in *Memoirs* as the framework through which to explore Symonds's complex personal faith as it was perceived by himself and expressed in his essays, letters, and poetry. Symonds's ripening spiritual mood will be considered in the context of *werden*, what Horatio Brown defined as 'in process, when the end came'.[43] The close examination and analysis of the various stages of Symonds's religious enthusiasm more clearly delineate a singular and unique personal religion that informed his poetry and prose. The chapter organises the decisive moments in Symonds's intellectual development as follows: his school years at Harrow that led to the separation in his mind of

[43] John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, 3rd edn (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1907), p. vii.

piety from morality; the hitherto overlooked significance of his involvement in the prestigious Old Mortality Society at Oxford; the cultivation of his sceptical spirit at Oxford and the repercussions on his enterprising interrogation into the nature of orthodox religious systems; the schools of thought and the individuals considered by him to have been among the most significant influences; and, finally, his emergence from ennui to an unwavering and resolute faith in the form of Stoic-Epicurean endurance. Such an examination of his mutating 'religious mood of mind' (as he wrote to Catherine Symonds, 5 June 1867; *L*1 724) is crucial to understanding the subsequent three chapters that explore, through the analysis of the interpenetrations of science, religion, philosophy, and poetry, how Symonds's literary output was informed by an acceptance of, and submission to, the truth of God as Law, a universal and harmonising Force that Symonds perceived as both mystical and empirical, transcending the physical and imbuing the spiritual realms.

Chapter two extends the discussion of Symonds's 'scientific pantheism' (*Memoirs* 466) – his belief in an inexorable cosmic force that permeates all things, and which justifies the notion that all things, material and spiritual, are intrinsically united – to a close analysis of *Palumba*, a narrative poem hitherto unexplored in literary criticism. The 'romance' (*MM* 254) was inspired by William Hickling Prescott's *A History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), specifically the ritualistic practice of the Aztecs in the fourteenth century that demanded the sacrifice of men chosen by religious priests for their youth and beauty. Symonds used the historical account to inform his philosophical interrogation of the syncretic and evolutionary nature of dogmatic religion that 'pursues its slow and even progress' (*Renaissance* 56). The chapter presents Symonds as social and cultural anthropologist and considers the creative dialogue between his conception of *phusis* ('origins') and the syncretic symbols employed in the poem, that contract within them religious and scientific significances to explore the notion that all cultures, creeds, nations, and races are abidingly connected. The chapter analyses a symbol pertinent to Symonds's 'new metaphysic': the garden, conceived through historical and mythical representations of landscape, and considered for its ornamental and scientific purposes.

The third chapter will consider a hitherto unrecognised facet of Symonds's nature poetry and show how his engagement with both popular astronomical discourses and leading men of science informed his perception of the human condition. It will explore Symonds's poetic expression of the vital and essential connection between man and his environment, and how this shaped his personal philosophy that man was the universe's analogy. The chapter will conduct close readings of prose extracts and individual poems, offering an additional

perspective on critical discussions of *Animi Figura* (1882), concentrating on the spiritual connection between Symonds as observer, and the external environment. It will examine how Symonds responded to the popular astronomical treatises of the time, specifically Sir John Lubbock's Address in 1881 to the British Association in York, and how the discovery of '*dead suns*' (*L*2 703) and companion planets, or 'dark bodies' (Lubbock 56), informed and vitalised his faith in 'God as Law' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287). It will argue that Symonds's reading of the language of the planets, especially his awareness of the symbolic possibilities of the wandering stars, those celestial bodies that radiate and borrow light, validated the philosophical and spiritual correspondence between cosmos and the self. The chapter will then explore the significance of Symonds's wandering and climbing endeavours in the valleys and mountains of Davos, their conduciveness to composing literature subscribed to 'the Aesthetics of Elevated Viewing'.[44] Prospect, that is, the vista or view 'afforded by a particular location or position', enabled an aesthetic experience of the night sky that formed the essential connection between Symonds's spiritual thought and the external environment, which gave substance to his developing creative identity.[45] Ideas of vision, insight, and transcendence induced the experimental composition of his Alpine poetry, and demonstrated that, indeed, 'Great things are done when Men & Mountains meet.'[46]

Chapter four considers Symonds's apprehension and understanding of the nature, relations, and functions of the poet and poetry in culture and the imagination. The chapter will explore the ways in which Symonds's intuitive understanding of the Italian Renaissance – 'the most marvellous period that the world has ever known' (*Renaissance* 9) – and his interrogation of and sympathy towards its epoch-defining ideas and radical personalities, influenced and shaped his own poetry and prose to meditate on the problems of religion, science, and philosophy. It will explore how Symonds engaged in a creative dialogue with his predecessors and contemporaries to determine the importance of the relationship between poets as 'hierophants of nature' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124), the interpreters of the spirit of the age, and the music of nature, and their vital function of imparting nature's message to those ready to receive it. The chapter situates Symonds in the poetic tradition of the poet-prophet figure,

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[44] The expression is used by Simon Bainbridge as the title of the third chapter of his *Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770-1836* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[45] 'Prospect, *n*. I. 1. a. The action or fact of looking forward or out, or of seeing to a distance […]; b. The view (of a landscape, etc.) afforded by a particular location or position; a vista; an extensive or commanding range of sight'. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020. <www.oed.com/view/Entry/153018> [accessed 12 September 2020].

[46] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, foreword by Harold Bloom (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965; revised 1982), p. 511.

presenting him as a visionary adopting the philosophical principles of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Walt Whitman to give shape to his personal conception of and unwavering faith in a democratic vista of the future.

This thesis will demonstrate Symonds's cultural significance for understanding wider trends within the Victorian period, especially in terms of religion and how he apprehended the revelations of science. His unique apprehension of the complexities of religion, informed and supported by his wide-ranging influencers and influences, is distinctive in its positive grasp of the union of faith and science. The thesis, more significantly, challenges representations of Symonds in scholarship as perpetually languid and pessimistic by highlighting his unwavering and enduring faith in the architectonic law that governs all things to emphasise his faith in Stoic-Epicurean endurance.

I

‘I Speak of God as Law’: Harmonising Scientific Method and Religious Thought

Faith, Hope, and Love; Religion, Conduct, Art;
Truth, Beauty, Good; trifoliate trinities;
Trefoils triune, conjoining head, will, heart
In threefold concord; thrice-linked harmonies,
Tripartite, trisubstantiate; these three
Made, make, shall make what lives and lasts in me.
(‘A Coat of Arms’, ll. 9-14; *VL* 145)

The question of faith – what it means to believe, and the stability of a personal definition of belief at different stages of existence – is a theoretical conundrum that pervades the prose and poetry of Symonds. ‘The Philosophy of Evolution’, published in the first volume of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (1890), is one of several essays in which Symonds construed, through a lengthy process of deductive judgement and reasoning that is inherently Greek in its methodology, theories of and arguments for the role and significance of faith (and doubt as an essential component of it) in the world. Symonds’s poetical works, especially the meditative nature of his sonnet sequences, reflect the dynamic process of his mind as it contemplated notions of faith set forth by the religious symbolism of preceding ages, and how these prescribed ideas, in turn, bound men to ‘oaths’ (‘The Innovators’, III. 13; *AF* 4) and to ‘the hallowed antique creed’ (‘The Innovators’, IV. 2; *AF* 5) of Scripture. Symonds’s literary projects, his meditations on the question of faith, do not claim an absolute or resolved understanding of the problem of religion, but interrogate its dissemination by authoritative religious figures. Symonds did, however, present two points that remained salient in his works and helped him to navigate his theological theorising. Firstly, he displayed an awareness of the stringency of orthodox systems of theology that circumstantially fettered humankind to the condition of consent while suppressing dissent:

> Woe to doubt’s pioneers! Against them rise
> Banded the guardian priests of hearth and home,
> Who feed faith’s altar flame ’neath custom’s dome,
> And draw world-wisdom from tradition’s eyes. (‘The Innovators’, III. 1-4; *AF* 4)

Secondly, Symonds imaginatively expressed the evolutionary nature of these powerful religious systems, their characteristic practice of enfolding and unfolding esoteric knowledge, as they adapted alongside the expanding facts of developing science to ensure their survival: 'All these [gods], and all besides whom all men fear, | Are the phantasmal shadowy shows of man' for 'Our gods ourselves are, glorious or base, | As the dream varies with the varying race' ('An Old Gordian Knot', IV. 9-10, 13-14; *AF* 82).

Symonds's writings express the conscience of a man who was apprehensive to fall under the dominion of a systematised form of religion, one that retained its power by conditioning man to renounce individual freedom of thought and instead acquiesce to that system's rigid understanding of divine law. References in this thesis to Symonds's conception of prescribed religions (generally those dictated by Scripture), unless stated otherwise, should be understood as historical, 'ascetic systems' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 404), bodies of law that exercise control over body and soul by making dutiful the practice of rigorous self-discipline, self-denial, and solitude. Indeed, Symonds's conception of *theologia,* his philosophical account of God that drew from myths and natural phenomena to create a personal and more rational 'science of things divine',[1] deviated from his father's willing adherence to Scripture (that promulgated the medieval expression of *theologia*), considered by Symonds to be 'illogical' (*Memoirs* 465) yet excusable, to instead treat his explanations of God in the Hellenic spirit of the Stoics. The distinction between dogmatic theology, the study of God as authoritatively held and communicated by the church, and natural theology, the study of God based upon reasoning from natural facts separate from revelation, was fundamental to Symonds's construction of 'some faith whereby my own soul might be supported' (*Memoirs* 465) and, ultimately, the consideration of the important problem of the place of humanity in the universe.

Sustained by a resolute faith in universal order and all things as vital components of the vast complex that is 'in perpetual *Becoming*' ('The Philosophy of Evolution', *ESS*1 7), Symonds analysed the philosophies of pioneering intellectuals from diverse centuries, whom he called 'the diffusers and diluters of ideas' (*Memoirs* 425), and sought out the thinkers with whom his 'spirit chose to fraternize' (*Memoirs* 469). After the critical examination of the theories and ideas by which Symonds gained a firmer conception of his own faith, he exalted Cleanthes of Assos, Marcus Aurelius, Giordano Bruno, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walt

[1] Cf. 'The whole drift of the Scripture of God, what is it but only to teach theology? Theology, what is it but the science of things divine? What science can be attained unto without the help of natural discourse and reason?' (Richard Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* 2 vols (London: Everyman's Library, 1907), I, p. 319).

Whitman, and Charles Darwin as the men with whom he ultimately shared an 'intuition into the sempiternally inscrutable' (*Memoirs* 469). The demise of Symonds's eldest daughter Janet, who died in the early hours of 7 April 1887, at the young age of twenty-two from tuberculosis was a significant event in Symonds's life that tested his notion of faith. His correspondence with friends and family at this particular time, specifically the letter addressed to Henry Sidgwick (6 April 1887, *L*3 221), as well as a letter addressed to his daughters Charlotte and Margaret (10 April 1887, *L*3 226-27), written after the passing of Janet, are revelatory of Symonds's thoughts on death, immortality, and how he applied his latest conception of faith as Stoic endurance to cope with the law of life. The sentiments expressed in both letters show how Symonds attempted to conciliate the untimely death of his daughter, who was 'Christlike' (*L*3 227), with his resolution to live well.

The concordance between religion and science, a harmonising of the principles of volition and the inevitable law of evolutionary process, governed Symonds's personal theory of life: 'It is not my present business to deal with pessimism, however, but to seek out how the scientific spirit is remoulding religion' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 28). A belief in the architectonic nature of a pantheistic, universal law was not, according to Symonds, a compromise of one's sense of religion or faith. 'God is not less God,' Symonds observed, 'nor is creative energy less creative, because we are led to suppose that a lengthy instead of a sudden method was employed in the production of the Kosmos' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 15). Here Symonds suggests that, although absolute knowledge of the processes of evolution – physical, mental, collective, and individual – is unattainable, the supremacy of a pantheistically-conceived life force, a prodigious and mystifying power that has preordained the processes of life, is triumphant. Science, referred to by Symonds as the 'new gospel' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 37), was not injurious to the tenets of hope and volition, the conscious willing of the individual bound by Christianity to the promise of redemption. Science, rather, endowed man with an alternative assurance permeated with its own form of divinity, and what Symonds referred to as 'the promise of faith extended to religious souls by Science' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 38). Faith in science therefore empowered humanity, allowing rational, thinking human beings to control their way of life, '"to live resolvedly in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful"' (*Memoirs* 469). It is, however, important for the critic studying Symonds's works to recognise that he did not necessarily attempt in his writings to discredit Christianity. Inspired by the moral spirit of Christ, he, rather, distilled from this system of religion elements of truth to be used for a higher purpose, typically the exploration and understanding of the moral basis of life.

This chapter will focus on the way in which the evolution of Symonds's spiritual faith, as delineated in his autobiography and elucidated further in his poetry, literary criticism, and letters, advanced through a complex series of stages, navigating between the separate but conterminous forms of doubt and faith, to ultimately resolve that human beings were a part of God, the spirit and law of the universe. In this sense, Symonds's personal spiritual faith, that was for him inseparable from conceptions of morality, departed from what he called 'Modern morality' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 404), the theological conception of God that implied the influence of a divine governor. He, instead, drew from the more scientifically-inclined hypothesis of 'Greek morality' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 404) a confidence in *phusis* (*φύσις*, 'origin'), more specifically 'the regular order of nature' that determined the place of each and all in the universe.[2]

The chapter thus investigates Symonds's 'Religious Development' (*Memoirs* 463-76), his spiritual autobiography that forms a part of *Memoirs* and brings into relief the complex protean nature of his evolving sense of faith. In 'Religious Development', Symonds revealed that his personal sense of faith is most notably expressed in the following works: *Studies of the Greek Poets*; *The Catholic Reaction* (1886), published in two parts, which constitutes the final two volumes of *Renaissance in Italy*; the epilogue to *Palumba: A Mexican Tale*; the final sections of *Animi Figura* (1882); and both volumes of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*. Although Symonds's faith cannot be confined to a system, a pattern of thought emerges to reflect the self-reflexive nature of a man who, throughout his life, revisited past stages of his faith to attempt to translate his spiritual moods in writing. A close reading of this chapter in *Memoirs*, an extensive account Symonds claimed to be dictated by 'the spirit of veracity' (*Memoirs* 471), reveals the curious nature of a personal belief system that adopted from its various external influences (that which and those whom have impressed upon his sensibility) ideas and sentiments about God and self, to construct a form of faith that was, ultimately, unique to its creator.

The peculiar nature of the composition of *Memoirs* is addressed by Amber Regis in the introduction to her edition of the work. Her identification of the uncharacteristic structure of *Memoirs* as a text that alternates between a chronological and a thematic account, one of the numerous problems of 'self-written narratives' (*Memoirs* 5), is significant to our understanding of Symonds as man who was in a constant process of self-analysis and was, therefore, always

[2] See *phusis* (sense III), in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), II, p. 1964.

engaging with the act of self-(re)writing. If one is to view *Memoirs* as a narrative arc that spans the life of the author, within which self-contained chapters are revisited and revised by a mind continuously exposed to and absorbing evolving theoretical discourses, the language and theme of process (and the author's particular interest in this) appear in the work as a dominant and significant pattern. Regis asserts that 'Symonds presents the memoirs-in-progress as an extended (sexual) case study' (*Memoirs* 4), imposing her editorial bias and interpretation on Symonds's confession to Henry Graham Dakyns regarding *Memoirs* – 'I have nothing to relate except the evolution of a character somewhat strangely constituted in its moral and aesthetic qualities' (*L*3 364) – that (re)defines it through the lens of queer theory. Indeed, her summary of the personal memories presented by the author in *Memoirs* highlights the 'sexual' (*Memoirs* 4) condition, concluding that 'perhaps the most surprising [revelations] are those concerned with schooling and university life: the former is marked by sexual bullying and an affair between headmaster and pupil, while the latter is permeated by fears of exposure and blackmail' (*Memoirs* 4). That Symonds's adolescent years played a vital role in the development of his understanding of his 'sexual consciousness' (*Memoirs* 149) is undeniable. However, it is to this singular trait that his Harrovian and Oxonian experiences are circumscribed by Regis, overlooking the significance of the events from this period for his religious development, as this chapter will demonstrate. Symonds learned to intellectually engage with a wealth of theological, ideological, scientific, and philosophical discourses in order to imaginatively delineate a personal, metamorphic conception of the relationship between humankind and faith that would continuously (re)shape his ideas of God, as 'Religious Development' evidences.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF *WERDEN*

'Religious Development' is the section of *Memoirs* dedicated to the presentation and examination of Symonds's evolving ideas of religion and belief, concepts that perplexed him from the early stages of his life up to its end. It is one example from Symonds's vast literary corpus that reveals to the reader, through its structure and language, the events and experiences which formed the author's peculiar religious temperament while at the same time acknowledging the subject of 'style as a sign and index of personality' ('Notes on Style', *ESS*2

10).[3] Symonds did not entirely shed the Platonic idealism he adopted in his youth but rather imbued it with a growing appreciation for and understanding of realism and the literal, in the form of scientific materialism, that heralded the Goethean ideals of concordance, unity, and beauty. His absorption in epistemology and metaphysics, and how their many theoretical branches interplayed with one another, permeated his thinking and manifested itself in his copious literary output. His pattern of thought, whether it assumed its form as a 'process of debate' (*AF* xii) between persons or as a dialogue 'carried on within the meditative mind' (*AF* xii), was effected in all of his works. However, it was the latter mode of discussion, an inner dialectic, that predominantly featured in his prose and poetry in the form of unceasing *ratiocinatio*. His remarks towards the end of his preface in *Animi Figura* are significant to the understanding of the process by which Symonds used dialectics to express his spiritual development in the form of verse: 'in the conduct of a lengthy argument sonnet may succeed to sonnet, propounding and disputing themes which need for their development the thesis and antithesis of logical discussion' (*AF* xii).

'Religious Development' opens with a powerful statement: 'Religion is so important a factor in man's intellectual life, and has so direct a bearing upon the growth of the emotions, that I ought not to omit some account of my development upon this side' (*Memoirs* 463). The documentation of the place of religion – as faith that is personal as opposed to dogmatic – in Symonds's life, its effect upon the formation of his personal emotions, was depicted by the author as necessary and vital. Religion, Symonds observed, the unwavering spirit of devotion, is indissolubly connected to the cultivation of mind and thought, essential parts of the sentient, spiritual self. Religion, too, is formative and shaping; both concepts are fundamental to the understanding of Symonds's perception of faith as an ever-evolving entity that exercises its influence upon instinctive feelings, rather than as a particular system that demands from its adherents a rigid form of ritualistic worship. The opening statement in 'Religious Development', much like Symonds's speculative prose and poetry, is steeped in the language and imagery of processes and reveals much about the writer's self. '[S]tyle is the man', observed Symonds in his consideration of the personal style of the artist ('Style', *ESS*2 7). 'Meanwhile', he deduced, 'the exact psychology is wanting which would render our intuitions regarding the indissoluble link between style and personal character irrefutable' ('Style', *ESS*2

[3] 'Notes on Style' is divided into four parts: parts one, 'History and Usage of the Word', and two, 'National Style', appear at the end of *ESS*1; and parts three, 'Personal Style', and four, 'The Art of Style', are the opening essays of *ESS*2.

7-8).[4] Despite the lack of scientific evidence to support this personal theory, Symonds, in his familiar ratiocinative manner, attempted to arrive at a conclusion that acceded to the claim that the self is mirrored in its chosen method of expression.

In the second section of the third part of 'Notes on Style' ('Personal Style'), Symonds identified the interrelations and interdependencies which he believed to exist between the mind and literary style, the unique phenomenon that 'broad distinctions of mental temperament may be traced in style' ('Style', *ESS*2 5). Symonds infers here that styles of writing, tinged by the mind and thought from which they are created, are revelatory of the emotional landscape of the individual, the moods being experienced in a particular moment of literary composition. Symonds thus determined that autobiographies, epistolary correspondence, and other forms of confessional writing 'are of the highest value in determining the correlation between a writer's self and his style' ('Style', *ESS*2 8). Taking Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* (volumes 1 and 2 published in 1836; volume 3 published in 1848) as an example, Symonds concluded that 'We not only derive a mass of information about Goethe's life from Eckermann, but we also discover from those conversations in how true a sense the style of Goethe's works grew out of his temperament and experience' ('Style', *ESS*2 8-9). Emotion and experience, according to Symonds, have a direct bearing upon the style of writing with which they are expressed. This method of analysis can be applied to the writings of Symonds himself, a writer highly self-conscious of his linguistic style and perpetually inclined to self-scrutinise and adapt his mode of expression to suit his mood. Horatio F. Brown acknowledged such a characteristic in the preface to the third edition of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (1907), and his remark offers an insight into Symonds's patterns of thought and their influence on his personal style of expression: 'those who knew him best felt that he was still in "werden," in process, when the end came.'[5] It is significant, therefore, to notice that Symonds's prose and

[4] Commenting on the developing theory of Victorian evolutionary criticism, Odin Dekkers compares what he considers to be Symonds's unsuccessful scientific literary pursuit to his more successful contemporaries. Dekkers argues that Symonds possessed an 'ambiguous attitude towards science', whilst heralding the innovative approach to scientific literary criticism of French critic Émile Hennequin: 'In France, the most comprehensive endeavour to establish a science of criticism was made by the young critic Émile Hennequin in his *La Critique Scientifique* of 1888, which received some little attention in the British press, notably from Edward Dowden. Symonds, however, makes no mention of […] Hennequin, and approaches the question as if he were the first to raise it' (Odin Dekkers, 'John Addington Symonds and the Science of Criticism', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 43.1-2 (2016), 339-55 (pp. 349, 350)). Symonds, however, appended the following note to his observation of the yet unevidenced connection between style and personality: 'While I was engaged in writing this essay, a young French author, now, alas! dead, sent me a book which may be considered as an important contribution to the psychology of style. It is entitled, "La Critique Scientifique," par Émile Hennequin. Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1888' ('Style', *ESS*2 8fn).

[5] John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, 3rd edn (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1907), p. vii.

poetry commonly possess the themes of progression and development, both of which accurately and effectively reflect the mental temperament of their progenitor. Qualities and concepts from the lexicon of evolutionary theory are applied to *Memoirs*, too, to reflect the author's habit of mind, one that is pervious, 'willing to receive religious influences' (*Memoirs* 464), and constantly susceptible to change.

The style of 'Religious Development', the way in which the author recorded his perception of the interaction between unconscious and conscious elements throughout his life, is revealing of the intriguing manner by which Symonds conceived his ideas of God and faith and, more importantly, the process by which he achieved a personal sense of 'some faith' (*Memoirs* 465). At the beginning of the section, Symonds, in an emphatic tone and by a process that is psychoanalytical in manner, declares his perception of his mental constitution as it concerns religion. His investigation into the genesis of his conception of a personal God begins with the retracing by Symonds of his development of mind as it was influenced by individuals and events, perceived by the author to have been vitally informative to his eventual conception of God as 'the Cosmic Enthusiasm' (*Memoirs* 467). Symonds distinguishes his psychology, the nature and patterns of his thoughts in connection to their external influences, from that of his more well-known and influential contemporaries. 'I have already observed', Symonds remarked of his investigation of his literary and intellectual evolution in the section that precedes 'Religious Development' in *Memoirs*,

> that I was not gifted by nature with any strong sense of God as a person near to me; nor was I naturally of a pious disposition; nor yet again endowed with that theological bias which qualifies the metaphysical thought of philosophers like my late brother-in-law, Professor T. H. Green.[6] (*Memoirs* 463)

[6] Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882), social liberalist devoted to reform in politics and civil service, and Whyte's Chair of Moral Philosophy at Oxford. Green was one of the founding members of the Old Mortality Society, along with John Nichol, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Edward Caird. Benjamin Jowett and Green established philosophy as an independent discipline at Oxford University, and Green's radical doctrine on Philosophical Idealism was to spread through many British universities and permeate a society already facing a crisis of conscience, permanently affecting British thought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For Green, faith and piety driven by a concern for salvation of the soul in life after death was selfish and immoral. Rather, he stressed the importance of acts of altruism and humanism, men in society striving together for social reform in *this* world. For a discussion of Green's literary legacy, ideologies, and impact on socio-political matters concerning the education of the working-class, see Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964).

Whereas Green was naturally inclined, according to Symonds, to believe in God and to accept a systematised conception of theology, Symonds's personal 'bias to scholarship and curiosity' (*Memoirs* 463), his natural inclination towards study and inquiry, formed the 'groundwork' (*Memoirs* 463) of his mental constitution. Unlike Green, Symonds had to 'feel about for some faith' (*Memoirs* 465) in his endeavour to 'comprehend' (*Memoirs* 465) religion.

This sense of 'bias', however, the rigid faith in systematised religion, was not restricted to the philosophies of 'the sturdy yet imaginative' (*Memoirs* 465) Green. Symonds saw in the pioneering literary figures of the age, those luminaries who 'had constructed for themselves and fitted up according to the particular tone and bias of their several dispositions' (*Memoirs* 465), expressions of faith that, although having influenced his conceptions of religion, did not entirely match his own. Symonds's portrayal of his father in *Memoirs* presents an eminent figure who exerted a powerful 'mental and moral influence' (*Memoirs* 464) on his son, inevitably affecting Symonds's intellectual qualities during his undergraduate years at Oxford between 1858 and 1863.[7] In *Memoirs*, Symonds's acknowledged the intimate and unique relationship he shared with his father, recalling how they were 'drawn together' (*Memoirs* 464) by the 'painful catastrophe' (*Memoirs* 464) engendered by the infamous Charles Vaughan episode at Harrow (which will be discussed further in the subsequent section), and how they both freely exchanged conversations with a liberalism that even Symonds perceived as 'unusual perhaps in the intercourse of father and son' (*Memoirs* 464). Added to this phase of development are the intellectual discussions of Dr Symonds and several eminent Broad Church men who were his acquaintances and frequent visitors of Clifton Hill House, such as John Sterling, F. D. Maurice, Francis Newman, 'the awe-inspiring Don' Benjamin Jowett (*Memoirs* 427), and Sydney Dobell.[8] The Broad Church Anglicanism of Symonds's father and his circle of friends powerfully impressed itself on Symonds's thought, helping him to widen his interpretations of Christian Scripture by embracing and implementing into his personal interrogation of religion the tenets of speculation and doubt. However, it was the influence of

[7] John Addington Symonds, MD (1807-1871) had an illustrious career and claimed several honorific titles that included Physician to the Bristol General Hospital, Lecturer on Forensic Medicine at the Bristol Medical School, Lectureship on the Practice of Medicine (1836-1845), Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (elected in 1857), and Vice-President of the British Medical Association. In 1848, he was elected as the Honorary and Consulting Physician to the Hospital.

[8] John Sterling (1806-1844), Scottish author whose memoirs were written by Thomas Carlyle in *The Life of John Sterling* (1851), as an alternative to Julius Charles Hare's publication that appeared in two volumes in 1848; Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), Anglican theologian and Knightbridge Professor of Casuistry and Moral Philosophy at Cambridge; Francis William Newman (1805-1897), younger brother of John Henry Newman and author of *Phases of Faith* (1850); Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, whose essay appeared in the highly controversial *Essays and Reviews* (1860); Sydney Thompson Dobell (1824-1874), the English poet and critic.

the last four men that intimated and signified to Symonds the questionable shape of religion and the form of the God that resides within: they 'familiarized me with lines of speculation antagonistic to any narrow interpretations of Christian dogma' (*Memoirs* 465).

During this process of growth, that reached a new stage in its formation, or *werden*, the pattern of Symonds's thought manifested itself by what it assimilated, from his numerous and varied influences,[9] and what it rejected, by its adoption of certain principles useful to his own comprehension of faith, of a personal religion whereby his 'own soul might be supported' (*Memoirs* 465). Through the sympathetic understanding of and respect for his father's 'illogical' (*Memoirs* 465) yet excusable adherence to Scripture, an irrational faith in Christian convention that Symonds designated to the mental atmosphere of the time of which his father and his peers were a product, Symonds was able to issue forth from that past stage of cognition and enter a new phase in modern thought: 'I was staring from the point which they had reached; and I should be compelled to go further' (*Memoirs* 465). At this point in his spiritual development, Symonds was both intimate enough with, and detached enough from, the stage of religious thought of his predecessors. He was able to absorb, modify, and expand the essence of their fixed beliefs in a Christian God, losing 'the consolation of faith in redemption through Christ' (*Memoirs* 467), without becoming 'irreligious' (*Memoirs* 465), and adapting it to make it compatible with a personal faith whereby his 'own soul might be supported' (*Memoirs* 465). Symonds's 'spiritual tissue' (*Memoirs* 464), adversely affected at an earlier stage of mental growth by his ennui caused by the infamous incident involving Charles Vaughan, was steeped in resolve. No longer languorous and disenchanted by the hypocrisy of Vaughan, Symonds engaged determinedly with the systematic examination, through his studies, of Plato and

[9] Symonds lists numerous men with whom he was acquainted at Oxford, all of which came to possess illustrious careers, becoming eminent figures in the public sector and in civil service. These include: John Conington, Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford and Symonds's lifelong friend who 'professed himself a submissive Christian through terror' (*Memoirs* 465); Hugh Pearson (1817-1882), Canon at St George's Chapel, Windsor (1876-1882) and member of the Broad Church; Christopher Cholmeley Puller, whose philosophies were inspired by those of Auguste Comte; William Richard Wood Stephens (1839-1902), Dean of Winchester (1895-1902), and, according to Symonds, 'a man of simple faith' (*Memoirs* 465); Albert Oslif Rutson, who desired to marry Symonds's sister Charlotte who eventually married Green (see Appendices in *Memoirs* 534-39, for Symonds's account of his turbulent friendship with Rutson); George Charles Bright (1840-1922), a physician; James Surtees Phillpotts (1839-1930), headmaster of Bedford Grammar School (1874-1903); Albert Venn Dicey (1835-1922), one of the founding members of the Old Mortality Society and author of *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (1885); Charles Stuart Parker (1829-1910), who published *Sir Robert Peel: His Private Papers* (1899); James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce (1838-1922), Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford (1870-1893) and British Ambassador to the United States of America (1907-1913); and Edwin Palmer (1824-1895), a liberal theologian and Corpus Professor of Latin at Oxford (1870-1878). Conington, Green, Ruston, Puller, and Symonds formed part of a reading party that would lodge at Whitby and then again at Coniston lake. It was during the excursion to Whitby, in 1859, that Symonds revealed to Conington the true nature of Charles Vaughan's affair with Alfred Pretor (*Memoirs* 172).

Aristotle, the history of philosophy, and logic, to guide and enrich his understanding of 'the mysteries of the universe, God, nature, man' (*Memoirs* 465).

CONSTRUING ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXY: THE SEPARATION OF PIETY FROM MORALITY

Reflecting on his Harrovian days, Symonds confessed his 'God-fearing' (*Memoirs* 464) devotion to a draconian deity, declaring himself as 'willing to receive religious influences, as most boys of my age' (*Memoirs* 464). Nonetheless, however pervious and readily impressionable he was in his early age, he later drew the conclusion that there existed no external influence in his childhood 'to evoke the religious sentiment by any appeal to my peculiar nature' (*Memoirs* 463). The result is one in which Symonds, again, presents himself as a figure whose mental temperament is permeated by a burgeoning imaginative life, reinforcing the idea he has of himself as s*ui generis*. 'English public schools', he observed, 'deliberately sacrifice exceptional natures to the average; and I was in many respects an exceptional nature' (*Memoirs* 421).

It is of great importance to sympathise with and reflect upon Symonds's experience as a schoolboy, for a more complete understanding of the lengthy, conscious process through which Symonds constructed what eventually became the religion by which he lived '"resolvedly in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful"' (*Memoirs* 469). The infamous scandal involving the secret love affair between Charles Vaughan, Dean of Llandaff, and Alfred Pretor was recorded by Symonds in *Memoirs* (150-51, 172-75), and it was a crucial episode in Symonds's sexual, but also moral and religious development.[10] Brown heavily censored the episode in the manuscript of *Memoirs*, crossing out Vaughan's and Pretor's identities.[11] *Memoirs* documents Pretor's revelation to Symonds of the affair (*Memoirs* 150), as well as Symonds's revelation of the incident to, first John Conington, and then his father (*Memoirs* 172), who forced Vaughan to resign from Harrow and never seek 'further advancement in the church' (*Memoirs* 173). Vaughan, Noel Annan explains, submitted to Dr Symonds's

[10] Charles John Vaughan (1816-1897), headmaster of Harrow (1845-1859) and Symonds's form master, became Dean of Llandaff in 1879. He was the uncle of Symonds's brother-in-law, Thomas Hill Green. After the death of Green's mother, his father Valentine Green, rector of Birkin, Yorkshire, married Anna Barbara, Vaughan's half-sister.

[11] In the manuscript of Symonds's autobiography, the Vaughan-Pretor episode is a 'Passage marked for deletion (MS 489). Brown does not reproduce this material, jumping' from one passage to another of the manuscript, avoiding all reference to it in his biography of Symonds (*Memoirs* 473fn8). Several phrases have 'been heavily scored through with pencil' in an attempt by Brown as executor of the document to conceal the identities of those involved in the scandal (*Memoirs* 473fn2).

conditions, daring, however, 'to accept the deanery of Llandaff' after Dr Symonds's death.[12] The reason behind Vaughan's 'sudden abdication' and his withdrawal from public life – kept secret by Symonds, his father, Conington, 'and a few undergraduates at Cambridge and Oxford' (*Memoirs* 173) – remained unknown until Grosskurth published her edition of *Memoirs*, and the episode has, since then, been regarded by scholars as revelatory of the closed nature of Victorian society, especially in matters of sexuality. The extensive censorship of this event has, indeed, drawn attention to the sexual nature of the episode, but, as a result, its repercussions upon Symonds's religious and moral views have been largely overlooked. The event, described by Symonds as having caused his 'torpid cynicism' (*Memoirs* 152), was in fact a decisive moment for the formation of his perception of biblical exegesis, religious figures of authority, and religious duty, and of the way in which he rendered those ideas in his speculative discourses of prose and poetry as subject to argument and scrutiny.

The sensitive nature with which Symonds responds to the episode, how Pretor's revelation plunges him into 'astonishment' (*Memoirs* 150), and how he seeks to express the reasoned ground of his moral faith sincerely and sympathetically, is at odds with the way in which Rupert Croft-Cooke, in *Feasting with Panthers* (1967), portrays Symonds's response to the matter. He describes the seventeen-year-old Symonds as 'High-minded, artificially religious, emotional'.[13] Croft-Cooke's review of Grosskurth's biography of Symonds is unsympathetic and revealing of his personal, unfavourable opinions of Symonds: 'the author has such sympathy for the unhappy man whose life she relates that she does not appear to see him as sometimes unlikeable and often ludicrous.'[14] Nevertheless, regardless of whether Croft-Cooke uses the term 'artificially' to imply cunning invention, he highlights a vital aspect of Symonds's complex system of faith; that it is the product of deliberate invention, artificially created insofar as it did not follow strict dogmatic orthodoxy. This much transpires in a letter written to Brown (29 July 1890) concerning the preparation of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*: Symonds, the self-confessed architect of his behavioural tendencies, revealed himself to be in a constant process of self-effectuation, 'altering my nature, correcting my proclivities, working toward a conscious aim' (*L*3 480).

[12] Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (London: Harper Collins, 1999; repr. 2000), p. 329.
[13] Rupert Croft-Cooke, *Feasting with Panthers: A New Consideration of Some Late Victorian Writers* (London: W. H. Allen, 1967), p. 96.
[14] Croft-Cooke, *Feasting with Panthers*, p. 95. See pp. 96-98 for Croft-Cooke's (partisan) rendering of the Vaughan episode, which betrays a very sympathetic depiction of Vaughan.

Croft-Cooke is highly critical of the aftermath of the affair, suggesting that '[t]he episode during Symonds's schooldays does not seem to have had any lasting effect'.[15] This is, however, an evident misconception of an episode which reverberated far beyond Symonds's Harrovian days.[16] For the writing of 'Religious Development', Symonds, with vivid poignancy, exhumed the emotions produced in him by the event to reveal a vital moment in his conception and perception of religion: 'The shock of the discovery, and the casuistical reflections it engendered, had the immediate effect of dissociating piety from morality in my view of the religious life' (*Memoirs* 464), a passage marked for omission by Brown. The event influenced the type of interrogation made by Symonds, for the rest of his life, into his personal cognition of the nature of human beings and their relation to God and the universe, an interrogation which included but extended beyond his homosexuality. His 'astonishment' prompted 'casuistical analysis' (*Memoirs* 150), a process of contemplation, an attempt by the conscience to resolve a case that, to the young student, seemed to be a conflict of duty and conduct. In respect of religion, the discovery instantaneously rendered, for the poet, Christian law pervious to inquiry: religion, as the practice of obedience to God and faithful devotion to decreed commands, was severed from Symonds's personal idea of moral law, 'right conduct' ('On the Relation of Art to Science and Morality', *ESS*1 151) and '*goodness*' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 150).

The enduring effect of this event upon Symonds's 'religious life' (*Memoirs* 464), its revelation of the discrepancy in popular faith between qualities that are and conduct that is right or wrong, is clearly evident, although doubted by Croft-Cooke, and accentuated by the assertive statement that directly follows: 'There existed no doubt that Dr Vaughan passed for an eminently pious man; and it was equally clear that he indulged habits in secret which he denounced as sins from the pulpit' (*Memoirs* 464).[17] Orthopraxy and orthodoxy become

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[15] Croft-Cooke, *Feasting with Panthers*, p. 98.

[16] See, for example, Trevor Park's *Nolo Episcopari: A Life of Charles John Vaughan, 1816-1897* (St Bees: St Bega Publications, 2013) in which he denounces Symonds's representation of the affair as unreliable and inaccurate. Morris Kaplan discusses the episode in a manner that is more sympathetic than Croft-Cooke's; however, his argument is underpinned by Symonds's struggles with his own homosexuality, his 'stern upbringing' and 'powerful sexual urges' (see Morris B. Kaplan's *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in the Wilde Times* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 105-06). Christopher Tyerman's *A History of Harrow School, 1324-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) provides a detailed account of the episode, taking into consideration the accounts of both Symonds and Charles Dalrymple (pp. 245-84). However, Tyerman, too, criticises Symonds's record of the episode, condemning his 'fertile imagination, especially when describing his homosexual awakening' (Tyerman, *History of Harrow*, p. 279). He simplifies the complex nature of *Memoirs* with the following resolution: 'More seriously, the memoirs as a whole constitute an extended propagandist essay on the nature of homosexual orientation and Symonds' heroic passage to enlightenment' (Tyerman, *History of Harrow*, p. 279).

[17] This sentence also belongs to the censored passage. Regis notes that 'Dr Vaughan's name has been cut, quite literally, from the manuscript (MS 488—see Appendices). There is a hole in the page over which his name is re-inscribed' (*Memoirs* 473fn6).

unwoven, separate entities that no longer share the same religious code; indulgence and piety further emphasised the gulf between the two tenets in the mind of Symonds. The disharmonising of these particular values by the immoral conduct of two individuals is presented by Symonds as a hypocrisy that pervaded the affluent institution. The Harrovian system, 'a bad one' (*Memoirs* 421) for Symonds, was corrupt and lacking in the handling by its masters of the 'all-round exercise of human faculties' (*Memoirs* 421), made up of athletics and study. Athletics, he observed, 'degenerated into lawlessness, licentiousness and rowdyism. Study dwindled into mechanical and easily evaded task-work' (*Memoirs* 421). Although the athletes possessed physical beauty and were 'fit for noble purpose' (*Memoirs* 421), they 'had no moral discipline' (*Memoirs* 421). Symonds emphasised the corruption that permeated the hierarchical make-up of Harrow, a corruption that was adopted by the students of the institution through the example of their masters (ordained religious figures of authority):

> The students were starved through the inadequacy and negligence of their instructors, stupefied by unintelligent routine, numbed by the goddess Dullness which spread her sleepy money-getting wings above the place. There was no master-spirit to infuse energy into either of the dual branches of the system, to combine both in a vital organism and to provide a proper scope for individuals. (*Memoirs* 421)

The image painted by Symonds of 'the little state of Harrow' (*Memoirs* 421) as 'rotten to the core' (*Memoirs* 421) is a reiteration of the anxiety he felt for the exposure of young students to the 'double culture' ('The Genius of Greek Art', *GP*2 388) nurtured by institutions central to the formation of the intellectual landscape of the country: 'I think that I am justified in saying that Harrow failed conspicuously as a nursery for the picked youth of a great nation' (*Memoirs* 421). The school, an environment for fostering the minds of the young during a vitally formative stage, like the individual figures of authority within it, was associated by Symonds to failure, an association which tinged his perception of 'religious life' with a scepticism that mirrors the discord between piety and morality depicted in the discussion of the Vaughan episode. Relaying his account retrospectively, but writing in the present tense, which suggests the lasting effect of the 'religious life' of his schooldays upon his sentiments, Symonds confessed: 'Harrow is first the contamination of my moral sense, and secondly the hardening of my character by premature initiation into the bear-garden of mundane life' (*Memoirs* 422). His engagement with studies was an act of labour that 'offered a pause and respite in the utter wilderness and desolate conditions of the godless place' (*Memoirs* 422).

Parallels may thus be drawn between the ways in which environment and behaviour were instrumental in infecting and shaping Symonds's perception of duty, religion, faith, and moral conduct. The corruption of Vaughan, to whom Symonds referred as one of the 'sphinx-natured shams' (*Memoirs* 421) of Harrow, arises from the discrepancy between his private acts of self-indulgence and the ecclesiastical doctrines established by authoritative figures of faith. Vaughan, a man of high repute and distinction, was associated by all who knew him with the tenets of trust and belief, in his role as headmaster and vicar; there was 'no doubt' (*Memoirs* 464), in the popular mind, as to the faultlessness of his character, Symonds observed. Yet, the blatant 'hypocrisy and inconsistency' (*Memoirs* 464) of his words and actions did not correlate with Symonds's notion of goodness and ethical law. Preaching from his pulpit, an elevated platform indicative of moral superiority and a place from which moral religious sermons are delivered by a guide highly appointed by the church, Vaughan's discordant nature led a disconcerted Symonds to extend his scepticism outward, 'to suspect human nature at large' (*Memoirs* 464), and, ultimately, to question the social and moral character of Christianity.

SPECULATION AND SUGGESTION: TOWARDS A COMPREHENSION OF MORALITY

The opening statement of Symonds's essay 'On the Relation of Art to Science and Morality' is a bold assertion on the problem of linguistic anachronisms: 'The most singular phenomenon of language in its relation to thought is our inability to define the words expressive of ideas by which we are principally influenced in life' (*ESS*1 148). Yet, Symonds was open to criticism, insofar as this essay, like the rest of his poetry and prose, contains ideas that invite and encourage interpretation. Symonds accepted the inability of language to define concepts completely and exhaustively, especially in relation to those ideas that 'blend in our spiritual nature' (*ESS*1 148), such as love, beauty, truth, poetry, goodness, and God. Nonetheless, he added, jestingly, 'Yet a man may be permitted at times to play this impossible game of definitions as a kind of intellectual pastime, recognising its inefficiency, but acknowledging suggestive and stimulative value in the sport' (*ESS*1 148-49). Even though Symonds proposes definitions for these tenets, they are subjective to his personal experiences and, therefore, this becomes another exercise of speculation. 'We may' is anaphorically used by Symonds at the beginning of the essay (*ESS*1 149), reminding the reader of the speculative vein that runs through the work.

The hypothetical exercise successfully suggests that universally accepted definitions for words do not exist; hence, 'our inability to define the words expressive of ideas by which

we are principally influenced in life' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 148), a theory uttered by Symonds throughout his works. While making these claims for the 'phenomenon of language' (*ESS*1 148) in his lengthy examination of definitions for goodness, truth, and beauty, Symonds presented one possible manner of determining the qualities of goodness as a scheme by which he lived:

> Still we know that there is no beauty worthy of the name without truth and without a certain sort of goodness. We feel that goodness is the highest kind of truth, and that truth is good. We recognise that every truth, once demonstrated, has a right to be called beautiful. It is only needful to fix attention on the contrary ideas of badness, ugliness, falsity, in order to perceive that their intrusion into the sphere of the good, the beautiful, the true, vitiates our radical conception of those virtues. Beauty cannot be bad; goodness cannot be false; truth cannot be ugly—and so on, ringing all the changes on their combinations. ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 149-50)

Morality is characterised by particular attributes, steeped in nuance, but definable for Symonds by the direct comparison with their opposites. It is from the attempt to understand 'contrary ideas', their oppositional meanings measured against one another, that our understanding of a word, at its root or simplest level, is impaired.[18] Thus, the meanings of 'those virtues' become varied, complex, and diluted. Our conception of opposing ideas, our understanding of what things 'cannot be', prevents a complete understanding of morality. This method of reasoning, the re-composition of what the mind, according to Symonds, naturally tends to 'decompose', is consistently demonstrated in his attempt to form sympathetic contact with the wide range of human apprehension of the world.

Benedict de Spinoza, in the preface to the fourth part of his *Ethics* (posthumously published in 1667), proposed his own definitions of the moral categories of good and evil. His

[18] The word 'radical', here, is employed by Symonds in the linguistic sense to allude to a phase of human speech or language that was in its origins. For a detailed examination of radical language, see Max Müller's, *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861):

> As all languages, so far as we can judge at present, can be reduced in the end to roots, predicative and demonstrative, it is clear that, according to the manner in which roots are put together, we may expect to find three kinds of languages, or three stages in the gradual formation of speech. […] The first stage, in which each root preserves its independence, and in which there is no formal distinction between a root and a word, I call the *Radical Stage*. This stage is best represented by Chinese. (Friedrich Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), pp. 273-74.)

metaphysical philosophy suggests that good and evil, like perfection and imperfection, have no absolute or finite meaning; the world, according to Spinoza, and what man perceives of it 'are only modes of thinking'.[19] Reality, like perfection, was thus understood by Spinoza as subjective to the observer. 'For one and the same thing', he argued, 'can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf.'[20] Despite Spinoza's acceptance of the subjective nature of definitions, he argued that we still 'must retain these words […] because', he suggested, 'we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature we may look to.'[21] This method of reasoning, however, is framed by a subjective method of analysis; it is dominated by the author's 'mode of thinking', something that Spinoza could not avoid. In a similar sense, Symonds attempted to reify his own moral ideal of goodness by aestheticising definitions of goodness, truth, and beauty:

> It is the function of the intelligence to decompose abstractions. Intelligence deals with concrete things; and the concrete is always the differentiated. Thus we use the word *good* in different senses. We speak, for instance, of good iron, a good horse, good beef; but we reserve the name *goodness* for the dominant excellence of human beings, moral virtue. To this quality we assign ethics; to truth, science; to beauty, aesthetics. ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 150)

Symonds outlined the inherent and fundamental operation of intelligence, man's faculty of understanding, as one that fragments ideas to better understand them. This central process, however, the breaking down of concepts, is, simultaneously, one to be accomplished by the creative imagination. Although ethics, science, and art, are components of morality, Symonds suggested that each province 'exists for itself' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 151) and must be 'considered separately' (*ESS*1 151). The virtue of morality, however, its function to regard the ways in which all things relate to our spiritual being, establishes its primacy over science and art. This reflection on the nature of the mind, again, portrays it as a conflicting process, one that constantly strives to unify whilst continually decomposing.

Symonds recorded in *Memoirs* the influence of his readings of Spinoza on his personal notions of religion and faith, especially those works concerning the metaphysical aspects of the

[19] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 115.
[20] Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 115.
[21] Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 115.

philosophy of evolution (*Memoirs* 468). In a letter to Henry Sidgwick (3 September 1885), Symonds discussed the vital influence of Giordano Bruno upon modern thought and his significant role in shaping Spinoza's (among others') philosophy of life, a fact that Spinoza chose to elide: 'The extent to which Spinoza, Leibnitz, and the German idealists have lived upon his ideas without, until Schelling, avowing their obligation, is quite amusing' (*L*3 74-75). Nonetheless, Spinoza's influence on Symonds is apparent in the way in which the latter examined the nature of words and their meaning, and his belief that humanity's understanding of them, although subjective, inevitably effects individual perceptions of morality. Spinoza assumed that 'the model of human nature', towards which human beings continuously strive, is 'good'.[22] Symonds, however, through a lengthy process of deduction typical of his manner of theorising, justified his own 'model of human nature' by extending his argument to discuss the relation of human nature with goodness. Beauty is equated by Symonds to 'a quality, not of essence, but of aspect and appearance' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 149). Goodness and truth, conversely, are qualities 'of essence' (*ESS*1 149). If, then, the divine, benevolent force that penetrates all things is *essential*, and human beings are a composite part of this greater, pervasive spirit, humankind, too, is a product of absolute goodness.

Unity, in all its manifestations, is presented in Symonds's essay as a necessary quality of human experience; however, it is a quality that is in constant contention. Religious life, in the sphere of nineteenth-century intellectual history, grew increasingly exposed to the fragile agreement and correspondence between thoughts and things. It is important to note, however, that although this was a time when scholars discussed different modes of perceiving reality, the difference was not always a matter of conflict. Where some scholars became progressively disenchanted with religion, others fortified their allegiance to it, becoming more faithful. Symonds's scientific attitude, his critical investigations, for example, of the metaphysical and more philosophical aspects of evolutionary theory, encouraged his difficulties of perceiving the oneness of Christianity (in the medieval sense) as an enduringly relevant entity in the greater scheme of life. Symonds therefore expressed a scepticism that was aimed towards Christianity's partial view of the universe, one which, for the poet, could not fully explain the workings of the cosmos and humanity. Symonds's personal religion unified all modes of life, including art, philosophy, and science, and, thus, constructed an apprehension of life on which humanity could and must depend:

[22] Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 115.

> From the most abstract point of view, goodness, beauty, truth, are in reality inseparable. Religion presents us with an ideal of the universal Being, in whom they coexist without one flaw or note of difference. This is religion's way of presenting to our minds the ideal unity of our own nature, the type of self to which humanity aspires. ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 150)

Symonds believed in the existence of an ideal 'universal Being' that is goodness, truth, and beauty. Although he believed that goodness was the natural and primordial state to which humanity naturally seeks to return, he too acknowledged that the power of dogmatic forms of religion was assumed by the '*way*' (emphasis added) in which it presented to our minds the example of 'ideal unity', that piety is the path towards morality. This thought, reminiscent of the 'casuistical reflections' (*Memoirs* 464) engendered in the mind of Symonds by Vaughan's impiety, presented a greater philosophical concern of Symonds, one that questioned the aims of religion as an institution and religion as the embodiment of moral virtue.

It is the unity achieved through self-knowledge, a harmony between self and the external world, that, according to Symonds, was deficient not only in his own mind but also in the popular mind of the Victorian era. The poetical voice of *Animi Figura* speculates:

> I know not what I am.—Oh dreadful thought!—
> Nor know I what my fellow creatures are:
> Between me and the world without, a bar
> Impalpable of adamant is wrought.
> Each self, from its own self concealed, is caught
> Thus in a cage of sense, sequestered far
> From comradeship, calling as calleth star
> To star across blank intermediate naught.
> His own self no man sees, and none hath seen
> His brother's self. ('Personality', I. 1-10; *AF* 11)

Where once, in a world dominated by medieval Catholic thought, systems of theology, science, and art were harmoniously bound to a consensual view of God and the universe, and the place of humanity within it, the Victorian scene is presented by Symonds as unstable and shifting, as contending systems of thought (religious, philosophical, scientific) arise and exist in conflict:

> Yet were they free to take or to avoid?
> Who knows!—Amid the dull chaotic din
> Of wrangling schools which argument can win
> Conviction, when blind faith hath been destroyed? ('Personality', II. 5-8; *AF* 12)

The destabilisation is presented in the sonnets as a dwindling of the mind which increasingly renders the speaker more helpless in his frantic search for some light in the outer chaos of opposing uncertainties into which our inner part renders itself: 'Yea,' infers the voice in the second and final sonnet in the sequence, 'both shall carry with them to the void | Without, the void more terrible within' ('Personality', II. 1-2; *AF* 12).

SYMONDS AT THE OXFORD OLD MORTALITY SOCIETY

The period that followed Symonds's years at Oxford between 1858 and 1863, specifically his membership of the university's illustrious Old Mortality Society (OMS), which flourished for a ten-year period (1856-1866), offers a glimpse into his intellectual background during a time that was a significant formative stage in the development of his dynamic religious spirit. More vitally, however, is how Symonds continually drew from the radical topics that were debated by the OMS men to inform his future speculations on issues that personally concerned him, such as cosmos, humanity, and democracy. Although Symonds meticulously documented in 'Religious Development' the incidents he perceived as fundamental to the growth of his faith, he curiously omitted any mention of his life as an Old Mortal. He did, however, record in his memoirs the names of several members of the Society as the men with whom 'I compared my own eager questionings', during 'long walks or midnight colloquies' (*Memoirs* 465). Though this largely unrecognised moment in his life may seem extraneous to his religious development, detached and unrelated to the expression and radical beliefs of Symonds's spiritual mood in later life, a closer analysis points to the relevance of Symonds's participation in the OMS for his religious and intellectual development. Indeed, the unfettered inquiry into 'the mysteries of the universe, God, nature, and man' (*Memoirs* 465) that Symonds conducted is in line with the radical tastes of the OMS, which lent a dynamic quality to his systematic examination of faith.

Gerald Monsman's *Oxford University's Old Mortality Society* (1998), the first book to engage with the largely ignored mid-Victorian intellectual club, introduces the Society and its prolific members, many of whom became influential figures in the English intellectual landscape, with metaphors that evoke the first awakenings and fresh, new vigour typically

associated with spring. They were 'the seed-ground for new social and religious paradigms', their existence forging 'our cultural springtime'.[23] The Society was founded in 1856 by John Nichol and included among its original members the eminent figures, such as Algernon Swinburne and Albert Dicey.[24] It was a club that, according to Monsman, had 'progressive tastes' on all social aspects including politics, religion, science, art, and literature, stressing especially the importance of contemporary literature.[25] Nichol would hold weekly discussions in his rooms at Balliol College that ranged between the politics surrounding the Italian cause and the triumph of liberty during the rule of King Ferdinand II; the upheaval of Napoleon Bonaparte's tyrannical reign in France; American slavery and Abraham Lincoln's democracy (Lincoln and especially Whitman's notion of democracy were to permanently influence Symonds's own humanistic vision of a future egalitarian state, which will be discussed further in the final chapter of the thesis); and domestic concerns, particularly those related to educational reform. Thus, the Old Mortals, uninhibited in their discussions, were instrumental in the radical reshaping of the intellectual atmosphere of the time. They were a critical part of the 'process shaping the new Victorian canon'.[26]

The nature of Symonds's involvement in the OMS, his engagement with the individuals that formed what Monsman calls 'the leading intellectual force in Oxford', as well as his own admission into the Society, has been somewhat overlooked by his critics.[27] 'In 1862,' observes Monsman, 'during his last year at Balliol, J. A. Symonds was elected a member, and early in 1863 Walter Pater was elected. Unfortunately, we know little of Symonds' participation in Old Mortality affairs.'[28] Symonds, too, obscured from view this part of his life, an act to which Monsman alludes in his work:

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[23] Gerald C. Monsman, *Oxford University's Old Mortality Society: A Study in Victorian Romanticism* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), pp. viii, ix.

[24] The Society took its name from the figure of Old Mortality, the graveyard caretaker in Walter Scott's novel, *The Tale of Old Mortality* (1816), which was published alongside *The Black Dwarf* to form the first series of four from *Tales of my Landlord* (1816-1832). William Angus Knight, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews University, included a chapter on the OMS in his *Memoir of John Nichol* (1896) that reproduced jottings by Albert V. Dicey concerning Oxford life and the OMS:

> 'There were at Balliol a certain number of us, such for example as G. R. Luke, T. H. Green, and Swinburne, who were united by a common intimacy with Nichol. This connection might have come to very little if he had not, after his manner, united us together in an essay-reading society, called—owing to an almost accidental joke about the ill health of some of its members—the "Old Mortality"'. (William Knight, *Memoir of John Nichol* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1896), p. 139.)

[25] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 59.

[26] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 60.

[27] Gerald C. Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society at Oxford', *Studies in Philology*, 67 (1970), 359-89 (p. 366).

[28] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', pp. 384-85.

> As regards the suppressed *Memoir* [*sic*] in the London Library, I drew a complete blank. The section dealing with his time at Oxford contained no mention of the Old Mortality. This presumably explains why Symonds' biographer, H. F. Brown, who used the memoir extensively, has nothing. But why Symonds himself, who certainly, as the Brooke diaries show, attended meetings, is silent on this point is a puzzle.[29]

Monsman accessed Professor T. E. Holland's list of members (printed in 1896) and the Minutes Book (the official record of the Society's history, rules, and regulations), which was bequeathed to the Bodleian Library in 1924 by Nichol's daughter. Both provided him with the correct information regarding the names of members, their colleges, and the dates they joined the Society:

> The members who joined between 1862 and 1866-68 according to Professor Holland's tally, included some of its future most illustrious names: John Addington Symonds, historian of the Renaissance, critic, translator, and poet; Ingram Bywater, Regius Professor of Greek; Walter Pater, essayist and novelist, one of the most pervasive if elusive influences of the writers of the late-Victorian era and emergent modernism; William Wallace, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford; and John Wordsworth, Bishop of Salisbury.[30]

Melvin Richter mentions the existence and ongoings of the Old Mortality Society in the context of his discussion on Green, and mentions Symonds as part of the Society, but neither of his sources – William Knight's *Memoir of John Nichol* (1896) and H. A. L. Fisher's *James Bryce*, 2 vols (1927) – include Symonds as a member.[31] Furthermore, he cites what Monsman considers to be a questionable source as his reference to the Society's list of members. Rather than acknowledging T. E. Holland's 1896 list of members (credited by Monsman as 'more comprehensive though still incomplete'), Richter cites the 'extremely inaccurate' list printed by H. A. L. Fisher that omits Symonds's name and, Monsman notes, 'misspells several others.'[32] Edmund Gosse, in his *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1917), referenced

[29] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 385.
[30] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 76.
[31] See Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, p. 80.
[32] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 2; Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 360fn3; Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 2.

Holland's list to reveal that Symonds was one of the members of the OMS that joined 'afterwards'.[33]

Symonds might not have mentioned, in his memoirs or elsewhere (of the extant and available materials), his participation in the OMS, but his letters show his association with Oxford's subculture of highly distinguished societies, and have multiple references to his casual meetings with some of the Old Mortals. In a letter to his sister Charlotte (11 March 1860), he mentioned that he 'had a very intellectual breakfast: Conington, Rutson, Green, Tollemache, Dicey, Lylulf [*sic*] Stanley, & Puller' (*L*1 223), but he did not record his attendance at the Society's official gatherings.[34] Writing to Charlotte and others (7 October 1882) with 'Reminiscences of T. H. Green', after the latter's passing, Symonds remarked that 'I well remember his coming back from hearing Pater read an essay at the Old Mortality, beaming all over with the high theme expressed in thrilling language: "It was a Dithyramb!"' (*L*2 775), in what is the only reference to the OMS in Symonds's correspondence. Symonds also related to Charlotte the occurrences at meetings with the Essay Society: he told her of a reading that took place at 'this Society' (24 January 1861, *L*1 267); his reticence towards making a speech at a 'dinner of the Essay Society' (1 June 1861, *L*1 296); and his journey to Crystal Palace where the 'Old Members of the Essay society are going to have their annual dinner' (9 June 1864, *L*1 479). Brown reprinted, in his biography of Symonds, a letter (which Herbert Schueller and Robert Peters do not include in their published volumes) that records his involvement in the Essay Society: '"I have had a second bad night, and am feeling ill and nervous. Read in the morning about the Criminal Responsibility of Lunatics in the *Psychological Review*, and some notes of papa's. I am going to write about it for the Essay Society."'[35] The Essay Society was another club formed by Conington and of which Symonds was a member.[36] Schueller and Peters, however, misattribute Symonds's references to the 'Essay Society' in his correspondence, as to the OMS. They mistakenly suggest that 'this Society' (*L*1 267), in Symonds's letter to Charlotte, is 'The elite Oxford essay society, Old Mortality' (*L*1 267fn1). Not only, however, was Symonds accepted into the OMS (according to Monsman and Holland's list) in 1862, after the letter was written, but also Schueller and

[33] Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1917), p. 39.
[34] Lionel Tollemache attended both Harrow and Oxford at the same time as Symonds. In his memoir, he writes: 'It is related in his [Symonds's] *Life* that he and I met at what must have been a very interesting breakfast given by Professor Conington' (Lionel A. Tollemache, *Old and Odd Memories*, 2nd imp. (London: Edward Arnold, 1908), p. 135).
[35] Horatio F. Brown, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography Compiled from his Papers and Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: John C. Nimmo, 1895), I, pp. 143-44.
[36] Symonds dedicated a significant part of his chapter ('Intellectual and Literary Evolution') in *Memoirs* to a discussion of the influences of Conington and Green (*Memoirs* 425-27).

Peters refer to essays which Symonds read, according to them, for the OMS and which, in fact, Brown clearly identifies, citing Symonds's own correspondence, as having been read for the Essay Society. In *Old and Odd Memories* (1908), Lionel Tollemache's memoir, he briefly noted the nature of both his and Symonds's involvement in Conington's club:

> We were both members of a society which was variously designated as the Essay Society, the Mutual Improvement Society, (less modestly) the Wise and Good, and (with special reference to two or three of its members) the Jolly Pantheists—a society of which Conington, himself anything but a Pantheist, was the founder and patron.[37]

No scholar, apart from Schueller and Peters, or contemporary member of the societies ever refer, either directly or indirectly, to the Old Mortality Society and the Essay Society as having been one and the same.

Grosskurth records in her biography the process by which Symonds failed to be elected to the Old Mortality Society after having 'his admission […] blocked by the vote of Lyulph Stanley', but Symonds's access was blocked, by Stanley's vote, to the Essay Society, not the OMS, as Symonds mentioned to Charlotte (19 February 1861, *L*1 277).[38] She also observes that it was in his final year at Balliol that Symonds 'resigned from Conington's essay society and the same year was finally elected to the Old Mortality', but Symonds only resigned from the presidency of the Essay Society (1 December 1861, *L*1 324), continuing to attend meetings (3 March 1862, *L*1 339) and present papers (23 June 1862, *L*1 354).[39] Monsman, however, is reticent about Grosskurth's claims: 'since there is no record that Lyulph Stanley was a member himself, the reported facts of this episode [by Grosskurth] are suspect. The most reliable information of Symonds' participation in the Society are the entries in Brook's [*sic*] diaries which record his presence.'[40] Samuel Roebuck Brooke was admitted into the OMS in 1863, after his matriculation in Corpus Christi College in 1862.[41] Although Brooke's journals remain largely unpublished, Monsman's access to the manuscripts held at Corpus Christi proved invaluable to understand the intellectual and speculative atmosphere of the OMS by which

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[37] Tollemache, *Old and Odd Memories*, pp. 135-36. Conington, according to Symonds, 'professed himself a submissive Christian through terror' (*Memoirs* 465).
[38] Grosskurth, *Woeful Victorian*, p. 56.
[39] Grosskurth, *Woeful Victorian*, p. 57.
[40] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 385.
[41] Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715-1886*, 4 vols (Oxford: James Parker, 1891), I, p. 168.

Symonds's religious spirit was impressed, during this crucial and informative period of his life.[42]

Monsman explains that, in Brooke's journals for the years 1863-1864 which deal with his time at Oxford, Symonds's name is recorded to signify his presence at the OMS meetings. Monsman records the following extract from the unpublished diary, written by Brooke on 15 February 1863, that alludes to Symonds's membership:

> The Old Mortality is one of 3 Essay societies which have sprung up in Oxford. It is senior to the 3 in the fact that senior men (mostly Bachelors) belong to it, and it is beyond its contemporaries alike in genius and fame. Such members as Bryce, Caird, Nettleship, Robinson, Simmons [*sic*], Green &c would do honour to any society *individually*; when joined together the result is certainly brilliant.[43]

Although Symonds's name is misremembered by Brooke – he, again, misspells it in another entry referring to his attendance – the entry faintly illuminates this obscure episode of Symonds's life. Brooke's reference to '3 Essay societies' shows that the OMS and the Essay Society were, in fact, different groups. The OMS was senior to Conington's and Courtenay Ilbert's essay groups, because its members had, mostly, already graduated by the time Brooke joined.[44] It is, however, Brooke's entry written on 23 May 1863 that remains the sole fragment that suggestively shifts the focus from passive presence to active participation: 'Old Mortality at Symonds', Magdalen. Essay read called "*The Limit*."'[45]

Monsman interprets Brooke's entry as evidence, in this instance, of Symonds's active participation: 'Regrettably, that meagre entry is all we have; Brooke's other entries merely mention his attendance.'[46] Despite Monsman's optimism, any attempt to identify the nature of this essay and the extent to which Symonds was himself involved in the composition or oral presentation is, considering the available evidence, mere speculation. Of Symonds's contributions to the Society, none have been preserved. We learn nothing of the subject matter

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[42] Brooke's diary comprises six volumes that are kept at Corpus Christi. The diaries document Brooke's life while at Lancing and Corpus; however, only the volumes concerning his Lancing years have been published as *Sam Brooke's Journal: The Diary of a Lancing Schoolboy* (Friends of Lancing Chapel, 1953). The remaining journals relating to his Oxford life have yet to be published. Monsman notes that 'In the volumes for 1863 and 1864 there are a number of references to the Old Mortality and accounts of its meetings' (Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 371fn25).
[43] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 376.
[44] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 376.
[45] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 385.
[46] Monsman, 'Old Mortality Society', p. 385.

of the essay, its duration, or how it was received by the attendees. Nonetheless, two things remain salient and, therefore, remarkable about this essay: the title and its relation to the intellectual atmosphere in which it was composed. The brief heading, 'The Limit', is reminiscent of Symonds's short essay, 'The Limits of Knowledge', published twenty-seven years later in the appendix of *ESS*2 (285-91), the second out of eight essays in the appendix, appearing between 'Darwin's Thoughts about God' and 'Notes on Theism'. The essay is significantly shorter, like all the entries in the appendix, than the remaining essays of both volumes of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, and includes some verses suggested by 'the problems of death and doubtful immorality' ('The Limits of Knowledge', *ESS*2 288). Symonds, nonetheless, appended to the preface of volume one the following note:

> Seven of the following Essays have appeared, in whole or part, in *The Fortnightly Review*, one in *Time*, and one in *The Century Guild Hobby-Horse*. One has been extracted from a paper previously published in my own "Italian Byways." All these have been re-written to a large extent. The remaining ten, together with the Appendices, are new, and come before the public for the first time now. ('Preface', *ESS*1 ix)

That Symonds determined in the final sentence the unfamiliarity of the eighteen essays, the fact that they have not been previously brought to the reading public before 'now', does not preclude the possibility of 'The Limits of Knowledge' being based, partly or entirely, on 'The Limits', the essay read at the OMS meeting at Symonds's rooms at Magdalen College. Symonds constantly reiterated and reworked older thoughts and ideas in his works; his essay *The Renaissance*, read in the Theatre at Oxford in 1863 and for which Symonds won the Chancellor's Prize, was reworked into the lecture *The Renaissance of Modern Europe* (1872), delivered before the Sunday Lecture Society, and was also the germ of his *magnus opus*, the multi-volume *Renaissance in Italy*. Symonds's tendency to reuse older material, whether it be republications of works either unaltered or amended, has been acknowledged, although in a pejorative manner, by his bibliographer Percy Babington: 'Two things militated against his joining the ranks of the great writers. First, his continual contributions to periodicals. Second, his undue affection for his early work and consequent readiness to reprint it.'[47] 'The Limits of Knowledge' is permeated with the author's interrogation of God, death, and the universe, ideas

[47] Percy L. Babington, *Bibliography of the Writings of John Addington Symonds* (London: John Castle, 1925; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), p. ix.

that are similar to those which inspired and stimulated the keen philosophical discussions and the radical intellectual force of the OMS, as is evident from the Minutes. Indeed, Georges Lafourcade, in his literary biography of Swinburne, highlights the extent to which the OMS meetings positively informed the academic studies of its members, the constructive relationship between the Society's discussions and the university's syllabus: 'Those young men were reading for the same examinations, and the minutes prove (as also the three numbers of *Undergraduate Papers*) that the essays and debates were often on points connected with the syllabus.'[48] It is, then, very possible that Symonds was likewise influenced by his attendance and participation in the OMS, that its influence reverberated to Symonds's later works.

It is necessary to recognise, however, that between 1862 and 1866 (supposedly when Symonds was admitted and, too, was Walter Pater) the Society had grown into a significantly more mature entity. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Symonds's essays were published in the Society's *Undergraduate Papers*, or that he was familiar with articles from previous issues of *Undergraduate Papers* – such as the illuminating discussions on 'Hereditary Influences on Character' presented by G. Luke, Green's 'The Force of Circumstances', or Swinburne's essay on 'Modern Hellenism' – this does not preclude the analysis of ideas that helped to shape and give substance to the active, searching scepticism of a young Symonds.[49] The Society's debates on religious hypocrisy, man's relationship to the historical process, the problem of death, as well as its reputation as '"a speculative club"', as Reverend Berkley referred to it, are ideas that are developed in Symonds's 'The Limits of Knowledge'.[50] Symonds presented *Essays* to the public in the same speculative vein: 'To suggest ideas, to stimulate reflection, is the object of a book like this' ('Preface', *ESS*1 ix). The keynote of the essay is Symonds's suggestion that man, as a part of the world, 'cannot get outside himself' ('Limits', *ESS*2 285) and is therefore able to conceive of the universe merely 'as a mode of his own consciousness' ('Limits', *ESS*2 286). Man's consciousness is thus a significant portion of the whole, and whose advancement of knowledge about the world is inextricably bound to 'the progress of relative science' (*ESS*2 286).

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[48] Georges Lafourcade, *Swinburne: A Literary Biography* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1932), p. 74.

[49] Monsman determines the *Undergraduate Papers* as 'surely one of the most intriguing aspects of the Society' (*Old Mortality*, p. 28). The magazine, Monsman observes, 'intended to give concrete form to all those new sentiments in literature, art, social life, and religion which were beginning to emerge as political possibilities in the mid-nineteenth century' (*Old Mortality*, p. 31).

[50] Knight, *John Nichol*, p. 149. Berkley was a member of the OMS. In the extract reprinted by Knight in Nichol's *Memoirs*, Berkley writes of the OMS: '"It was certainly not an athletic society; but I do not myself recall any exceptional feebleness of body, though its strength lay rather in the speculative sphere"' (Knight, *John Nichol*, p. 149).

The advanced views that epitomised the character of the OMS, its spirited defence of religious and political liberty, and the advocacy of radical ideas inherited from their Romantic predecessors, are echoed by Symonds in his personal, radical conceptions of religion and humanity's relation to the universe. Although the OMS championed the notion of transcendental truth, the renewed emphasis on social reform and reason was, according to Monsman, a key characteristic of the Society that clearly defined the place of this 'Victorian romanticism' in the history of ideas.[51] Symonds, like other members such as Green, stressed reason in religion. Green's personal metaphysic, however, his critical examination of thoughts gained by experience and the construction of them into a coherent system, was, according to Symonds, unfulfilling to the spiritual needs of his own soul:

> Green coached me privately in Plato. I do not think I got much from him. His own views were turbid at that period. He had just begun to grapple with Hegel; and he never possessed, even to his last days, a complete grasp of his own philosophical ideas. In the summer of 1860, being in a phase of mental storm and stress, he was not a very lucid leader of the blind.[52] (*Memoirs* 180)

Symonds believed that Green's *lebensphilosophie* was too steeped in 'theological bias' (*Memoirs* 463). The latter's religious disposition, his proclivity towards Christian teachings, is reiterated by Monsman: 'Green, together with Nichol, Luke, and Grenfell, belonged to a Bible study and prayer group which they attended every Sunday.'[53] Green's 'The Force of Circumstances', an essay first published in *Undergraduate Papers* and re-published by Richard Nettleship in Green's *Works* (1888), presented his personal theory of the interdependent relationship between the external realm of forms and the mind. According to him, the outer world, the veil behind which God works, invisible and unseen, is the means through which man's mind is communicated to him. Green observed: 'There is no chasm between man and nature. Each, we may truly say, is a reasonable soul, one as being the living receptacle, the other the apt channel, of the influx of divinity.'[54] Nature, for Green, was the revelation of

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[51] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 75.
[52] Cf. Symonds's letter to W. R. W. Stephens (19 July 1860): 'Green is coaching me in Plato. He does it well, for he knows an immense deal about the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, as well as about modern systems. On the other hand, because he is a very original thinker, he does not express himself quite as clearly and fluently as such beginners as myself would like' (*L*2 251).
[53] Monsman, *Old Mortality*, p. 75.
[54] *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. by R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), III: 'Miscellanies and Memoirs', p. 5.

divinity, and creative power was dependent upon the author's summoning of it. Symonds's philosophy of life echoed Green's acquiescence to German and English Romantic doctrines that heralded ideas of divine influence and symbols in nature. Where Green, however, regarded Christianity as the greatest form of citizenship and saw the revelation of a divine spirit in both man and nature, but not as a part of them, Symonds's conception of spirit, vitally, saw man and nature as irrefragable constituents of the Whole, the living frame of the universe.

FROM ENNUI TO STOIC-EPICUREAN ACCEPTANCE

Mutable moods encouraged by ill-health and approaching death instigated Symonds's indulgent theorising about humanity and its place in the world. This was expressed in evolutionary terms to reflect his self-perception as a man 'swimming down the stream of competitive existence' ('Preface', *ESS*1 viii). His habitual nature of self-scrutiny and self-analysis leads to the coining of a phrase that aptly expresses a mood that tinges his prose and poetry: 'indefatigable curiosity' (*Memoirs* 239). Although Symonds used this expression to describe his awe for the glorious monuments of ancient Rome and the beautiful vistas of Italian landscape, it too serves as an apt descriptor of Symonds's relentless scrutiny of the idea of religion that is tethered to what Symonds refers to as 'Ennui' (*Memoirs* 239). Ill-health and the distress he suffered as a result of the Vaughan affair, as well as the accusations made against him by Charles Shorting at Oxford in later years, were undeniable contributors to his anxiety.[55] The effects of these events inflicted impressions upon his thought that were grave and permanent: 'I was deeply wounded in the heart and moral nature, deeply wounded in brain and nerves' (*Memoirs* 240). His utterance is expressive of a self-diagnosed pathology that identified the nature of a disease that manifested itself mentally and physically. He proceeded to delineate further the sources that exacerbated his 'Ennui':

> Then exercise, head work, superfluous agitation concerning religion and metaphysics—the necessary labour of an ambitious lad at college, and the unwholesome malady of thought engendered by a period of *Sturm und Drang* in England,—depressed vitality, and blent the problems of theology with ethical and personal difficulties. (*Memoirs* 240)

[55] Charles George Horatio Shorting (1841-1897), the son of Canon Charles Shorting, entered Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1859, but lost his scholarship in 1862. For more information on his relation to Symonds, see *Memoirs* 210-13.

Thus ennui, for Symonds, was inextricably linked to the practice of 'head work' that involved the contemplation of religion, the essence of which permeates societal law and personal ethics. This plagued Symonds for the rest of his life.

Symonds's meditation on matters of spiritual evolution, and its communion with and instigation by ongoing physical and mental illness, is also recorded in 'Peregrinations Continued. Switzerland, Provence, the Riviera. Settlement at Clifton in the Autumn of 1868', chapter eleven in *Memoirs* which precedes 'Religious Development'. Symonds, in a curious act of self-analysis, explained 'an incoherent document' (*Memoirs* 341) – from which he reproduced passages in *Memoirs* – written by himself after departing from Cannes where he stayed for three months between 1867-1868. Symonds alluded to this 'incoherent document' to describe a crisis he suffered, contemplating the process by which he emerged from a state of suffering – described by him as hellish and 'infernal' (*Memoirs* 340) – to come to accept his place in the universe. Although Symonds was visited in Cannes by many friends, including his sister Lady Strachey, Henry Sidgwick, Edward Lear, German composer Otto Goldshmidt and his wife Swedish Soprano Jenny Lind, and Miss Helen Paget, he could not overcome the feelings of misery and wretchedness that plagued him. Despite his depression, ennui, and numerous physical maladies, Symonds's personal faith, his spiritual mood, was not subject to what he termed as '"conversion"' – a 'phenomenon' (*Memoirs* 341) by which the mind sought comfort by turning to a faith in a God tethered to and by popular definitions – 'With me it was different' (*Memoirs* 341). Symonds expressed instead an acceptance of a newly realised faith, a curious melding of the opposing tenets of Stoicism and Epicureanism, as analogous to the rebirth of his spiritual self:

> I emerged at last into Stoical acceptance of my place in the world, combined with Epicurean indulgence of my ruling passion for the male. Together, these two motives restored me to comparative health, gave me religion, and enabled me, in spite of broken nerves and diseased lungs, to do what I have done in literature. I am certain of this fact; and I regard the utter blackness of despair at Cannes as the midnight in which there lay a budding spiritual morrow. (*Memoirs* 341)

Emergence, the outgrowth of the self from previous forms and stages of spiritual existence, is realised here by Symonds in the image of a burgeoning 'budding spiritual morrow' that signifies his more optimistic mood. The conflation in 'budding' of language and image, non-finite verb and figurative representation of growth, is bound by Symonds to a spiritual dawning,

one that resonates symbolically with William Blake's ever-widening sunrise of eternity. Both Stoicism and Epicureanism were, for Symonds, the external factors that restored his volition to produce literature as the aesthetic expressions of his new faith. Both philosophies endowed the man with a condition of belonging to a form of order that Symonds could 'at last' call 'religion'.[56]

Symonds's faith in what he described as a 'Stoic-Epicurean' (*Memoirs* 420) philosophy intensified with time, remained resolute throughout his later life, and was realised and expressed in almost all his poetry and prose. Symonds borrowed the expression from Arthur Hugh Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (1849), the poem in which Clough coined the phrase 'Stoic Epicurean acceptance' (Canto I: IV. Claude to Eustace, l. 12).[57] Symonds's association of Epicureanism with a desire for and inclination towards 'the male' (*Memoirs* 341), referred to by himself as a 'ruling passion' (*Memoirs* 341), was realised in various aesthetic forms. It is not, however, restricted solely to his desire for the male. In a letter to Mrs. Clough (16 January 1869), Symonds construed the phrase as 'a mixture of hardness of soul with the determination to seize on every flower that comes in the path' (*L*2 37). His definition of this faith is pregnant with symbolism that synthesises ideas essential to Stoic and Epicurean thought: not only did he acquiesce to live resolutely and determinedly, he too accepted the finite course of life and chose to live it well (philosophies embodied by the aesthetic form of the transient flower that not only reminds us of the beautiful, yet ephemeral, nature of life, but also of how it, too, must be satisfied with the conditions of temporal existence). The Cloughian expression was employed by Symonds to also describe the Greek virtue of *sophrosyne*:

> The real way of achieving a triumph over chance and of defying fate is to turn to good account all fair and wholesome things beneath the sun, and to maintain for an ideal the beauty, strength, and splendor of the body, mind, and will of man. The mighty may win fame, immortal on the lips of poets and in the marble of the sculptor. The meanest may possess themselves in patience and enjoy. Thus the Greeks adopted for their philosophy of life what Clough described as a 'Stoic-Epicurean acceptance' of the world. They

[56] In the Hellenic period, the philosophical systems of Epicureanism and Pyrrhonism, both schools of thought by which Symonds's poetic and prose expressions of faith were also influenced, developed alongside speculative Stoicism. For a detailed account of the Stoic teachings of Epictetus, see *The Teaching of Epictetus: Being the 'Encheiridion of Epictetus,' with Selections from the 'Dissertations' and 'Fragments'*, trans. by T. W. Rolleston (London: Walter Scott, 1888).

[57] *The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. by Blanche Clough, 3 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), II: 'Poems', p. 304.

> practised a genial accommodation of their natures to the facts which must perforce regulate the existence of humanity. ('Conclusion', *GP*2 395-96)

Epicurean pleasure as a manifestation of beauty, here, is not strictly voluptuary; it does not merely focus on Symonds's 'ruling passion for the male'. It, rather, emphasises pleasure in its higher forms, depicting beauty as holistic and inclusive of 'the body, mind, and will of man'. Symonds conceived the 'real way' of overcoming the conflicting lessons that perturb man taught by contending philosophies, including theology, in a manner that stoically champions the notion that the individual does, indeed, exert influence over his own attitude – he must perceive or interpret 'things beneath the sun' in a particular way ('to turn to good account'), and he must resolutely uphold ('maintain') his ideals.[58] Symonds's reasoning, however, did not necessarily adopt Epicureanism to oppose determinism, but, rather, placed emphasis on humanity's ability to define their own manner of approaching the disquieting paradox of chance and fate.

The paradox of Stoicism and Epicureanism – on the one hand determining fate as an overruling force to which individuals have no choice but to submit, and, on the other, firmly upholding free will – found harmony, for Symonds, in the expression of beauty in line with Greek thought. The 'mighty', those possessing physical strength as well as valour, 'win fame' and immortality in the verses of poets and in the statues of sculptors. Their memorialisation through forms of art by the artist allows the 'mighty' to defy fate. The 'meanest', too, may triumph over fortuitous circumstances that befall their person. They are capable of 'possess[ing] themselves', controlling the manner in which they journey towards the end of life. This Greek philosophy of life, like Clough's Stoic-Epicureanism, possesses a vitalising connection with Symonds's own shifting speculations on the subject of immortality. Although Symonds's prose and poetry consistently exhibit the sceptical attitude of their author, especially his uncertainty about the nature of the soul and an afterlife, he remained faithful to the idea that philosophy, and the transmutation of its mysteries into aesthetic forms, offered some manner of relief to those distressed by the thought of death. Such considerations, however, were not merely Symonds's contribution, as poet and critic, to the endless theoretical

[58] For an introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy, and especially the theoretical contrasts between Stoicism and Epicureanism, see John Sellars, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Sellars highlights a vital evolution in Stoic thought that places emphasis on human agency and humanity's possession of choice: although events that occur in life are beyond our control, we are free to choose how we perceive these events. 'This distinction', Sellars suggests, 'became central to the philosophy of the later Stoic Epictetus' (Sellars, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 148).

debates about determinism. Rather, he emphasised the power of choice, the proposition that human beings certainly possessed control in a universe ordered by a greater force – namely, how they desired to conduct their way through life before succumbing to the inevitability of death.

The Stoic reflections of Symonds, the internal contention between acceptance and denial, are poignantly presented in his correspondence to family and friends as he tried to come to terms with the death of his daughter Janet. Symonds's literary response to her untimely death – to which Symonds refers as the 'coming doom' (*L*3 229) in a letter to his daughters Charlotte and Margaret (10 April 1887) – can therefore be seen as a Stoical reaction towards the mysterious nature of non-existence that arose from psychological distress. At the beginning of the letter, Symonds aestheticised his daughter's death in a manner similar to that of his Romantic predecessors – the artistic eulogising of those that die young:

> We have found great peace & consolation in seeing Janet, who looked even more beautiful in death than in life. She was just like one of those marble statues of the sleeping dead carved by a Tuscan sculptor, & was covered with flowers. (*L*3 226)

Symonds, similar to his cognisance of the glorious dead heroes of Hellas ('Conclusion', *GP*2 395-96), used his creative faculties to express his grief. Janet, here, is memorialised by her father in a vivid word-painting that contains within it images of permanence. She is not dead but sleeping, and is adorned with flowers, symbols of transience. However, flowers, too, are biological and figurative symbols of regeneration and immortality. Janet, thus, safely lives, marmoreal and immutable, in Symonds's memory where he sculpts her image out of the beautiful, enduring marble of a Renaissance master. His acceptance of Janet's death, his transmutation of its mysterious nature, is the essence that vitalises his literary utterances.

In the same letter to his daughters, Symonds attempted to put into practice the remedial Stoic exercise of harmonising religion, philosophy, and art:

> One of you said in your letter that Janet was Christlike. And this is perfectly true. Like Christ also she suffered for others. […]
>
> Your mother embroidered a golden daffodil upon a little Satin cushion for her head in the coffin; & I made her add beneath it these Greek words *οὐκ ἔθανες πρώτη*. These are the beginning of a beautiful Greek epitaph: 'Thou art not dead my Proté.' Proté means

> ‘the first.’ She looked wonderful in her coffin—like a bride—only as Greeks would say ‘the bride of death,’ or better as the early Christians would say ‘the Spouse of Christ.’
>
> To pass thus away at the very threshold of live [*sic*], without any of the joys of womanhood, is very sad. But again I must remember an old Greek saying: ‘Whom the gods love, dies young.’[59] (*L*3 227)

In an effort to relieve the affliction caused by his daughter’s passing, Symonds attempted to follow the Stoic doctrine of living well, and reminded his daughters, as well as himself, of the ‘old Greek saying’, one that tried to account for the death of his daughter at such a young age. Janet is thus placed by her father among the glorious young heroes of Hellas and, once again, memorialised through the power of fancy. It is intriguing that Symonds’s cognisance of Janet’s death aligned itself with the Greek tradition, rather than the biblical custom that propounded the absolute doctrine of resurrection depicted in the Book of Revelation: ‘She [Janet] trusted, I know, as I too trust, on religious truths which are even more firmly based than St Paul’s expectation of a life with Christ in God’ (*L*3 229). The tenacity with which Symonds asserted the existence of truths more firmly based than those of the Bible is informed by the experience of personal hardships. Writing to Sidgwick on the day before Janet’s passing, Symonds reminded him of the finitude of humanity’s wisdom on the matter of immortality. Despite admitting to possessing an ‘impulse of curiosity’ (*L*3 222) for the hypothesis of an afterlife, one which he was ‘not such a fool as to ignore’ (*L*3 222), Symonds accepted that humanity’s knowledge, forever limited in its understanding of the greater mysteries of the universe, would always remain partial: ‘I honour every effort which may render mankind clearer upon the great issue’ but ‘At present, at all events, we have to live and die without the gratification of our curiosity’ (*L*3 222). In his later years, Symonds’s scepticism shifted towards a resolute confidence in the architectonic force that, although mysterious and ineffable, embodied the processes of life.

[59] Dr Symonds translated this epitaph, from the Greek Anthology, to which Symonds refers as ‘Thou art not dead, my Proté! thou art flown | To a far country better than our own’ (John Addington Symonds, MD, *Miscellanies*, ed. with an introductory memoir by John Addington Symonds (London: Macmillan, 1871), p. 412).

HELLENISM, CHRISTIANITY, WHITMAN, DARWIN, AND POETRY: A CONCEPTION OF A NEW METAPHYSIC

At this stage in his religious development, after his Oxford years, Symonds's mysticism, combined with logic and the study of the history of ancient and modern philosophy at Oxford, evolved to present a conception of personal faith that claimed to transcend those prevalent modes of theology. His experiences thus far, the numerous influencers and influences, endowed his speculations of religion with reason that anticipated a fundamental transformation of orthodox modes of thought: 'The lines of speculation which I followed led me to believe that some radical change in the current conceptions of the Divine Being was necessitated by the changes taking place in modern thought' (*Memoirs* 466). For Symonds, modern thought, governed by scientific advancement, required and demanded thorough inquiry into the enigmatic concept of 'the Divine Being'. This dramatic shift in intellectual perspective for Symonds, the reconceptualisation of God as the living embodiment of all things, would forever influence and shape his personal idea of God. He predicted that modern thought, its revolutionised conception of Deity, 'would eventually substitute the ideal of a God immanent in the universe for the ideal of a God external to it, creative of the world-machinery and providentially controlling it' (*Memoirs* 466). Symonds judiciously proclaimed this 'emotional and rational forecast' as the 'new phase' into which 'theology must enter' (*Memoirs* 466). Modern science, according to Symonds, progressing by ascertainable processes of discovery, inevitably suggested that an omnipotent force and motion pervaded all things. This was a power demonstrated by science and to which all things in nature, material and inorganic, must commit. This personal sense of faith, one that coordinated within its thought the presentation of facts to reason by materialistic means and the optimistic belief in a spiritual essence immanent in the cosmos, was referred to by Symonds as 'scientific pantheism' (*Memoirs* 466).

This faith, fundamental to Symonds's conception of his place in an ordered, 'God penetrated universe' (*Memoirs* 467), was influenced further by his readings of Cleanthes, Goethe, and Marcus Aurelius to formulate a religion that was endowed with Stoical beliefs, especially its celebration of morality. Goethe's Proemium to 'Gott und Welt', described by Symonds as the hymn that 'sufficiently represents the submission and self-dedication demanded by the scientific spirit of religion' ('The Philosophy of Evolution', *ESS*1 39), and Cleanthes' Stoic prayer became the dominant principles that sustained and supported 'the conditions of the new faith' (*Memoirs* 466) conceived by Symonds. In his translation of the

Proemium, that first appeared in *The Spectator* (24 September 1870), Symonds conveyed the inviolable faith that animated Goethe's spiritual utterance:

> To Him who from eternity, self-stirred,
> Himself hath made by His creative Word!
> To him [*sic*], supreme, who causeth Faith to be,
> Trust, Hope, Love, Power, and endless Energy!
> To Him, who, seek to name Him as we will,
> Unknown within Himself abideth still!
>
> Strain ear and eye, till sight and sense be dim;
> Thou'lt find but faint similitudes of Him:
> Yea, and thy spirit in her flight of flame
> Still strives to gauge the symbol and the name:
> Charmed and compelled thou climb'st from height to height,
> And round thy path the world shines wondrous bright;
> Time, Space, and Size, and Distance cease to be,
> And every step is fresh infinity.
>
> What were the God who sat outside to scan
> The spheres that 'neath his fingers circling ran?
> God dwells within, and moves the world and moulds,
> Himself and Nature in one form enfolds:
> Thus all that lives in Him and breathes and is,
> Shall ne'er His puissance, ne'er His spirit miss.
>
> The soul of man, too, is an universe:
> Whence follows it that race with race concurs
> In naming all it knows of good and true
> God,—yea, its own God; and with homage due
> Surrenders to His sway both earth and heaven;

Fears Him, and loves, where place for love is given.[60]

The poem, Symonds explained, was first revealed to him in Zürich by Green in the first weeks of August 1863. It was a 'poem which took deep hold upon me, and began to build my creed' (*Memoirs* 225). Goethe's accedence to and enthusiasm for the scientific spirit of religion is formulated in pithy couplets to express an intriguing paradox. On the one hand, it subscribes to a universal spirit that deviates from the laws of science, nullifying every effort of the scientist to bind and limit this Force to time, space, size, and distance. It absolves itself from quantifiable language and is ever-creating, with 'every step', an unknown and 'fresh infinity'. On the other hand, Goethe conceives this divinity as a pervasive power that is intrinsic to the world and equated to law – it 'moves the world and moulds'.

Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, considered by Joseph Barber Lightfoot as the noblest expression of 'Heathen devotion',[61] emphasises the moral aspect of man's willing submission to the universal law that is God.[62] The hymn appears on Symonds's grave, in Symonds's own translation under the epitaph composed for him by Jowett and engraved onto his headstone, and epitomises Cleanthes' projection of 'a religion commensurate with modern Science' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 14):

Lead thou me, God, Law, Reason, Motion, Life!
All names for thee alike are vain and hollow.
Lead me; for I will follow without strife;
Or if I strive, still must I blindly follow.[63] ('Conclusion', *GP*2 414)

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[60] John Addington Symonds, 'A Translation of Goethe's Proemium to "Gott und Welt"', *The Spectator*, Issue 2204, 24 September 1870, p. 1147. The translation is reprinted at the end of 'The Philosophy of Evolution' (*ESS*1 40-41), with some minor stylistic alterations, and Symonds discusses the poem in *ESS*2 111-12. Symonds's translation of Goethe's Proemium was used by John Tyndall at the closing of his essay on the 'Scientific Use of the Imagination' in *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People: A Series of Detached Essays, Lectures, and Reviews* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1871), p. 168. Symonds noted Tyndall's use of his translation, and reflected on the mysticism that appealed to scientific thinkers and extended to their investigations: 'It gave me pleasure when Professor Tyndall quoted it in one of his volumes of essays, as expressing the religion to which Science can ally itself' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 40fn).

[61] Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 306.

[62] Cleanthes (c. 331-232 BC), the Stoic philosopher, successor to Zeno, was the founder of Stoicism. In his note to *The Hymn of Cleanthes* (1921), Edward Blakeney discussed the interdependence of Stoicism and morality, the former's celebration of fraternity, its foreshadowing of 'the doctrine of a true brotherhood of man' (*The Hymn of Cleanthes, Greek Text Translated into English*, trans. by Edward Henry Blakeney (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), p. 4). Stoicism and morality were vitally informative to Symonds's personal conception of faith and the spiritual creed that guided his conduct in life: to live in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful, and to celebrate human beings as members of the universe.

[63] The hymn appears with minor stylistic variations as 'Echoes. *From Cleanthes*' (*NO* 214), the last stanza of 'An Invocation' (*MM* 205), and on the headstone of Symonds's grave. An alternative translation by Symonds of the

This hymn, an ethical system fundamental for the understanding of Symonds's protean and dynamic spiritual condition, makes its supreme appeal to an all-ruling Law. The essential idea of God, demonstrated by Cleanthes, as an unerring and continuous energy to which all things are subservient, forms what Symonds termed 'the Cosmic Enthusiasm' (*Memoirs* 467). The phrase, its allusion to the universal spirit of which all things form an integrant part, is discussed at length in Symonds's *Walt Whitman: A Study* (1893). Symonds shared Whitman's belief in a Cosmic Enthusiasm, which Symonds argued was 'unapproached by any poet-prophet since the death of Bruno' (*WW* 33-34). It is the lifeforce from which the stringent ideas of heaven and hell, redemption and damnation, have, according to Symonds, 'been purged away' (*WW* 31). A deep-seated faith in and absolute submission to a great spiritual vitality that penetrates the universe, and of which man is a part, was, for Symonds, more congruous with his agnosticism.

In 'The Limits of Knowledge', Symonds addressed the possibility of readers treating his proclamation of an agnosticism compatible with the dictum 'I speak of God as Law' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287) as suspect. He confessed, in his memoirs, to have 'lost the consolations of faith in redemption through Christ, and all that pertains thereto' (*Memoirs* 467). But Symonds's faith in modern science informed his inquiry into his own conception of faith and, ultimately, God. 'Man', he proclaimed,

> has the right to use time-honoured language, and to designate his apprehension of the unity in Nature by that venerable title, God. He is only doing now what all the men from whom he is descended did before him. Mumbo Jumbo, Indra, Shiva, Jahve, Zeus, Odin, Balder, Christ, Allah—what are all these but names for the Inscrutable, adapted to the modes of thought which gave them currency? God is the same, and His years do not change. It is only our way of presenting the unknown to the human imagination which varies. ('Limits', *ESS*2 287)

The view that emphasises the power of the creative mind to endow with meaning those concepts that are entirely mysterious reappears in Symonds's assertion that 'Our gods ourselves are, glorious or base, | As the dream varies with the varying race' ('An Old Gordian Knot', IV.

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same lines reads: 'Lead Thou me, Zeus, […] and thou world's Law, whithersoever I am by you appointed to go; for I will follow unreluctant; and yet should I refuse, through evilness (or cowardice) up-grown in me, none the less I shall surely follow.' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 14) See also Epictetus, *The Echeiridion* 53 (LCL 218, p. 537); and Epictetus, *Discourses* II. xxiii. 42 (LCL 131, p. 411).

13-14; *AF* 82). This couplet, that forms the final lines of the fourth sonnet in the cluster, presents the poetical voice's conception of God and religion as a 'dream', an idea generated by the mind in an attempt to cognise the unintelligible. Symonds resolved that God, the idea of deity presented to our reason, evolves alongside the circumstances of modern science which, accordingly, inform our apprehensions of the world in which we live. Man's progressive yet partial knowledge of deity, therefore, remains tethered to his imagination that is infinitely mutable.

'An Old Gordian Knot', first published in *New and Old* and reprinted in *Animi Figura*, develops the notion of God as self-styled and subject to the individual's mental disposition:

> I stood at sunrise on an Alpine height
> Whence plains were visible, and the domed sky
> Spread vacant in serene immensity;
> Westward beneath my feet curled vapours white,
> And grew and gathered, while the East was bright:
> Then as the silver wreaths clomb silently,
> Methought a shadowy giant steeple-high
> Towered up above me ringed with radiant light.
> Standing he bore the shape of me who stood
> Sole on that summit; yea, he bowed or rose,
> Beckoned or threatened, as my varying mood
> Constrained his movement; till the light that grew,
> Wrought from the strife of clouds supreme repose,
> And heaven once more was still and stainless blue.[64]
>
> ('An Old Gordian Knot', II. 1-14; *AF* 80)

Here, Symonds's adoption and adaption of the sonnet form from the Italian, and its suitability for the expression of his meditative verse in the English language, is highlighted in the preface to the poem: 'The English sonnet is no longer regarded as an exotic from Italy, but as a poetic species, which, however introduced at first, has been acclimatised in England and has assumed

[64] The eight sonnets of 'An Old Gordian Knot' were first published in *New and Old* (*NO* 129-33) as part of the 'Sonnets' section, and were reprinted in *Animi Figura* (1882). *Animi Figura* is the speculative debate of the poet 'upon the fundamental question of man's place in the universe' (*AF* viii). The re-publication of the cluster in *Animi Figura*, a lengthy sonnet sequence, reflects Symonds's meditative practice that attempted to extensively 'deal with cognate problems' (*AF* vii) by tracing the evolution of his thoughts on God.

a character accordant with the English genius' (*AF* ix). Thus, in the example of the sonnet above, it is evident that the form allowed Symonds to effectively interrogate and express two points central to his philosophy of God: the octave presents the poet's speculation upon the 'shadowy giant' that looms over him, and the sestet reveals the process of imagining and the resultant existence of the 'shape' as interdependent elements. The significance of the spectre in the poem is twofold: its form as the lofty 'steeple' is evocative of ecclesiastic architecture as well as symbolising the curious phenomenon of the Brocken-spectre.[65] Both symbols, the one suggestive of Christianity and the other nature, are projections of the imagination. It is, however, Christianity's attitude towards nature that, according to Symonds, 'prevents our recognising the Spirit immanent and everywhere' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 18).

Charles Darwin, one of 'the diffusers and diluters of ideas' (*Memoirs* 425) that gave substance to Symonds's instinctual faith in the process of evolution that exists and functions beyond the material world, was included by Symonds in his pantheon of intellectuals. Symonds identified with Darwin's positive belief in God, as well as his reluctance to define Him: 'What he [Darwin] meant by Agnosticism appears to have been an indecision as to the definition of God, and a profound doubt as to the power possessed by man of reaching Him' ('Darwin's Thoughts about God', *ESS*2 282). Darwinian evolution, the most recent and therefore relevant form of evolutionary theory supported by the advanced stage of science in the latter half of nineteenth century England, appealed to Symonds's instinctual belief in the Greek conception of all things in the universe as subject to the law of process.[66] Through the delineations of the biological processes of life brought to him by scientific investigation, Darwin rationally concluded that the mystery lying on either side of life, at the beginning and the end of it, was insoluble by human beings. This conclusion led Symonds to suggest that Darwin was an agnostic who 'leant toward Theism' ('Darwin's Thoughts', *ESS*2 283). He, according to

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[65] See John Holmes' discussion of 'An Old Gordian Knot', and *Animi Figura* more generally, in chapter six of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence: Sexuality, Belief and the Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[66] In *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin investigated the power and influence exercised by the process of 'natural selection', and how this resulted in the gradual and progressive adaption of organisms to suit the external landscape:

> It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the head of time has marked the long lapse of ages, and then so imperfect is our view into the long past geological ages, that we only see that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were. (Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; revised 2008), p. 66.)

Symonds, was an optimist whose belief remained irrevocably bound to the faith he professed to have abandoned. In this matter, Symonds's belief in the divine law of the universe greatly differed from Darwin's. Whereas Symonds, through an instinctual faith in the Cosmic Being and the latest, but 'partial' (*Memoirs* 468), determinations of Darwin's theory, resolutely believed in a pantheistic, pervasive spirit, Darwin, according to Symonds, never conceived of the possibility of God as intrinsic in the world. Symonds argued that Darwin's thought on God remained tethered to outdated modes of thought that were not correlative to the discoveries of popular science, he 'had not come to reflect on the notion of Deity without a remnant of Paleyism' ('Darwin's Thoughts', *ESS*2 284). Throughout his scientific reasoning, Darwin habitually regarded God as Providence and Designer that dwelt in spaces extramundane: 'His reason demanded a supreme Law—a God of some sort; but Paley's extramundane God still haunted him, and prevented him from ever entertaining the notion that God may be Himself the supreme Law and Life of the universe' ('Darwin's Thoughts', *ESS*2 285). Darwin, it seemed to Symonds, could not emancipate himself from the stringent theories formulated by the Church and remained under the influence of doctrinal ideas about the relation of the soul to the world and God. Nonetheless, despite their divergent view of God as the supreme law of the universe, Symonds ascribed to Darwin the eminent position of teacher whose theory, although partially determined by the laws of science, was vitalising to Symonds's 'self-forged faith' (*Memoirs* 468).

The fundamental principle, for Symonds, that united religion and science was law. The Hellenic conception of 'God as Law', God 'as prime principle of law and order in the universe' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 30), and to which all things, organic and inorganic, are subject, was combined by Symonds with popular scientific thought to present a unique theory that united factual elements from the latter to sustain and support the idealism of the former. Although science could not answer questions concerning the problem of immortality – whether or not the soul continued to exist after death – Symonds suggested that it taught humanity that the promise of redemption by Christianity 'belonged to a past stage of religious development' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 27). The idea of the advancement of religious thought collateral to the evolution of language that is 'time-honoured' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287), was scrutinised by Symonds in the following statement: 'For the old term Commandment, which implies the will of a sovereign, our present condition of knowledge leads us to substitute the new term Law' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412). This rational deduction, according to Symonds, was appropriately represented in Hermann von Helmholtz's definition of the scientific determination of law as '"General conceptions in which a series of similarly recurring natural processes may be

embraced"' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 411). It was this unique conflation of mystical and scientific thought that, for Symonds, anticipated a new stage of theology: 'It implies a new motion, both popular and scientific, of the divine in nature, a new criterion of what is right and wrong, and in the last resort a new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412).

To this, Symonds appended a sentiment reflective of Stoic-Epicurean endurance, one that willingly accepted the 'unchangeable decrees' (*GP*2 412) by which he believed the cosmos to be governed. He emphasised the necessity of humanity's unapprehensive conformity to this law of nature that would enable the species to 'pass from strength to strength' (*GP*2 412). Symonds presents himself here, as he does in *Memoirs*, as the legislator of a new phase of theology. His philosophic system combined within it Hellenic and Christian conceptions of life, to create a third mode of thought that reconciled within it the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* – his belief that man is 'a member' and citizen of the 'divine life of the universe' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 407) – and Thomas à Kempis *Imitatio Christi* (c. 1418-1427), that presented man as an 'exile' and 'wanderer' (*GP*2 407), without a special place in the expansive universe belonging to God, both of which Symonds, in letters to Henry Sidgwick and Blanche Clough, recorded as reading (March 1868, *L*1 799-800). Symonds's conception of Christianity, here, should not be mistaken for the ascetic system of historical Christianity. It is, rather, the Christianity of Christ, the ethics of his teachings and his actions, that penetrated the Hellenic philosophy of life and which allowed for a 'matured and purified humanity' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 403). Thus, Christianity, the moral agent by which early civilisations developed and improved, was perceived by Symonds as an ameliorative force whose enriching influence was not necessarily inseparable from Christian theology, nor was it incapable of surviving 'the dissolution of the orthodox fabric' (*GP*2 403).

Symonds's unconstrained desire to absorb the moral attitudes of Graeco-Roman Stoicism and of Jesus, his assimilation of the important and neglected truths of his predecessors, permeated his being, leading him towards the acceptance of a holistic conception of the universe, expounded in the Cosmic Enthusiasm of Walt Whitman.[67] It was, for Symonds, the ethics in Marcus Aurelius's philosophy that were best suited to the modern age in which popular scientific thought was more advanced. The biblical tenets of creation and original sin, the dogmas essential to the sustenance of what he referred to as 'the Christian programme'

[67] Symonds revealed, regarding Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (first published in 1855), '"which I first read at the age of twenty-five"', that it '"influenced me more perhaps than any other book has done, except the Bible; more than Plato, more than Goethe. It is impossible for me to speak critically of what has so deeply entered into the fibre and marrow of my being"' (*WW* 11).

('Conclusion', *GP*2 407), become obsolete, giving way to nature, the faith of the Greeks in scientific morality, as the system of faith best adapted to the modern age of scientific thought. It was Symonds's vocation, 'his purpose' (*GP*2 407), to 'recall attention' (*GP*2 407) to the essence of Marcus Aurelius's philosophy that emerged as 'the final outgrowth of Greek speculation' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 405), after persistent contact with the Romans, to celebrate humanity as a member of the universe (*melos*, 'limb'), and not simply a portion of it (*meros*, a 'part' or 'share'). This definition of *melos* not only elucidates but gives philosophical meaning to Symonds's admission in *Memoirs*, that it was through Whitman that he learned 'what it really is to be a member of the universe I sought to worship' (*Memoirs* 468). Symonds, bard-like, reminds the reader that Marcus Aurelius had already conceived in theory an ethical system that bound human beings to the natural order of the universe, making them an integrant part of the whole: 'What Marcus Aurelius enunciated as an intuition is what must daily become more binding upon us in proportion as we advance in scientific knowledge' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 405).

The philosophical and religious implications of 'An Old Gordian Knot', alluded to above, are represented by the 'varying mood' (II. 11; *AF* 80) of the poetical voice. The 'varying mood', influenced and affected by the poet's evolving spiritual attitudes, is the dynamic psychological landscape that dictates the eventual (but ever-shifting) manifestation of the 'shadowy giant' (II. 7; *AF* 80) previously discussed. The suggestion of the ever-changing modes of presentation of the Inscrutable by man to man, is confirmed in the opening lines of the following sonnet from the cluster:

> Then in my soul I cried: even such is God—
> Made in our image, fashioned in our form,
> Woven on the vapours of the secular storm,
> Where spirit stirred not, nay nor Seraph trod:
> He framed no Adam from the plastic clod,
> No Eve for Adam's helpmate; but this worm,
> Spawned by the world what time her spring was warm,
> This man, that crawled on earth's primeval sod,
> Learned not himself, but seeking outward saw
> Transfigured self on circumambient air;
> Whence seized by fatal impulse and strange awe,
> Worshipping what he knew not, he enslaved
> Aeons of men who blindly wept and raved

> To filmy phantoms of their own despair. (III. 1-14; *AF* 81)

Here, Symonds openly challenges orthodox theology, specifically the legitimacy of the creation account in Genesis, with an argument that incorporates within it ideas of Darwinian evolution. Adam, the progenitor of man, is replaced with 'this worm', 'This man' as a base creature that is in the rudimentary stages of existence, and far from possessing a ratiocinative mode of mind that was, for Symonds, the 'highest' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 18), but not necessarily the final, stage of thought and consciousness. God, too, is separated by Symonds from notions of divinity. He, the fabrication of man's imagination, His 'image' and 'form' an interlacing of ideas that are the reflection of man's self, resides, unsubstantial, 'on the vapours of the secular storm' where neither spirit nor angel have walked. Man's 'fatal' flaw appears to be the absence of healthy introspection and meditation – he 'Learned not himself'. He, instead, projects outwards onto the physical landscape of the world illusions to ease his own delusions, and the 'secular storm' of mind, shaped by the temporal, visible world, becomes the abode of God. The fault of man that 'Learned not himself' echoes an earlier iteration in the sonnet sequence, in man being fooled 'By blind self-ignorance' ('Personality', II. 10; *AF* 12).

In the poem, Symonds determined that it was not the biblical God but God as 'the world' ('An Old Gordian Knot', III. 7), a primeval element, which created out of itself a crawling being at the earliest stage of physical and intellectual development. Symonds's God, like Bruno's, Goethe's, and Whitman's God, is, therefore, immanent in the universe and not extraneous to the law of evolution. These images are evoked by Symonds in 'The Philosophy of Evolution', the essay that its author recommended to be left 'unread [by the reader], until one or another of the following articles aroused in them some curiosity about the author's views upon religion and man's relation to the universe' ('Preface', *ESS*1 ix). 'The study of pre-historical humanity,' Symonds observed,

> together with the suggestions of the Evolution hypothesis, render any doctrine of a Fall more and more untenable. Instead of Paradise, and man's sudden lapse from primal innocence, we are now convinced that history implies a slow and toilsome upward effort on the part of our ancestors from the outset. ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 6)

By penetrating the mind of man with the historicity of miracle, that phenomenon inexplicable by science and ascribed to divine power, Christianity, for Symonds, had rendered it impossible for mankind to separate the idea of faith from orthodox theology. By binding itself to historical

fact that denied miraculous occurrences as symbolic and asserted the truth of 'sudden lapse[s]', such as the spontaneous creation of man by God, that deviate from the law of evolutionary progress, dogma not only set forth its creeds authoritatively and concisely, but it separated itself from mythology. Thus, to present Christianity as another form of myth constructed by the imaginings of the human mind renders its assertion as historical fact and absolute truth ineffectual. The rationality and validity of evolutionary principles, however, did not, according to Symonds, 'dispel the mystery which surrounds life' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 7). The Inscrutable that is God can never be known to either poet-prophet or reader and, by the end of the third sonnet of 'An Old Gordian Knot', and, indeed, the entire sonnet sequence, an element of mystery still hangs over the poem. 'Nay,' the poet declares,

> let them [man, race, age] pace in patient pilgrimage
> Toward that unknown mysterious hidden shrine
> Where dwells the very truth and life divine. (VIII. 5-7; *AF* 86)

In a letter written to Mrs T. Humphry Ward (16 November 1888), Jowett expressed a sceptical attitude similar to that of Symonds towards the claim by Christianity to historical truth. Jowett circumscribed such divine revelations to a more humble status, referring to them as 'points of critical theology', and exhibited an unsympathetic nature towards 'the ignorance of the Christian Church of everything but what is contained in them'.[68] His utterance is one of increasing disillusion, one that confines Christianity, in all its dogmatic forms, to the realm of hypothesis:

> They ['points of critical theology'] are an unauthenticated fragment belonging to an age absolutely unknown, which is adduced as the witness of the most incredible things. There remains the internal evidence, which leads to the conclusion that the Christian religion must rest on a foundation different from mere historical fact.[69]

In this view of religion, Symonds, like Jowett, shifted the focus of his philosophical argument from the false claim of theologians and ontologists to absolute truth to stress, instead, the positive effect of science on the understanding of what he observed as 'the real reality of all

[68] *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, eds. Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, 3rd edn, 2 vols (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1897), II, p. 341.
[69] *Letters of Jowett*, II, p. 341.

we partly grasp by knowledge' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287). Symonds denied the supreme and irrefragable nature of orthodox theology, and, instead, presented it as a construction by the human imagination that, forming a portion of the whole, could not transcend the limits of its own intelligence.

In Symonds's thought, as in the thought of Cleanthes, Bruno, Goethe, and Whitman, God and Universe were inseparable. He resolved that speculations of the former should be equally relevant and applicable to the latter. Both the universal life-force and all that it permeates are subject to the law of evolution. But human beings cannot know more than this: 'The mystery flies before us,' resolved Symonds, 'and will ever fly' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287). Everything in the cosmos belongs to and is a part of some spiritual essence that is symbolised by man by that highly distinctive title: God. The presentation of God as a constant force that dominates the universe echoes, in image and sentiment, the verses Symonds translated from Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*:

> We know not elsewhere any other God
> Than that which permeates the living whole,
> Alike in sentient clay and senseless clod.
>
> Call it Power, Motion, Love, Creator, Soul.
> There is no name for force that over nerve
> And granite sweeps with absolute control.[70] ('Limits', *ESS*2 289)

The opposing tenets of the 'sentient clay' and 'senseless clod', the one capable of perceiving by the senses and the other incapable of sensation, do not echo the tunes of Blake's clod and pebble that sing of differing perceptions to reinforce the contrary states of the human soul ('The Clod and the Pebble' (*Experience*), *Songs of Innocence and Experience*).[71] Instead, beliefs sprung up in Symonds that resonated with the pantheistic intuitions of Hellenic thought, which echo the sentiments of cooperation and concordance in all living things and the whole that is God, as is expressed in Shelley's 'Love's Philosophy' (1819). It is 'man's partial power of

[70] The verses that appear in this essay also form the epilogue of *Palumba* (ll. 849-54, *NO* 246). Several alterations, made by Symonds, are evident, including the exchange of personal subject pronouns to emphasise Symonds's voice – 'I' (*Palumba*, l. 849) for 'We' ('Limits', *ESS*2 289) – and the omission of an entire stanza. See also, *Palumba* (l. 852) for a variation of 'Call it Power, Motion, Life, Creator, Soul' that substitutes 'Life' for 'Love', and 'Creator' for 'Jehovah'.

[71] *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Press, 1974; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 74.

mental vision', since the mind is unable to cognise the idea of the infinite, that leads to the mental 'process of disintegration' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 153) through symbolic representation in an attempt to ascertain the true nature of things. Symonds's judgement of man's instinctive behaviour – his isolation of individual branches of knowledge to gain a better understanding of theoretical fragments that form a whole – was expressed in a scientific metaphor that illustrated the complexity of the process of cognition by drawing on the phenomenon of light being refracted through a prism: 'man's understanding acts like a prism, which breaks white light into its component colours' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 152).

The splintering of ideas to realise multiple perceptions was not, according to Symonds, a phenomenon restricted to the psychological domain. Rather, it was a process that also depended on man's 'regard [for] the outer world from theoretically separate points of view' ('Relation of Art', *ESS*1 152-53). Symonds determined that it was this method of 'disintegration', the attempt to define a salient point of view from which all expressions of the mind appeared as interconnected, that resulted in the creation of emblems through art which were then imbued with personal significances. These fashioned symbols, Symonds resolved, 'cadenced not in words, but in living imagery', were the 'fountain-heads of inspiration, mirrors of the mind of nascent nations, which we call Mythologies' ('The Periods of Greek Literature', *GP*1 14).[72] Symonds determined that systems of belief or isolated versions of truth were the representations of peoples, the collective nation, rather than of the individuals that created those systems; reality, and therefore conceptions of God, are thus subjectively perceived and rendered in the language of the thoughts and senses of a nation. Symonds intimated that absolute reality was unattainable though some expressions of it were nearer to the truth than others. This complex process of disintegration is evident in the stanzas above, whereby the particular loses precedence in the poet's range of vision and yields to the boundless nature of a universal power that penetrates all thought and feeling. From 'germs invisible and curve | Of comet' ('Limits', *ESS*2 289), and 'the hidden strife'[73] ('Limits', *ESS*2 290) perceivable in a

[72] Cf. Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

> The ancient poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive. And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity. Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood. Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. And at length they pronounced that the Gods had ordered such things. Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (*The Illuminated Blake*, p. 108.)

[73] In *Palumba*, l. 888, 'life' replaces the word 'strife'.

drop of water, to the transient ‘clouds of life’ (*ESS*2 290), the ‘ceaseless caravan’ (*ESS*2 290) of innumerable stars, and the ‘million globes together’ (*ESS*2 290) forever flowing onwards, Symonds’s faith returned to the architectonic ancient force that compels submission to ‘the one resistless law’ (*ESS*2 289) that governs all things.

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Symonds’s critical investigation into the development of *Theos,* and the systematic coordination of his catholic stores of knowledge, led him to hypothesise: ‘When we inquire into the nature of religions, we shall find that they are all of them at root attempts to account for the universe, and to define man’s place in the sphere of things’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 3). Symonds’s comprehension of ‘the nature of religions’ was framed in the context of causality: it is through methods of retrospective analysis and the comparative study of the history of religions that the reason for the existence of religion, as an explanation for the presence of human beings and the universe, becomes discoverable. We can deduce that the ‘nature’ alluded to by Symonds is specifically authoritarian and dogmatic. It is the ‘nature’, or the habit, of religion to provide those who exercise thought with two answers that are irrefutable: that there exists an omniscient and omnipotent God, and that man must do his duty. Contrastingly, according to Symonds, the Greek conception of beauty was ‘more comprehensive and more concrete than any which a modern race […] can attain to’ (‘Greek Art’, *GP*2 380); it clings resolutely to a faith in the synthesis, and especially the concordance, of all things in the universe, linking together their intuitions of beauty, their translations of sublime mysteries, and their thoughts on morality. For Symonds, the lesson taught to us by nature, a ‘supreme justice’ (*Memoirs* 472) that is summarised in the maxim ‘“Live only in the Whole”’ (*Memoirs* 472), forces humanity back to the simple instruction that dominated Greek life: ‘Nature is […] the first, chief element by which we are enabled to conceive the spirit of the Greeks. The key to their mythology is here’ (‘Greek Art’, *GP*2 370). Thus, it was in the harmonious music of the Greek tradition, ‘the spirit-stirring freedom of the past’ (‘Greek Art’, *GP*2 366), profitably borrowed and adapted to the modern conditions of science, that Symonds’s personal sense of faith found expression.

II

‘Unexpected Evolutions’: Understanding Anthropological Origins in *Palumba: A Mexican Tale*

> How sad is it that all our study of history, all our reflection upon principles in politics, never helps us at a pinch. We cannot apply what we feel we have learned, and the green tree of life laughs at our grey theories. Nay, worse, the unexpected evolutions of the organism force us to doubt what we confidently thought we had learned. (Symonds to Henry Sidgwick, 10 March 1886; *L*3 122)

Palumba: A Mexican Tale, the poem with which *Many Moods* (1878) concludes, pursues the evolving relationship of human beings and the physical world, how the interest of humankind in the surrounding landscape developed as a result of the advancing expansion of scientific curiosity. The narrative poem, first included in the privately printed pamphlet ‘Old and New’, was described by Symonds as ‘a flower or firefly parable of mortal fate’ in the notes that accompany the volume (*MM* 254). *Palumba*, whose philosophical value (cultural and scientific) remains unrecognised by critics, is a poignant tale concerned with the mystical elements of love, life, and death, and is told from the perspective of a young Aztec man, the eponymous character from whom the poem derives its name. *Palumba* is Symonds’s response to William Hickling Prescott’s social anthropological work *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843); the poet adopted Prescott’s study as a means of examining in poetry the regulative forces of dogmatic religion, politics, and economy, organisational forms of power that, for Symonds, irreversibly affected humanity’s understanding of their relationship with and place in the natural world.[1] Edward Dowden’s review of *Many Moods*, which appeared in *The Academy* on 3 August 1878 and fleetingly addressed the poem, is its only extant evaluation: ‘In “Palumba”—a tragic tale of human sacrifice in Mexico—the *terza rima*, a favourite form with Mr. Symonds, is used successfully for narrative purposes.’[2] *Palumba*, to add to Dowden’s

[1] William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859) was an American scientific historian who specialised in the Hispanic studies of late-Renaissance Spain. Prescott’s epic ethnographic account of the political and religious states of the Aztec civilisation and its eventual subjugation by the conquering Spaniards was based on Alexander von Humboldt’s *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, of which the first English edition appeared in 1811. The vast scope of Symonds’s interest in eclectic historiography, ranging from antiquity to the present, is evident in a letter to his sister Charlotte (October 1858) written while studying at Oxford. He requested that his aunt, Mary Ann Sykes, send to him the following books: ‘Carlyle’s French, & Guizot’s English Revolutions: all Prescott’s works: Hallam’s Constitutional History: Chaucer, Spenser, the large Milton, & Wordsworth’s Greece’ (*L*1 167-68).

[2] Edward Dowden, ‘Many Moods: A Volume of Verse. By John Addington Symonds’, *The Academy*, 14 (1878), p. 103.

assessment, is a colourful mythopoem, an intricate patchwork of religious, cultural, and scientific theories. It is a space for the confluence of comparative forms of knowledge, as they interplay with one another in the mind of their author, to express his conception of the place of humans in the universe and, more significantly, the place of morality within a world that is subject to the universal law of evolution, the orderly process of change that permeates the physical and spiritual world.

Palumba offers an imaginative retelling of the life and socio-religious customs of the Aztec civilisation, and uses the ritualistic practice of human sacrifice recorded by Alexander von Humboldt and reiterated by Prescott to interrogate how all things, including religion, are bound to the principles of evolutionary process. The poem, referred to by Symonds as a 'romance' (*MM* 254), powerfully and imaginatively resuscitates one of the anonymous young victims out of Prescott's account and gives him the name Palumba. Symonds alluded to the purpose of the romance in a lengthy note to the poem:

> Prescott in his *Conquest of Mexico*, says that it was a custom of the Aztecs every year to dedicate a young man, selected for his flawless health and beauty, to their god Tezcatlepoca [*sic*], or World-Spirit. […] I have used the short account Prescott gives of this strange custom, as the motive of a poem, the deeper indications of which will be found in the Prologue and Epilogue. (*MM* 254)

Symonds minimised the relevance of the poem's insight into the nature of dogma as well as its truthful and vivid rendering of the Aztec civilisation, explaining that 'I cannot pretend to have even aimed at historical accuracy in this romance' (*MM* 254).Yet *Palumba* reproduces factual details from Prescott's account – such as the menageries of Montezuma, the varying landscapes and gardens of the city (including chinampas associated with Mesoamerican agriculture), the dress of the inhabitants, the vivid illustration of gemstones – and imbues these relics of the historical civilisation with multivalent and symbolic significance that resonate in the anthropological discourse of the late-nineteenth century in England.

The narrative follows Palumba's experiences – his perception of duty, his thoughts on death, his experiences of love, comradery, and pain – before his impending sacrifice. The poem opens with a prologue that, by its tone and content, effectively establishes its critical perspective concerning the subject of religion and its pervasive influence on society. It is presented in the form of a cosmogony that absorbs the influence and images of the ancient Greek myths and presents love as the true deity, the genesis of all things in the cosmos. The

prologue is thus the poet's meditation on the evolutionary nature of religions, his lament for the persistence of authoritarian decree that is mutable and enduring. The main narrative follows Palumba, a boy who is chosen by a priest to be sacrificed to the god Tezcatlipoca because of his youth and beauty. We see the relocation of Palumba from the idyllic landscape and natural beauty of his home to a temple, in a scene that accurately represents the ritualistic practice of the Mesoamericans that saw the victim housed in a temple for one year and treated with every pleasure he desired before his death. Here, the tale departs from Prescott's account as Symonds imagined Palumba's final journey before his death. He wanders with his 'comrades' (l. 349) far from the illustrious temple chamber in which he is being housed, straying deep into the mysterious and ancient jungles of the city where he sees in the half-buried ruins of the forgotten temples 'Of gods once worshipped' (l. 357) the palimpsestic process by which civilisations and faiths emerge and decay. Significantly, it is while Palumba is immersed in nature that he is confronted by individuals that cause him to reflect on God, life, death, friendship, and love. Turning to Dante, Symonds reproduced in the Mesoamerican jungle a hellish vista, a 'lazar-house' (l. 385) that sees Palumba confront the brutal atrocities perpetrated by the authoritarian figures of religion. The images and language used to describe the maimed and disfigured individuals, abandoned and forsaken by their God, are reminiscent of the 'melancholy herd' (*Inferno,* XXVIII. 120) in the *Inferno*'s eighth circle of Hell. Palumba continues his immersion in the natural environment, 'wandering though the immemorial calm' (l. 520), an act imbued with the Platonic notion of *anamnesis* of which the philosophical implications and significances for Symonds's critique of religion will be discussed later in the chapter. Palumba's spiritual meditation on music and the spirit of nature that occurs in this natural setting is interrupted by a singing maiden who, for Palumba, embodies the idea of 'Love at first sight approved by ecstasy' (l. 606). More significantly, this moment in the poem is imbued with Symonds's personal belief in love as deity, removed from the religious and social conditions that define and determine it: 'none dares doubt the authentic deity' (l. 608).

Palumba's realisation of love as 'the authentic deity', which reflects Symonds's vision in the prologue of all things springing from love, results in a catastrophic event, a 'wreck of nature' (l. 703) that sees a violent and apocalyptic storm that leads to the demise of the nameless young maiden. Palumba interprets the events as a form of divine retribution, God vengefully punishing him for his transgressive belief that heralds love as 'the authentic deity'. Palumba returns to the temple with its 'garish | Galleries' (ll. 770-71), pondering the meaning of death, no longer perceiving it to be 'a simple thing to die' (l. 765). In the final stanzas of the main section of the poem that precede the epilogue, Symonds returns to the historical account of

Prescott that describes the ritual of adorning the victim in spectacular robes and flowers before being 'taken to the teocalli or pyramidal temple' (*MM* 254) where his heart will be cut out 'with a sharp razor of *itztli*' (Prescott 37). There are no graphic details of the event; however, the section terminates with an image that gains its poignancy from its imagined horror: 'Then one sharp shriek' (l. 805). The poem finally concludes with the epilogue that reflects on 'the perilous journey' (l. 809) which, for the poet, has revealed 'Nothing' (l. 810). Here, the poet admonishes and rebukes the hypocrisy and brutality of religions, and the human beings that engender them. It powerfully employs the modern voice of the poet and imaginatively harmonises within its revelation the modern scientific spirit and the belief in the abiding relations of all things that is permeated and determined by a pantheistic force. The paradox of knowledge, however, reveals a disconcerting truth. Despite the poet-prophet's clear and rational survey of the nature of religion and ritual, he, in the final line of the poem, laments the disposition of human beings to remain blind to this truth with a powerful exclamation: 'This hope is yours; but ah, you know not this!' (l. 912). *Palumba* is thus directed by the critical gaze of the poet that surveys the historical record of an appalling ritual (perceived through the eyes of the modern reader), forms personal judgements on the nature and motive of doctrinal practice, and boldly pronounces the truths he reads in the signs and actions he perceives. Symonds condenses the function of critic and poet, using his scientific judgement that, from an anthropological perspective, attempts to apprehend as wholly as possible a truth that is of 'moral and mental importance to humanity' ('On Some Principles of Criticism', *ESS*1 100):

> For it is in religion that innovations are always tardiest. Philosophies may rise and fall, empires may vanish and races die away, but one dogma meantime pursues its slow and even progress from vigour to complete corruption. Religion is grounded in the life of nations, and bound up with the hopes of every man. (*Renaissance* 56-57)

The aim of this chapter is to explore the interpenetrations of nature, science, and the imagination in *Palumba*, and how the poem contributes to Symonds's personal experimentation with what he called 'the literature of the future' (*L*3 344) or 'a new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412), a philosophic system that was furnished by the Hellenic instinct of universal law (and the poet's interrogation of natural phenomena), the morality of Christ (separate to dogmatic conceptions of the historical figure), and popular examples of nineteenth-century scientific investigations. The prevalent tone of *Palumba* echoes Symonds's

assertion in 'The Limits of Knowledge' that the claims of theology and ontology to absolute knowledge were, are, and always will be arbitrary and conceited:

> The science of God and the science of Being, Theology and Ontology, have no foundation except in the subjectivity of man. Both are seen to involve impertinences, naïvetés, solemn self-complacences, the egotism of Narcissus doting on his own perfections mirrored in the darkness of the river of the universe. ('The Limits of Knowledge', *ESS*2 286)

The first section of the chapter will explore how Symonds began his anthropological investigation with the imaginative illustration of *phusis* ('origin') in the prologue of *Palumba*. Symonds's cosmogony positioned Christian dogma and paganism against each other, bringing into relief the inscrutable mystery of life, the philosopher's, theologian's, and scientist's search for whether it is God (dogmatic) or nature that is the principle and 'originating power'.[3] The section will address Symonds's exploration of death and mortality, especially the way in which the poet perceived how dogmatic forms of religion and sacrifice were intrinsically bound. To effectively understand and present the pervasive nature of sacrifice, the way by which the forms of sacrifice change (for instance, from blood sacrifice in the context of ancient civilisations to self-denial and repression and the case of Symonds's sexuality in the modern Victorian era), Symonds's poem focuses on the poignancy of the youth that dies prematurely. The chapter will also explore the significance of the apocalyptic scene that precedes Palumba's sacrificial ceremony in the context of Symonds's investigation of the concept of *Theos*, focusing on the significance of the poet's presentation of the natural phenomenon of lightning as an event that evokes elements of religious mysticism (Christian and pagan). The second section will explore the blending, in the poem, of real, historical, sacred, and mythical gardens, which reflects the psychological landscape of the poet's mind, but also illustrates Symonds's philosophical study of humanity and its evolution alongside religious practices. This chapter will demonstrate how horticulture, the art and science of cultivating and managing gardens, and the poem's concern with the tenets of death and mortality, informed Symonds's poetic theory, his personal social anthropological inquiry into the dominant constitutions of dogmatic theology and culture. More importantly, these sciences and practices were imbued by the poet with a spiritual significance

[3] See *phusis* (sense IV. 1), in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), II, p. 1965.

to metaphorically represent the pervasive law of evolution that determined the place of humankind in the world.

THE INVESTIGATION OF *PHUSIS*: SYMONDS AS ANTHROPOLOGIST

John Holmes positions Algernon Charles Swinburne and his poetry within the debates of anthropology in the latter-half of the nineteenth century, observing that Swinburne's engagement with the scientific discipline was 'unique among Victorian writers'.[4] Like Swinburne's *Songs Before Sunrise* (published in 1871), a collection Holmes perceives as 'a distinctive conception of how poetry can be scientific without overtly incorporating data, methods or vocabulary of the science to which it contributes', Symonds's *Palumba* undertakes the work of anthropology in its investigation of the growth of civility out of past stages of human religious, cultural, social, and intellectual development.[5] The poem is particularly concerned with social anthropology, the theoretical framework by which Symonds investigated his personal theories of human evolution, the development of societies and cultures, and their religions, alongside the burgeoning experimental sciences and humanity's advancing knowledge of the natural world. Symonds's informal and casual blending of Aztec and non-Aztec references and details, including the wide variety of plants, flowers, and gemstones, is a combination of the specific and the general in this anthropological and experimental poem. *Palumba* conflates images that specifically pertain to the Aztec culture (the *itztli* and the teocalli, for instance) and culturally significant symbols that are pertinent to other civilisations (the daffodil, yew, and hyacinth, for example). *Palumba* thus emerges as 'an anthropological collection in its own right', to borrow Holmes's phrase, and, like Swinburne's poem, is scientific in its incorporation of facts and discoveries yet not overt in its depiction of these facts.[6] Moreover, the poem is a unique contribution in Symonds's entire oeuvre. Although he composed poems that were inspired by exotic references and sources – such as *The Love Tale of Odatis and Prince Zariadres* (*NO* 75-114), a Hellenistic adaptation of a Persian story, and *The Valley of Vain Desires* (*NO* 229-41), which used the poisonous upas tree (the Javanese 'hydra-tree of death' popularised by Erasmus Darwin in *The Loves of the Plants*) as an allegory for the 'attraction of vice' (*NO* 248) – *Palumba* is the only poem that deals extensively with

[4] John Holmes, 'Algernon Swinburne, Anthropologist', *Journal of Literature and Science*, 9.1 (2016), 16-39 (p. 18).
[5] Holmes, 'Algernon Swinburne, Anthropologist', p. 18.
[6] Holmes, 'Algernon Swinburne, Anthropologist', p. 18.

the questions of religion, love, death, and ritual framed within the historical context of a distant and "unfamiliar" civilisation.[7] Symonds expressed his protean religious mood and grasp of popular scientific knowledge in the form of a remarkable narrative that presented a recognised truth which aligned itself with the poet's personal belief: the claims by men to omniscience of religions and sciences, as they coexist in specific eras, are analogous to the truths decreed by the polytheism and mythologies of the past, for all experience is subjective to a particular stage of humanity's development and only forms a part of the whole that is inscrutable. Symonds's scientific and analytical approach chimes with Holmes's crucial observation that 'Symonds is acutely aware that he is using evolution as a metaphor, a critical tool that comes to hand, rather than the key to all mythologies'.[8]

Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* received positive reviews in the United States of America and Europe, with the eminent historian and ecclesiast Henry Hart Milman among those praising the work and forming a close friendship with the author.[9] Prescott did not visit the Mesoamerican archaeological site that was the subject of his study, but based his work, instead, on the extensive research carried out by Humboldt and the antiquarian Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough, on pre-Columbian civilisations and their ruins.[10] *Palumba* is Symonds's elaborate re-imagining of Prescott's narrative of human sacrifice that appeared in the third chapter of *Conquest of Mexico*, and allowed Symonds to explore the origin of

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[7] Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden. A Poem in Two Parts with Philosophical Notes*, 2nd edn (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1807), p. 79.

[8] John Holmes, 'Victorian Evolutionary Criticism and the Pitfalls of Consilience', in *The Evolution of Literature: Legacies of Darwin in European Cultures*, ed. by Nicholas Saul and Simon J. James (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 101-12 (p. 111).

[9] See George Ticknor's *Life of William Hickling Prescott* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), for the correspondence between Prescott and the Milmans. Milman (1791-1868), English historian, Oxford Professor of Poetry, Dean of St Paul's, was also an acquaintance of Symonds: 'The winter of 1860-61 brought me into relations with Jowett and other acquaintances of a distinguished sort at Oxford. I also began to visit at Lord Lansdowne's country seat of Bowood, where I met Dean Milman, Mrs Higford Burr, and the lions of the period' (*Memoirs* 181).

[10] Prescott 'went carefully over all that Humboldt had written, and all he could find in the old printed authorities, like Herrera, Torquemada, and Sahagun, together with the vast documentary collections of Lord Kingsborough' (Ticknor, *Prescott*, p. 183). Humboldt's exploration of Mexico in 1804 led to the rediscovery of Aztec codices collated between 1735 and 1740 by Lorenzo Boturini during his travels in Mexico. Although Boturini's work on Aztec antiquities was believed to be fantastical and dubious (as suggested by Prescott), the codices he procured are some of the most valuable artefacts of the Mesoamerican civilisation. In the mid-sixteenth century, The Codex Mendoza, which forms a part of Montezuma's income books, was made into several copies by Don Antonio de Mendoza, the Viceroy of New Spain (the main copy was sent to Spain). After having been stolen by a pirate and passed through several hands, the copy was eventually obtained by Richard Hakluyt, Chaplain to the British Ambassador in Paris, and taken to London. It remained inconspicuous in the Bodleian Library at Oxford for centuries until it finally appeared in the fifth volume of Edward King's elephant folio, *Antiquities of Mexico* (1830-1848), which also includes the first complete publication of the Dresden Codex (see Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1999), pp. 42-76). An obituary of King, appearing in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in May 1837, describes his *Antiquities of Mexico* as 'one very extraordinary public monument' and a work that is 'full of deep research' (Sylvanus Urban, 'Obituary: Viscount Kingsborough', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 7: New Series (May 1837), pp. 537-38).

Mesoamerican mythology and sacerdotal order whilst collaterally inquiring into the dogmatic spirit of the Christian Church and its ecclesiastic affairs. *Palumba* likens the Aztec system of faith, one that seems distant to the secular observances and Christian duties of Victorian society, to all religions that are bound to order and duty imposed by divine law. The religious and social customs of the ancient civilisation, as absorbed by Symonds from his reading of *Conquest of Mexico*, help to contextualise *Palumba*'s climactic event of human sacrifice – a practice that fits into Victorian ideological narratives of civilisation and savagery, yet disconcerted Symonds's sense of morality. The barbaric act, as perceived by Symonds and condoned by Aztec religious law, becomes the touchstone by which the poet's self as audience contemplates not only religious mythologies, of which social order and cultural mores form an integrant part, but also the place of morality within evolving and varying systems of belief.[11]

The setting of the poem in a time and place so different from Symonds's own is indeed curious, but the question of faith that pervades the philosophical narrative of the poem is explored effectively as Symonds attempted to bring into relief the universality of religions, not the strife of contending systems of orthodoxy. His holistic approach to life, his enduring faith in the supreme pantheistic force, was reiterated in a letter to Henry Sidgwick (8 July 1874), the only letter known to mention *Palumba*. The poem, privately kept and hitherto unseen, expressed Symonds's 'pantheistic musings' (*L*2 352), his belief in the existence of an inscrutable, transcendental world-spirit. As a surveyor of civilisations and their development, Symonds observed that the careful study of various and varying cultures inevitably improved and enhanced humanity's understanding of the beginnings of different socio-cultural modes of thought and feeling. This humanistic approach from the perspective of a *litterateur* echoes the rationale of Prescott as anthropologist in *Conquest of Mexico*; the evolution of faith, science, and art in all civilisations is the adaption, refinement, and layering of older belief systems which are constantly (re)constructing the interminable, mutating entity that is religion. *Palumba* is, correspondingly, syncretic in nature, and pleaches the philosophical doctrines of various religions, popular religious texts, and mythical tales – adopting elements from Greek, Norse, Mesoamerican, and Sumerian mythologies, as well as from the Bible, Omar Khayyam's *The Ruba'iyat* ('the high-piping voice of Omar', l. 15), Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* – into which Symonds symbolically weaved his personal religious creed to produce an absorbing version of the history of culture and religion. *Palumba*,

[11] Cf. 'The civil polity of the Aztecs is so closely blended with their religion that without understanding the latter it is impossible to form correct ideas of their government or their social institutions' (Prescott 26).

therefore, is polysemous, a multi-layered record of different forms of knowledge that intertwine and evolve to produce a complex narrative that reflects the mutating, hybridised faith of its author. *Palumba* is simultaneously a mythological poem and a comparative literary study of the origins of religion. The poem is imbued with a syncretic spirit which proposes the existence of an underlying unity and inclusivity of multiple faiths, and its mixture of various cultural mythologies and texts attempts to conciliate the diverse and sometimes opposing tenets of these religious and philosophical practices.

Palumba uses the tragic event of human sacrifice as an allegory to present and discuss Symonds's sense of disagreement between his personal emotions and the widely accepted customs of dogmatic religion. The narrator in *Palumba*'s prologue, with the powers of hindsight and prolepsis, foregrounds a philosophically charged topic that evokes the elegiac verse of antiquity: the untimely death of the young and beautiful in the name of duty:

> Not for us alone
> Are fair things holy; nor are we the first
> To weep o'er youth's frail blossom overblown. (ll. 1-3)

For Symonds, the tragedy of premature death, in all its mythological forms, was a subject that bound together seemingly distant families of nations, and urged the philosophical inquiry into the indirect and covert nature of segregation and difference as enforced by religion in societies. It is an evocative opening to the poem that negates transhistorical and transcultural claims to originality and individuality ('Not for us alone', l. 1), and superiority or priority ('nor are we the first', l. 2). The attenuation of perspectives at the beginning of *Palumba* sets the tone for the rest of the poem's philosophical discourse on origins and the relationship between humans, nature, and religion, and is steeped in Blakean ideology concerning man's mancipation of himself to the obfuscatory five senses: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'[12]

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[12] *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 15, in *The Illuminated Blake: William Blake's Complete Illuminated Works with a Plate-by-Plate Commentary*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Press, 1974; New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 111. Symonds quoted this particular statement, among others, while reminiscing, in the forests of Val Bregaglia, upon the effects of *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* on his religious thoughts and its lasting impression that mingled with his own pantheistic creed to incite further speculation upon the nature of man and the universe:

> Here I wandered one September morning; and, as it chanced, a reprint of Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" was in my pocket. […] As I read, there happened to me something like that which happened to Petrarch upon the summit of Mont Ventoux. Blake's sentences, pregnant with mysticism, struck a deep

Symonds's anthropological investigation of *phusis*, in *Palumba*, begins with a cosmogony. This cosmogony in the prologue is rooted in biblical and pagan tradition, and both conceive, explicitly or indirectly, the universe and the creation of all within it as stemming from chaos. In Symonds's version, Love is a primordial being:

> Love with the rosy-wings was nursed
> On Night's broad breast in chaos; there his smile
> Like sunrise over weltering billows burst:
>
> Whereby a world was fashioned. Death the while
> Herself from Sleep divided, side by side
> To walk thenceforth with Love Life's echoing aisle. (ll. 4-9)

Echoes of the cosmogony in Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791) can be heard here: '*Love Divine* with brooding wing unfurl'd' (I. 101), Darwin explained in *The Economy of Vegetation*, the first part of the poem, has creative power for it conjures the world from 'the rude abyss' (I. 102), dispelling the 'throne of Night' (I. 99).[13] Chaos is 'Astonish'd' (I. 104), bewildered and shocked into creation, exploding to produce a mass of revolving stars (I. 105-08).[14] Likewise, it is the creative and embryonic power of Love that Symonds emphasised: Love's 'smile' is likened to the 'burst' of sunrise, which, like Darwin's 'Earths round each sun with quick explosions burst' (I. 107), is the expression of the manifestation of a sudden and uncontainable force in the universe.[15] Chaos, in Symonds's poetic vision, does not imply confusion and disorder, and is employed in the Hellenic sense that expresses formless void, a vacuous vault of unbounded darkness. Hesiod's *Theogony* paints a vivid image of the first state of the universe, how it evolved from infinite blankness to become occupied by biological matter: it was 'first of all Chasm' that 'came to be, and then broad-breasted Earth' (ll. 116-17,

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> chord and chimed with thoughts which were already stirring in me. For a while, I entered into spiritual union with nature, and felt as though the genii of those giant chestnut-trees might pace across the sward, [...] and saw that everything is infinite, and knew the thought which fills immensity, […]. Such moments do not last long, but they leave impressions which contain the germs of future speculation. ('Nature Myths and Allegories', *ESS*2 127-28)

Symonds's depiction of the significance of trees in *Palumba* and their indissoluble connection to meditation and introspection will be discussed later in the chapter.

[13] Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, p. 9.

[14] Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, pp. 9-10.

[15] Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, p. 10.

LCL 57), and from Chasm were 'Erebos and black Night' produced who, 'after mingling in love', conceived 'Aether and Day' (ll. 123-25, LCL 57).[16] In *Palumba*, the immeasurable darkness of 'Night's broad breast' on which Love is 'nursed' presents chaos as formless space, but, in not overtly determining the nature of chaos, Symonds was following biblical paradigms. Genesis 1 alludes to, but is not explicit about, *creatio ex nihilo*: creation had a passive beginning entirely submissive to the will of God which began with the formation of 'the heaven and the earth' which 'was without form, and void' (Genesis 1:1-2). Love, in *Palumba*, takes precedence as an individual and vital entity which 'fashions' the world. The primacy of Love, its significance in the cosmic rhythm of life from which all things are promulgated, is recalled by Symonds in 'The Genius of Greek Art'. The immortal son of Aphrodite of Melos, as imagined in the sculpture of Eros by Pheidias (exhibited in the British Museum, as Symonds noted in the essay), 'is imagined as the "first of gods," *θεῶν πρώτιστος*, upstarting in his slenderness of youth from Chaos—the keen, fine light of dawn dividing night from day' ('The Genius of Greek Art', *GP*2 375). The omnipotence of the biblical God is, here and in *Palumba*, displaced, and Love, instead, is imbued with superintendence. Symonds's cosmogony thus reforms and conflates the images and language of various pre-existent cosmogonies, scriptural and pagan, to present a vibrant mytho-theology that not only highlights the likeness of religious images and symbols but also suits his personal religious mood.

The prologue continues with a dirge which introduces the primary theme of the poem, the beautiful youth who suffers an untimely demise, through which Symonds exemplified the common *phusis* of humankind's religions. It presents mythological figures who experienced premature deaths, ranging from Norse, Christian, Babylonian, and Phoenician mythology – Balder, Christ, Thammuz, and Linus are united by Symonds in a pantheon of his own creation.[17] 'Yea,' laments the poet,

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[16] Glen Most remarks that Hesiod's use of the word 'Chasm' indicates 'a gap or opening' rather than word's commonly misleading notion of 'jumbled or disordered matter' (LCL 57, p. 13).

[17] Linus of Thrace was a reputed musician and is the personification of lamentation in Greek mythology. In *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (2 vols, 1890), James George Frazer speculated on the symbolic and linguistic origin of Linus to suggest a similarity between Phoenician, Greek, and Egyptian lore. He referred to the Phoenician song 'called by the Greeks Linus or Ailinus […] as a lament for the death of a youth named Linus' (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), I, p. 365). 'But', Frazer observed, 'the name Linus or Ailinus appears to have originated in a verbal misunderstanding, and to be nothing more than the cry *ai lanu*, that is "woe to us," which the Phoenicians probably uttered in mourning for Adonis; at least Sappho seems to have regarded Adonis and Linus as equivalent' (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, p. 365). Frazer drew ideological parallels between Adonis as a deity to whom vegetation and trees were consecrated (symbolic of the revival of life) and his Egyptian (Osiris), Phrygian (Attis), and Babylonian (Thammuz) counterparts (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, pp. 278-79). Balder, too, was 'the good and beautiful god' (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, p. 244) and associated with vegetation and trees. Frazer's anthropological and mythological examination was correlated to his concept of the 'dying-and-rising god', which he used to ground his analysis of all the aforementioned deities and the similarities of all religions. His theory was

all the ancient stories tell of doom:
Even Balder, the most beautiful among
The brave of Asgard, hid his head in gloom;

Each spring the maids of Tyre and Sidon sung
Their dirge for Thammuz: nay, the Son of God
Who bent his brows on Calvary, was young.

One thought, fire-footed with a curse, hath trod
The hearts of countless nations. All and each,
Singing Ah Linus! sank beneath the sod.

Far, far away in lands where lianes pleach
The bloomy fretwork over flaming skies,
Men dared in bygone centuries to teach

By no mere myth the doom of youth that dies. (ll. 34-46)

The poet treats this intriguing medley of gods in euhemerist fashion: the gods, like mortals, cannot escape the inexorable law of the universe that moves all things towards decay and death. Palumba is divinised in the image of all the gods that die young which Symonds mentioned in the prologue, and, by analogy, the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca is also bound to the pattern of this law which determines that the 'cones', or religions, that the tree of life 'forms and sheds' will also fade and become 'Dry gaping husks' ('Ygdrasil', I. 5-6; *AF* 7).

In the prime
Of this old world, now worn and lustreless,

Men taught by signs like these that frosty rime
Nips the rathe buds of earth, that beauty-bloom

constructed prior to the revelation of important materials that completed versions of some of these myths (e.g. the mid-twentieth-century discovery of a complete Sumerian version of *Inanna's Descent*) and, therefore, is nowadays considered obsolete but still possessing heuristic and historical relevance.

Dwells on the lips we love a little time.[18] (ll. 29-33)

The prologue of *Palumba* thus determines 'the doom of youth that dies' (l. 46) as a 'truth' that 'found tragic utterance' (l. 47) in 'a poet's sighs' (l. 48), but not heeded by those 'living in pomp majestical' (l. 49). It is a 'truth' taught since time immemorial (related to the epic nature of the poem), reiterated by successive generations, and used to reaffirm the supremacy of orthodoxy.

For Symonds, religion and terror are, through this 'truth', associated: 'Yearly they showed the dreadful pageant forth; | Year after year one death admonished all' (ll. 50-51). He presents the repercussions of the dogma, or 'One thought' (l. 40), of theology: although creatively fashioned by the human imagination, it is authoritatively upheld and taught by the high priests that sacrifice Palumba, showing the destructive force of an abstraction held as 'truth'. The demands of the high priests as they interpreted the will of their gods required physical contributions – 'gold' and 'blood, their altar dowers' (l. 1094), as Percy Bysshe Shelley put it in *Hellas* (1822) – for, as Symonds determined, they were not orally communicated, or imparted by men through 'mere myth'. The 'One thought' disseminated by the religious teachings of this 'fierce people' (l. 48) is 'fire-footed with a curse' (l. 40), showing the pervasive power of (religious) ideologies as these dogmas unrestrainedly and inevitably spread their requirements for the unwavering and dutiful subservience and obedience of humanity to divinity, determining future forms and decrees of religious worship.

It is universality and the workings of a revolving history that Symonds emphasised in *Palumba*'s prologue. All nations are disfigured by the 'truth' of dogmatic religion, an idea he presented as the 'hallowed antique creed' in 'The Innovators' (IV. 2, *AF* 5), and the disparity that myths highlight by creating different and separate gods as they foreground their supremacy is a mirage. Yet this mirage is dispelled as Symonds's anthropological inquiry led him to ascertain a universal germ for all religions, and which he exemplified with all the tragic figures (the young and the beautiful) in *Palumba*'s prologue sharing an ill-fate, reinforcing his personal belief that all myths stem from the primal teachings by man to man. *Palumba* is Symonds's personal dirge for humanity, a universal threnody for 'the doom of youth that dies' (l. 46) as a consequence of the demands of ordained religious figures. The sacrifice of Palumba, dictated by Mesoamerican religious practice, symbolises Symonds's perception of the severe and

[18] Cf. Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Adonais*: 'Thy extreme hope, the loveliest and the last, | The bloom, whose petals nipp'd before they blew | Died on the promise of the fruit, is waste; | The broken lily lies—the storm is overpast' (ll. 51-54).

irrational side of authoritarian forms of religion, as opposed to his personal, self-constructed faith that upheld the moral values of goodness, truth, and beauty. That 'Men taught by signs like these' (l. 31), that the sacrificial practice commanded by older forms of religion might seem unnecessarily brutal in light of the intellectual progress of Victorian society, did not mean, for Symonds, that the dominant orthodox religion of his time was not equally irrational, or that it did not demand severe forms of worship or self-denial to demonstrate piety. Symonds reiterated, and extended to his own society, Prescott's observation that 'Terror, not love, was the spring of education with the Aztecs' (Prescott 34). The prologue highlights the relativity of the signs by which human beings teach, and how each religion's Moloch evolves 'As the dream varies with the varying race' ('An Old Gordian Knot', IV. 14; *AF* 82).

Symonds's anthropological inquiry thus brought into relief the contention between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, suggestively questioning whether right belief and right practice, determined by orthodox commandments, are aligned with morality. Symonds, as surveyor and critic of history, understood civilisation as an entity in constant flux, in *werden*; however, his interrogation led him to believe that Victorian society had not necessarily shed the barbarism it attributed to past modes of existence, but absorbed, disguised, and assimilated its customs that progressed alongside the linear movement of time. Symonds, like Prescott, examined and interpreted the abiding relations of cultures, societies, and religions in history through an anthropological lens:

> Thus we find the same religion [Aztec] inculcating lessons of pure philanthropy, on the one hand, and of merciless extermination, as we shall soon see, on the other. The inconsistency will not appear incredible to those who are familiar with the history of the Roman Catholic Church, in the early ages of the Inquisition. (Prescott 34-35)

Symonds's focus on the theme of the beautiful youth that dies prematurely proved important in his critical investigations of the nature and interconnections of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The question of divine justice or retribution, the reward or punishment assigned to humans by god in accordance with their conduct in life, is at the heart of Symonds's philosophical poem, and is better understood through a comparison with the biblical passages that *Palumba* addresses and reworks. The intellectual obstacles experienced by Palumba parallel those experienced by Adam, the first human in the Bible who is paradigmatic of human nature and represents, along with other psychological qualities, insubordination. Adam's banishment from Eden is the result of his disobedience of God's command to not eat from the

Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 2:17). His transgression, one that unequivocally goes against God's command, nonetheless carries with it the promise and hope of redemption as the consequence of the *felix culpa*, or fortunate Fall. In the mythological framework of *Palumba*, however, the title-character cannot expect a similarly redemptive outcome, and death appears to him as a final condition absent of the prospect of spiritual survival after bodily death: 'But wheresoe'er throughout this Eden stray | The perfumed paths, they lead but to the tomb' (ll. 241-42).

Adam's actions are explicitly unorthodox (he does not believe in God's caution that eating from the Tree of Knowledge will lead to certain death (Genesis 2:17)) and un-orthoprax (he commits the wrong-doing of eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6, 12)), which have the immediate result of his banishment from Eden directly by God. Tezcatlipoca, the central deity of the mythology that sustains *Palumba*, conversely, is never heard directly, and his divine providence is administered by 'fierce-eyed priests' (l. 787) on Earth. Theological fatalism, here, is shrouded in ambiguity. The despotism of religious dogma is implied in the chance cry of the priest who reads in Palumba's beauty a favourable augury for his supplication:

> 'People! I have seen
> The god we seek!' 'Twas the high priest, who thus,
> With gory knife in hand outstretched obscene,
>
> Marked the fair youth. (ll. 210-13)

Philosophical paradoxes mark the poem: when Palumba is chosen by the priest, the gathering multitude revere the youth, 'the god is found' (l. 216), but, as god, Palumba is doomed to live 'for a year', 'Then victim glorious! | The saint with deathless saints for ever crowned' (ll. 217-18). Symonds's philosophical meditation on the figure of the priest, whose divine ordinance is juxtaposed by his indecency, immorality, and 'obscene' actions, is a paradox imbued with a biographical tone. The dissociation of piety from morality in the vulgar image of the priest is reminiscent of the episode concerning Charles Vaughan at Harrow, which was decisive for Symonds's conception and understanding of orthodox religion. Palumba, contrastingly, is 'fair', related to Hellenic ideas of beauty that are both physical (based on a subjectivity of aesthetics as perceived by the poet and the priests, as well as youth) and abstract (the ideal of goodness and morality). It is the urgency of the priest and the combination of these qualities (the youth's physical and abstract 'fairness'), not Palumba's unorthodoxy or un-orthopraxy,

that ultimately incite Palumba's unfortunate Fall. Symonds thus scrutinised the practice of the priests, considered as an indirect divine decree, to effectively bring into relief subjectivity and arbitrariness, the ambiguity between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, justice and morality.

Symonds's investigation of *phusis* emphasised an anthropological deduction that influenced his 'religious mood of mind' (*Memoirs* 301), that the truths which religions claim to possess are also bound to evolutionary process. Changing societies within changing epochs adapt the symbols by which they depict and communicate authoritarian doctrines; however, the message or ideology remains inexorably the same. The parallels between Palumba and the biblical Adam are extended to the notion of the Fall: both transgress in a manner that defies the authority of the ruling deity of their religion and suffer the effects of divine retribution. In both Genesis and *Palumba*, it is female influence that induces disobedience and deviation from unwavering devotion to the deity, but Symonds's account, unlike the biblical, is sympathetic towards the unnamed maiden that leads Palumba to question the authority of the divine. Palumba's waywardness is illustrated by his communion with the spirit of nature, which is presented as a synaesthetic experience that fuses sound and light – 'till he thought | That sound and light became one silvery shower' (ll. 539-40); from nature's 'melody, so subtly wrought' (l. 541), emerged 'another song more passion-fraught' (l. 543).

The maiden's song is distinguished in the poem by an interruption of the *terza rima* to allow five quintains in iambic tetrameter that reflect on the loneliness of life, the inevitability of death, and the disappearance of the dead from memory:

> Buds bloom and perish in a day:
> But who bewails the rose of May?
> Men mourn the great, the wise, the brave,
> When they are garnered in the grave;—
> Youth unlamented fades away. (ll. 555-59)

The elegiac tone of the song recalls Palumba's earlier meditation on the death of his comrade, the friend who 'Home from the field had come and drooped and died' (l. 107). His comrade's fate anticipates that of the maiden, for those that Palumba loves seem fated to die prematurely: 'And much he pondered of youth's fading flower' that, in his prayer to god, Palumba questioned 'Hast thou for thy children then no ruth? | Or weepest thou, as we must weep, to see | The bloom of fair things fade?' (ll. 151, 159-61). Symonds here reflects on the injustice of 'youth unlamented' that 'fades away', on the effects of ceasing to remember the dead, and

echoes Greek elegiac poetry – 'Witless and foolish are men who weep for the dead, but not for the fading bloom of youth' (Theognis, ll. 1069-70; LCL 258, p. 329).[19] The fourteen stanzas in which Palumba meditates on the death of his comrade, and their fraternal bond, appears at the opening of the poem. The stanzas are imbued with an autobiographical tone, whereby Palumba, like Symonds, contemplates the ideas of death, love, and mortality in the context of dogmatic and ritualistic religious teachings. The stanzas are also an example of how Symonds's sexuality and his sense of religion were intrinsically bound. The stanzas present a vivid dream-sequence in which Palumba recalls the traumatic experience of witnessing the premature death of 'his friend and comrade' (l. 105), whose life is destroyed by 'death's imperceptible touch' (l. 110). The tragic event results in a mystical encounter between Palumba and the 'image of his comrade' (l. 121). It is during this dream-vision that the comrade's spirit reveals to Palumba the two tenets that were Symonds's guiding religious principles throughout his life: first, the universal principle that there exists an abiding relation among all things; and, secondly, the fact that all things move towards decay and death:

> 'The snows on yonder hills dissolve in rain:
> Foaming and fretting the streams forward fare,
> To merge their sweetness in the barren main;
>
> 'None may delay upon the Alpine stair,
> Or eddy round the rose-tree without end,
> Or bask amid the low lake-mirrors fare. (ll. 132-37)

Here, the dead comrade's 'image' reveals the poet's emotional relation to the scheme of all things, clearly defining his belief in the patterns and laws that regulate the spiritual and physical domains. Like the snows that must dissolve, like the streams whose eddying and turbulence must 'forward fare', human beings must also accept their fate of physical dissolution and, in the spirit of Stoic-Epicurean endurance, acquiesce to this universal law of process and progress:

> 'We too toward death and utter darkness wend:

[19] Symonds translated the couplet in *Studies of the Greek Poets*: 'Ah, vain and thoughtless men, who wail the dead, | But not one tear for youth's frail blossom shed!' ('Greek Art', *GP*2 375fn). See also Dr Symonds's translation from Theognis: 'Vain thoughtless men! lament ye death's fell power? | Yet shed no tears o'er youth's decaying flower?' (John Addington Symonds, MD, *Miscellanies*, ed. with an introductory memoir by John Addington Symonds (London: Macmillan, 1871), p. 411).

Lo, I who loved thee, now am nought but clay;
Thou canst not clasp my neck or call me friend!

'Yet from the weeds outworn of our decay
Is woven the incorruptible: death's womb
Shall be the cradle of the dawn of day.' (ll. 138-43)

Love and death are themes that Symonds constantly revisited in many of his poetic compositions and his exploration of fraternity and male-male love is also alluded to in *Palumba*. The dead comrade's lips are the 'lips he [Palumba] loved' (l. 113). More significant, however, are the following words uttered by the 'image' or spectre of the dead friend:

'Oh listen! Star by star,
Heaven dwindles; her long cycles wax and wane:
For ever Love and Death wage equal war. (ll. 129-31)

Symonds's way of conceiving the relation between men is repeated in the relation between stars, an allegory favoured and repeated by Symonds in many poems, such as *Love and Death: A Symphony* (published in 1878 in *Many Moods*). Symonds's conception of 'passionate friendship' (*L*2 201), his adoption of the Whitmanesque idea of '"adhesiveness"' (*L*2 201), and his conception of a democratic vista that included and embraced in its progressive evolution the 'close & intense tie of fraternity, the love of man for man' (*ESS*1 89) will be discussed in further detail in chapter three of this thesis.

The poem's contemplation on mortality and death extends to the episodes that include the young maiden who, like Palumba and the comrade, is fated to prematurely die. Like the young Ophelia in *Hamlet*, to whom Laertes refers before her suicide as the 'rose of May' (IV. 5. 156), Symonds's maiden sings of death that foreshadows her own demise.[20] The maiden's melancholic mood is tinged with Symonds's personal, moral inclinations which demand reflection on and protest against the iniquity of despotic religious laws that are arbitrarily assumed and capriciously applied, against the imbalanced and unjust outcome of divine punishment. Palumba, captured by her song, desires to 'Let us make sweet the little that

[20] *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1997; reissued 2008), p. 1761.

remains | Ere we descend to death's unseen abysses!' (ll. 585-86). Love, in this scene, is expounded as a union that is simultaneously physical and spiritual:

> Little he knows of loving who hath slandered
> Love at first sight approved by ecstasy,
> Yet sure as love whereon the soul hath pondered
>
> Till none dares doubt the authentic deity. (ll. 605-08)

It is this earthly, somatic ('ecstasy') and heavenly, spiritual ('Soul unto soul', l. 610) accord that allows Palumba to realise that love is 'the authentic deity': the experience of love has attenuated the dread of his fateful, impending sacrifice, for 'weeks of young-eyed love were heavenlier far | Than the slow years of long life's purgatory' (ll. 621-22). Yet this experience is immediately followed by a seeming apocalypse – earthquakes, lightning, stormy winds, and thunder – which Palumba interprets as the influence of the 'dread god' (l. 713) whom he challenges: 'Reillume | The furnace of thy wrath' and 'Take us unto thee, | Us two together, tangled in the noose | Of thine unshunned adorable deity!' (ll. 711-12, 715-17). That this 'wreck of nature' (l. 703) takes the maiden's life alone, Palumba attributes to the workings of 'the god no pity stirs' (l. 740): both youths die prematurely – he as a sacrifice and she in a natural catastrophe – for an 'inexorable God' (*Memoirs* 473). Divine retribution, in the biblical sense, is exacted upon both youths as a result of their defiance of the authority of the ruling deity by their deification of love: she dies, and he loses 'her through whom his life | Had wakened at a touch to ecstasy' (ll. 655-56).

The apocalyptic scene in *Palumba* absorbs into its framework two notions that concerned Symonds's thought throughout his life. The spectacle represents his speculation on theodicy – is divine judgement infallible and just? – and the domination of orthodox religions represented by the separation of human beings from nature, in an attempt by mediaeval Christianity to sever a union epitomised by the Graeco-Roman spirit. The reflection on the symbol of lightning (one of many symbols with which Symonds constructs his philosophical poem) and its accompanying thunder, is one of many anthropological experiments conducted by the poet and developed for the purpose of ascertaining an important philosophical principle: popular belief and truth are subject to the ever-changing intellectual atmosphere of evolving communities. From Symonds's word-painting, lightning emerges as a polysemous symbol

absorbing in its image varying meanings, attached by varying societies and ages, and their varying religions.

After the experience of love with the maiden, Palumba, ‘High on the terraced hill-top’ (l. 643), surveys the prospect of the woods and mountainous landscape, contemplating love and death. His meditation is suddenly disturbed by an abrupt change in the physical landscape that mirrors his internal strife: ‘While thus he gasped, a scarce apparent fume | Rose and o’erspread the landscape like a spell’ (ll. 671-72). Here, the static mood of the poem – ‘Not a breath | Stirred those aërial silences’ (ll. 645-46) – is energised by the restless activity of the natural landscape, portentous of the oncoming disaster:

> Dense grew the air; earth shuddered; crash by crash
> In distance boomed a muttering thunder-knell.
>
> It roared and gathered volume. Then the flash
> Of steel-blue lightning, like a rapier through
> The thick mist slithering with a sudden gash,
>
> Dived in the forest. To the zenith flew
> Frothed curls of torn clouds, like a Fury’s tresses
> Entwined with quivering snakes. The slumberous blue
>
> Of heaven through all her aëry wildernesses,
> Was flecked and flaked with fire tumultuously
> Scattered in restless wreaths and writhed abysses. (ll. 671-83)

The image is infused with the apocalyptic destruction of Revelation 8:5 – ‘And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast *it* into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake’ – but the agitation of nature in the second stanza of Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’, also written in *terza rima*, equally informs the passage: Shelley’s clouds are ‘Angels of rain and lightning’ that

> are spread
> On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
> Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. (ll. 18-23)

Symonds's philosophical poem, in this apocalyptic moment, touches upon the fundamental aesthetic experience of the natural landscape, transforming this scene into an example of the apocalyptic sublime. The magnitude of the scene, the progressive growth of this apocalypse, is revealed through a series of semi-colons that briefly, but impactfully, show the development of the imminent doom. This doom is announced by a 'thunder-knell', that ominously anticipates the maiden's demise, but also reinforces the divine origin, as Palumba understands it, of this 'wreck of nature' (l. 703) – the 'thunder-knell' evokes the biblical God who 'thundereth with the voice of his excellency' and 'thundereth marvellously with his voice' (Job 37: 4-5). The lightning is 'a rapier', a weapon that siderates the 'sombre' (l. 645) forest, another comparison that bears biblical parallels: 'And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as lightning' (Zechariah 9:14), and 'Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them' (Psalms 18:14). The lightning as rapier is part of a series of allusions to the *itztli* that presage Palumba's death: before the apocalyptic scene, whilst gazing from the elevated terrace at the expansive prospect of trees and meditating on his impending death, Palumba felt 'the fear' of his demise 'Deep in his spirit like a stabbing knife | Plunged and replunged' (ll. 657-58).

As the tempest builds, the winds whirl, 'hail and dew [are] deliriously | Tossed into eddying fleeces' (ll. 686-87), and the mountain-summits erupt in 'a glare of amber' (l. 691). Palumba, from a distant 'battlemented' (l. 707) hilltop,

marks the forked flame, how it crosses
This way and that in flickering jags the gloom
Deep down above torn woods and yawning fosses. (ll. 708-10)

The power of the lightning belonging to the 'dread god' (l. 713) evokes the 'two-edged thunderbolt of living fire' of the deity, the 'minister' that 'never fails', in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*:[21]

> Under its dreadful blow
> All Nature reels; therewith Thou dost direct
> The Universal Reason which, commixt
> With all the greater and the lesser lights,
> Moves thro' the Universe.[22]

Lightning is the manifestation of the power of Zeus and a symbol of the power of the Christian God in the Apocalypse. Tezcatlipoca, the 'World-Spirit' (*MM* 254), was also associated with concepts that the power of lightnings evokes, especially with hurricanes as natural phenomena, enmity, and discord. Lightning is presented, in line with Cleanthes' *Hymn*, not as an arbitrary occurrence, but as the 'dreadful blow' under which 'All Nature reels' and the embodiment of fate. It is divine providence, determining the action of God as Law, the architectonic order of the universe.

THE EVOLUTION OF SYMBOLS: GARDENS AS SHIFTING LANDSCAPES

Although Symonds's anthropological inquiry into origins was influenced by Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, *Palumba* is not merely a poetical retelling of history. It conflates and intermingles history and allegory to exhibit, from an anthropological perspective, the mysteries and myths surrounding human existence. Symonds's investigation of *phusis* in the poem is represented by the garden as a symbol of the evolution of humanity, how human nature is expressed through its relation with and dominance over the landscape. In the Victorian period the sense of 'garden' had three salient significations: an area dedicated to the cultivation of culinary foods; a space 'devoted to flowers and botanical pursuits'; and, finally, 'to denote a more extended scene, characterised by forest trees, and walks for shade and recreation, and combining such other objects belonging to external scenery, as taste, art, or locality, may

[21] *The Hymn of Cleanthes, Greek Text Translated into English*, trans. by Edward Henry Blakeney (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), p. 8.
[22] Blakeney, *Hymn of Cleanthes*, p. 8.

confer', what was called 'landscape gardening'.[23] *Palumba* is Symonds's poetic response to landscape and includes different forms of gardens, living symbols of mutability whose function not only adapts and develops alongside changing societies, but their definition remains unfixed and ever-changing. Symonds's anthropological inquiry highlighted that the cultivation of gardens is a universal and unifying practice: they are not confined to a culture, society, or time – both the Mesoamericans and Victorian society engage in their cultivation – and therefore the garden becomes an apt symbol of adoption and adaption, of the process of civilisation. From his reading of Prescott, Symonds gleaned that societies are a product of past civilisations which are not necessarily circumscribed to their own cultural setting: 'It is not improbable that they [the Aztecs' 'systematic arrangement of plants'] suggested the idea of those "gardens of plants" which were introduced into Europe not many years after the Conquest' (Prescott 66). Thus, in the vein of speculation and suggestion that was germane to Symonds's thought, he accorded with Prescott's resolution that any claims to cultural superiority by the self-perceived civilised Victorians should be reviewed: 'Such are the accounts transmitted of these celebrated gardens, at a period when similar horticultural establishments were unknown in Europe' (Prescott 261).

References to the gardens of Tenochtitlan and horticultural practices are vividly illustrated by Prescott:

> The principal street, conducting from the great southern causeway, penetrated in a straight line the whole length of the city, and afforded a noble vista, in which the long lines of low stone edifices were broken occasionally by intervening gardens, rising on terraces and displaying all the pomp of Aztec horticulture. (Prescott 282)

Palumba elaborates on this native practice, exploring the ways in which the ancient civilisation exploited the landscape for the purpose of agriculture in a manner not alien to modern Europeans. The poem opens with a scenic description of the landscape, with an image of plant husbandry, of farmland and its cultivation: Tenochtitlan, entitled by Symonds as the 'City of the Sun', is bathed in 'the tides of morning' which 'pour | Full-flooding radiance over lawn and lea' (ll. 54, 66-67). As the poem progresses agricultural practice evolves to involve recreation, commerce, and trade. Specific types of trees, plants, and flowers are presented throughout *Palumba* and are adopted by Symonds as emblems to represent and discuss philosophical ideas

[23] John Loudon, 'Landscape Gardening', in *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, ed. by David Brewster, 18 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1808-1830), XII (1830), pp. 525-73 (p. 525).

concerning religion and culture within the modern scientific context of botany. Cedar, oak ('lightning-blasted', l. 415), pine, larch, palm, sycamore, yew, juniper, sandalwood, magnolia, terebinth, chestnut-wood, and rose are among the various trees included in the poem. Botanical references include the lily, rose, daffodil, hyacinth, anemone, lotus, wild sage, cyclamen, liana, asphodel, aloe, pampas-grass, sugarcane, ferns, snowflakes, asphodel, meadow mosses, gourds, and peaches. The description of gigantic cedars, producing shade and shelter by throwing their broad shadows over measured and crafted garden spaces, combined with the description of cultivated fruits and flowers, had an appeal to the increasingly contemplative religious mind and scientific interests (specifically arboriculture and horticulture) of Victorian England. Symonds's poem combines scientific analysis (focusing on Mesoamerica, which was relatively unknown to the nineteenth-century European reader) with artistic beauty to produce a philosophical narrative that vividly illustrates the process of God's 'unerringly unfolding energy' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 28), its manifestation in the universal process represented by the intimate relationship between the evolution of human thought and the external world as a consequence of those mind-determined thoughts.

The vivid description of the ancient city of Tenochtitlan with which the poem opens presents it as an earthly paradise with its grand vistas of sparkling lakes and sprawling forests. Illustrations of extended, spreading gardens are abundant in the poem and echo the pastoral gardens of antiquity with descriptions of coolness, repose, fragrance, and fresh breezes:

> Terraces
> And pyramids ascend with frieze and fret,
> Blazing on gold-embroidered galleries:
>
> While by the lake, with pale and parapet
> Fenced from the gleaming water, gardens bloom
> Mid cedared silences and orchards set
>
> With glimmering apples in an emerald gloom.
> But wheresoe'er throughout this Eden stray
> The perfumed paths, they lead but to the tomb. (ll. 234-42)

Embedded within the image of serene nature depicted in these lines is the intrusion of organised religious practice as suggested by the man-made ornamental edifices and the ornate

architectural designs. The transcendental, pantheistic communion between man and the cosmic essence of Tezcatlipoca, as the 'World-Spirit' (*MM* 254), in nature is encroached upon by material edifices and decadent architecture. The images of terraces, pyramids, and decorated galleries combined with language that appeared in seventeenth-century European landscape gardening treatises, such as 'frieze and fret', conflates the grandeur of Mesoamerican architecture and contemporary European garden management.[24]

The ornate nature of the gardens in *Palumba* intimately resembles the gardens in the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, both works having produced a significant impression on the mind of a young Symonds. Eden is not only decorative, embellished with beautiful plants and flowers, but it is also practical in its sustenance of its inhabitants and its mundane irrigation of flora: 'And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden […]. 9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food […]. 10 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden' (Genesis 2:8-10). In this sense, God is identifiable as a gardener. Eden is cultivated land with specific trees and plants planted by God to serve the inhabitants in terms of pleasure and function. The landscaped and ornamental qualities of Eden and *Palumba* are also identifiable in *Paradise Lost*. As Eden first comes into Satan's view, it is depicted as a dormant landscape of envious beauty: 'Sometimes towards Eden which now in his view | Lay pleasant, his grieved look he fixes sad' (*PL*, IV. 27-28). Paradise is 'delicious' to Satan, the shading trees are heavy with 'fairest fruit' and flowers 'of golden hue […] with gay enamelled colours mixed' (*PL*, IV. 132-49). Milton's management of chiaroscuro, his disposition of light and shade in the landscape pictures of *Paradise Lost*, effectively contrasts the hues of gloomy shadows cast by the trees with the vibrant fruits and flowers, a technique similarly employed by Symonds in *Palumba*: 'orchards set | With glimmering apples in an emerald gloom' (ll. 239-40). Like in *Paradise Lost*, observation plays a fundamental role in *Palumba*. The reader's gaze is directed by both poets towards patterns in nature and the significant symbols within it. Symonds's meticulous attention to and close

[24] Cf. 'Under this title might be also properly introduced sundry other ornaments of Gardens, especially such as have any Rising, and it would be enquired into, what approach of Trees may be allowed for the ornament of these workes, for it is our opinion that *Viridaria, Vireta, Walkes, Mounts, Groves, Fountaines* etc be the more principall, & all *Parterrs* and *Flowry Areas* but the trimmings and accessories of a noble Garden: The same {may} be concluded of *Pyramids, Cabinetts, Pavillions, Freezes, Niches, Pillars, {Pedistalls}, Corniches* and other parts and compositions of *Architecture*.' (John Evelyn, *Elysium Britannicum, or The Royal Gardens*, ed. by John E. Ingram (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 125.) Evelyn (1620-1706) was an English writer and horticulturalist who was perhaps best known for his treatise *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesty's Dominions* (1664). *Elysium Britannicum*, the seventeenth-century compendium on horticulture, was composed over forty years and first appeared in print, as a complete work, in the year 2000.

observation of present and past, familiar and foreign cultural modes of thought and practice, effectively synthesises various cultural symbols and characteristics in a single image to vividly illustrate the poet's working 'theory of Mythology' (*L*2 51) and the syncretism of cultural systems.

Within the Edenic Tenochtitlan, the sprawling forests and gardens in and around the palace are inhabited by wild and exotic animals – a boar, a lynx, snakes, and monkeys. There, too, are numerous ornithological references that include flamingos, swans, parrots, nightingales, linnets, thrushes, and songbirds. While the animals are symbolic elements that furnish the philosophical narrative – the role of the 'linnet' as harbinger of truth, as one who 'speak[s] to the rest of human kind' (*Memoirs* 470), echoes Shelley's nightingale whose power of song leaves its 'auditors […] as men entranced […] moved and softened' by its harmony even though they 'know not whence or why' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 680) – they, too, represent a synthesis of beauty and zoological study. The array of exotic animals in the poem, which includes some that are not native to Mexico, presents the ambitious scope and scheme of *Palumba* which require an understanding of contemporary trends to comprehend the composition as poetry and art. The gathering of wild animals, their collection and exhibition in the poem, transforms the composition into a poetical menagerie, the progenitor of the zoological garden or modern-day zoo. Prescott described the 'immense aviary, in which birds of splendid plumage were assembled from all parts of the empire', and the menagerie kept by Montezuma: 'Adjoining this aviary was a menagerie of wild animals, gathered from the mountain forests, and even from the remote swamps of the *tierra caliente*. […] With what deep interest would the enlightened naturalist of that day […] have surveyed this magnificent collection' (Prescott 286-87). *Palumba*'s combination of ornamental, mythological, and scientific gardens (the menageries for zoological and ornithological study), further emphasises the anthropological spirit of the poem, the synthesis of the familiar and unfamiliar in a single, common poetic frame.

The conflation of recreational gardening and the growing of produce for commercial purposes is best illustrated in the stanzas that introduce Palumba and describe his raft-like garden:

> On yonder raft, with dazed and half-dreaming eye,
> A young man fair as morning toward the town
> Star-turreted in light, looks earnestly.

Upon his hair is set a lilied crown
Of lotus pink and azure, wet with dew
From sleepy-petalled clusters dropping down.

About his feet shine flowers of every hue
The lush lake-gardens nourish; fruits up-piled
Mid sombre sprays of juniper and yew. (ll. 75-83)

The description of the 'floating garden' (l. 87) upon which Palumba stands, heaving with luscious fruits and beautiful flowers, is reminiscent of the historical *chinampas* (a term which Symonds did not employ), or floating gardens, mentioned by Prescott: 'They [the conquistadors] were amazed, also, by the sight of the *chinampas* or floating gardens,—those wandering islands of verdure […],—teeming with flowers and vegetables, and moving like rafts over the waters' (Prescott 259-60). Humboldt's historical narrative of the Aztecs also described the fertile floating gardens, and he recounted his observation of *chinampas* across all New Spain, including on the shallow lake beds of the river Guayaquil in the kingdom of Quito.[25] Initially natural formations 'carried away from the banks', the Aztec civilisation 'gradually carried this system of cultivation to perfection', constructing *chinampas* as resourceful inventions that showed the advancement, refinement, and industry of this society.[26] The *chinampas*, cultivated out of necessity for subsistence, were used for agricultural purposes: 'On these chinampas', observed Humboldt, 'are cultivated beans, small pease, [*sic*] pimento (chile, capsicum), potatoes, artichokes, cauliflowers, and a great variety of other vegetables.'[27] As *Palumba* demonstrates, they had an agricultural and ornamental purpose, for, along with the cultivation of these vegetables, 'The edges of these squares are generally ornamented with flowers, and sometimes even with a hedge of rose bushes.'[28] Practicality and beauty are harmonised in the image of the floating garden. The science and art of plant husbandry and landscape gardening are united in the common body of the *chinampas* to reveal the mystery surrounding the origin of gardening that parallels the elusive origin of cultural practice.[29] Thus,

[25] Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, trans. by John Black, 4 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811), II, p. 98.
[26] Humboldt, *Political Essay on New Spain*, II, p. 99.
[27] Humboldt, *Political Essay on New Spain*, II, p. 100.
[28] Humboldt, *Political Essay on New Spain*, II, p. 100.
[29] The obscure origin of gardening is expressed in Robert Pogue Harrison's *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 39-40: 'Conventional wisdom has it that gardens first arose either as a by-product of agriculture or as a form of primitive agriculture. This is sheer speculation, however, and when it comes to speculations about origins we would do better to credit the intuition of poets rather

the *chinampas* which Symonds includes in *Palumba* are emblematic of cultural systems (scientific and, in a wider context, social), their origin, development, and persistence in the ever-changing environment in which they exist.

The vagrant nature of the *chinampas,* these migratory and wandering formations of fertile land, are steeped in a philosophical symbolism that represents the poet's intimations of mortality. Symonds's depiction of the 'lush lake-gardens' (l. 82) is identical to Humboldt's illustration of the floating islands observed by him in New Spain, moveable and driven by wind or man.[30] The image of the travelling islands, as opposed to the static and fixed islands attached to the mainland also described by Humboldt in his essay, captured Symonds's imagination, stimulating the creation of a lengthy narrative that examines and discusses morality in relation to the central theme of the poem, the youth that dies prematurely. The image of the floating garden, teeming with colourful fruits and abundant with 'chalices | Of perfumed flowers to tempt each curious eye' (ll. 180-81), is overshadowed by images indicative of ephemerality and portending misfortune. In the union of the garden with images of ephemerality, the poem evokes the gardens of Adonis, described by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1894) as 'baskets or pots filled with earth, in which wheat, barley, lettuces, fennel, and various kinds of flowers were sown' which, along with effigies of Adonis as god of vegetation, 'were carried out and cast into the water' to commemorate Adonis's premature death.[31] Palumba's awareness of his own transience, the imminence of his dutiful death, is reflected by and in nature that mourns for and with him as he attempts to soothe his 'deep pain with melodies' (l. 89). The flower petals are drooping and dropping and the 'sombre' (l. 64) trees in the opening of the poem are mirrored again in the 'sombre sprays of juniper and yew' (l. 83), the yew a common poetic trope for sadness.[32] Nature, however, responds to Palumba's prayers, crowning him with the golden 'rays | Of sunrise' (ll. 171-72) that take precedence over the wreaths placed by the priests 'on a victim's hair' (l. 173). Palumba is thus Christ-like and dies a martyr to the 'obscene' (l. 212) beliefs and practices of popular religion. The floating gardens, as historical (*chinampas*) and mythical (of Adonis) conceptions, inform Symonds's construction of natural spaces in the poem, and underpin its central theme of the transience of youth.

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than the conventional wisdom, if only because poetry's calling is older than the world itself, while the conventional wisdom typically reflects the mentalities of creeds of a particular historic age'.

[30] Humboldt, *Political Essay on New Spain*, II, pp. 99-100.

[31] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, pp. 284-85.

[32] Cf. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*: 'Strew, oh, strew | Hair, not yew! | Wet the dusty pall with tears, not dew!' (IV. 15-17).

The geometry of Symonds's quasi-mythical land, especially the spatial arrangement of trees, is present in art, borrowing its images of picturesque beauty and leafy coverts from mythical and historical sources to sketch an idea of paradisal gardens that is acceded to universally.[33] *Palumba* opens with an illustration of 'all the dark-stoled forests', the 'sombre oak, and sycamore | Aërial, throned above the black ravine' rising up like sentinels from the riverbank, 'row by row' (ll. 62-65). The image of the anthropomorphic trees with their dark stoles, alluding to priests' vestments and the gowns of classical antiquity, reimagines the gardens of antiquity within a Mesoamerican setting, and evokes Milton's description of Melancholy as a 'pensive nun, devout and pure'

> Sober, steadfast, and demure,
> All in a robe of darkest grain,
> Flowing with majestic train,
> And sable stole of cypress lawn,
> Over thy decent shoulders drawn. (*Il Penseroso*, ll. 31-36)

The theme of artificial and, in this case, restricted space that conveys order is continued in the presentation of agricultural tutelage that parallels the measured architecture of the edifices. Thus, nature and artifice are visually inseparable: 'Through sombre aisle and solemn colonnade, | Where terebinth and cedar intertwined | Their sable boughs' (ll. 496-98). Language and its meanings create artfully ambivalent images, and sense perception is blended by the poet with introspection to convey the mystical interconnection between sight, knowledge, and thought. Like Milton's Pensive Man, who communes with 'th' unseen genius of the wood' (l. 154), and meditates in the architectonic space of the forest, Symonds's Palumba seeks 'the sanctuaries of solitude' (l. 504) provided by the forests for reflection and repose, an idea that has a historical correlation with Prescott's description of Montezuma's gardens:

[33] In the introduction to Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, Symonds explored his curiosity for the art of planting trees through Browne's work which adopted as its subject the structure and layout of the Persian groves of Cyrus. Browne's *Hydriotraphia* and its companion piece *The Garden of Cyrus* were published together in 1658, the year of Oliver Cromwell's death. Symonds examined the importance of the *quincunx* to Browne's analysis of structured tree-planting: the *quincunx* is 'that figure familiar to all of us in the five of a die or a domino, and in which, when oftentimes repeated, trees have from old times been planted' (Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici: Urn Burial, Christian Morals, and Other Essays*, ed. and intro. by John Addington Symonds (London: Walter Scott, 1886), p. xx).

> Montezuma's gardens stretched for miles around the base of the hill. […] and the grounds are still shaded by gigantic cypresses, more than fifty feet in circumference, which were centuries old at the time of the Conquest. The place is now a tangled wilderness of wild shrubs, were the myrtle mingles its dark, glossy leaves with the red berries and delicate foliage of the pepper-tree. Surely there is no spot better suited to awaken meditation on the past; none where the traveller, as he sits under those stately cypresses grey with the moss of ages, can so fitly ponder on the sad destinies of the Indian races and the monarch who once held his courtly revels under the shadow of their branches. (Prescott 288)

The division of the trees, their linearity and corridor-like passages, in the forest that Palumba enters as he leaves the city-state echoes the 'row by row' nature of the forests presented in the opening of the poem and appear to be controlled like the series of columns constructed in medieval church architecture. The image of Palumba moving 'Through sombre aisle and solemn colonnade' is anticipated earlier in the poem, but inverted in the presentation of the disorderly revellers 'Threading dim court and sculptured colonnade' (l. 249).

The shared qualities of the tangible and intangible in *Palumba*, and the complex ideas represented by symbolic language, echo Max Müller's examination of language in *Lectures on Science and Religion* (delivered in 1872 at the Royal Institution) in the context of understanding the inevitable misinterpretation by later translators and readers of ancient texts and ideas, what Müller identified as 'a process inherent in the very nature and growth of language, which, in fact, may be rightly called an infantine disease.'[34] He emphasised the unavoidability of the corruption of language over lengthy periods of time and the influence of this process on the religious thought of past, present, and future generations:

> I believe it can be proved that more than half of the difficulties in the history of religious thought owe their origin to this constant misinterpretation of ancient language by modern language, of ancient thought by modern thought.[35]

Müller observed in the language of the ancient prophets a poetic power that condensed within the descriptive nature of language the concrete and the abstract, the material and the spiritual,

[34] Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), p. 44.
[35] Müller, *Science of Religion*, p. 43.

'in a manner which has become quite strange to us, though it lives on in the language of every true poet.'[36] Symonds, who expressed an interest in Müller's *The Science of Language* (1861) – 'Cd [*sic*] you let me have M Müller's 2nd vol of Lectures on Language?' (to Charlotte, 16 February 1869; *L*2 46) – reiterated Müller's sentiments in his observation of scholars' attempts to explain *mythus* and their origins as 'a disease of language' ('Nature Myths', *ESS*2 129). It is however crucial to recognise that Symonds perceived the function of mythology in society as essential to the progress of civilisation, suggesting that the creation of myths by humans was 'a necessary moment in human thought' (*ESS*2 129). Mythology possessed 'enduring symbolical importance' (*ESS*2 129), moulding and forever shaping the imagination of successive generations.

The complexity of meaning, or the 'disease of language', that presents itself in the translation of words can be recognised in, for example, Symonds's presentation of the 'sombre aisle and solemn colonnade, | Where terebinth and cedar intertwined | Their sable boughs' (ll. 496-98). He, in the manner of the ancient poets alluded to by Müller, harmonises ancient and modern thought, the purely spiritual and the material. The adjectives 'sombre' and 'solemn' possess a dual nature, a polysemic quality similar to the emblems employed throughout the poem. The meditative and pensive mood of the scene is disturbed by connotations of gloom and the grave. The boughs, too, are emblems of sorrow and lamentation with their black mourning garments ('sable', l. 498) paralleling the 'dark-stoled' trees in the opening of the poem. The partitioned nature of the landscape with its masses of dark thickets indicative of fortification, and therefore perturbation from potential threat, is reminiscent of the 'sylvan scene' (*PL*, IV. 140) of Paradise that is surveyed, envied, and ultimately invaded by Satan in *Paradise Lost*. For Palumba, himself a symbol of the question of morality and innocence, this threat came in the form of his religious sacrifice by 'the pale priest' (l. 173) as well as the forcible colonisation of the ancient peoples and their city by the Spaniards; in Genesis and *Paradise Lost*, the threat was represented by Satan's defiant intrusion upon Eden:

> So on he fares, and to the border comes,
> Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,
> Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,
> As with a rural mound the champaign head
> Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides

[36] Müller, *Science of Religion*, p. 43.

> With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
> Access denied; and overhead up grew
> Insuperable height of loftiest shade,
> Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm,
> A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend
> Shade above shade, a woody theatre
> Of stateliest view. Yet higher than their tops
> The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:
> Which to our general sire gave prospect large
> Into his nether empire neighbouring round.
> And higher than that wall a circling row
> Of goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit. (*PL*, IV. 131-47)

The natural landscape in *Palumba*, like in *Paradise Lost*, becomes the space congenial to contemplation. Satan, like Palumba, outwardly perceives to internally reflect upon the physical environment and the place of humanity in the universe. Milton, like Symonds, juxtaposed images of open, unenclosed ('champaign') land with pictures of division and darkness – 'crowns', 'enclosure', 'overgrown', 'Access denied', 'Insuperable', 'loftiest shade', 'Shade above shade', 'woody theatre', 'verdurous wall', 'circling row'. The 'woody theatre' implies the performative setting of the garden, and Symonds, like Milton, transforms Eden into a stage. Whereas in *Paradise Lost*, the reader, alongside Satan, intrudes on the secluded and embowered garden, in *Palumba* the act of human sacrifice, set in a different socio-cultural context, is a public spectacle and anticipated ceremony – 'people gathered in the courts beneath' for Palumba's sacrifice, 'a joyous festival' pervaded by 'the enthusiasm | Of that hoarse crowd' (ll. 777, 782, 791-92).[37]

In *Palumba* and *Paradise Lost*, trees are an appropriate image upon which to poetise and consequently moralise, trees themselves being imbued by Symonds with ideations of bygone modes of thought and memories. The shifting of imagery between the tranquil certainties of external landscape and the fanciful, bewildering covets of the mind is prevalent in the poem, and nature is correspondent to man's shifting consciousness. *Palumba* therefore

[37] Cf. Prescott explained that 'From the constructions of their temples, all religious services were public. […] and the dismal rites of sacrifice performed there, were all visible from the remotest corners of the capital, impressing on the spectator's mind a superstitious veneration for the mysteries of his religion, and for the dread ministers by whom they were interpreted' (Prescott 35).

affirms a tightly knitted relationship between nature, the divine, and psychological introspection.[38] The shaded spaces provided by the verdurous trees are crucial locations in which man is reminded of the inscrutable power of a primeval force of which all things are a part. The spots of 'dappled glade' (l. 498) over which Palumba bounds are metaphorical representations of the shifting landscape or mood of the poet's mind. They reflect the spaces of the unknown and unseen, the unknowable and invisible, in the sceptical mind of the poet. There is the confluence of the extramundane and the mundane in the larger sphere of the poet's thought and his mysticism gives tone to his descriptions of physical landscape. The ancient umbrageous trees (oak and sycamore) with their leafy screens are described by Symonds as 'Aërial' (l. 65), as is the shade of the lumbrous palms and cypresses ('aërial', l. 494) and the 'silences' (l. 646) and 'aëry wildernesses' of heaven (l. 681). 'Aërial' is significant for its scientifically and philosophically charged meaning. It was used by naturalists and botanists to designate to the air, or, above ground, the natural habitat or dwelling-place of animals and plants; figuratively, it was associated with the representation of elevation, ascension, and the transcendental.[39] Symonds, in the syncretic manner typical of his poetic compositions, yoked

[38] The vitality of such a relationship between divinity, introspection (through sleep), and the image and sound of nature (waterfalls, rustling trees, and the singing nightingales), was expressed by Symonds in the essay 'Among the Euganean Hills': 'Then came the divine night of sleep in lowly bed-chambers with open windows, through which entered the songs of nightingales, the plash of falling waters, and the sough of heavy-foliaged trees' (John Addington Symonds, *In the Key of Blue and Other Prose Essays* (London: Elkin Matthews & John Lane, 1893), p. 29). Symonds recorded in *Memoirs* that, as a child, he read Friedrich Wilhelm Carové's *The Story Without End* and, thus, 'The mystical, dreamy communion with nature in wild woods and leafy places took my fancy, and begat a mood of *Sehnsucht* which became habitual' (*Memoirs* 67).

[39] The term is employed by Milton in *Paradise Lost* to represent notions of the metaphysical and imaginative realms, as well as the divine nature of things. The angelic songs are 'Aerial music' (*PL*, v. 548). Milton shifted between adjectives, from 'aerial' to 'airy', to allude to the incorporeal and allegorical as representative of ideas of transience and spirituality. Adam comforts Eve with the following discourse upon Reason, Fancy, and the hierarchy of human mental faculties after she discloses to him her unsettling dream foretelling the imminence of temptation:

> fancy next
> Her office holds; of all external things,
> Which the five watchful senses represent,
> She forms imaginations, airy shapes,
> Which reason joining or disjoining, frames
> All what we affirm or what deny, and call
> Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
> Into her private cell when nature rests.
> Oft in her absence mimic fancy wakes
> To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
> Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,
> Ill matching words and deeds long past or late. (*PL*, v. 102-13)

The use of 'aërial' in the scientific sense is evident in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859): 'plants climb by three distinct means, by spirally twining, by clasping a support with their sensitive tendrils, and by the emission of aerial rootlets' (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: A Variorum Text*, ed. by Morse Peckham (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), p. 346). The synthesis of the mundane and the ethereal

together concepts from the material and figurative realms; the word is reiterated throughout the poem to cast a metaphorically ominous shadow over the bucolic landscape that anticipates the tragic death of the young protagonist. This shadowy image is extended to the young maiden to mimic Palumba's dreary fate. She, like 'Philomel' (l. 546) who, in Ovid's retelling of the myth, was metamorphosed into a nightingale (*Metamorphoses*, VI. 438-674; LCL 42), cries 'Darkling mid cedar-boughs' (l. 592), singing in elegiac and sorrowful tones among the darkness of the tress.[40]

Symonds's disposition as advocated by the Goethean ideology to achieve a steady understanding of the whole pervades the images in *Palumba* for which nature provides apt motifs. The diverse landscapes, wild and cultivated, are steeped in emblems that denote perceptions of abstract ideas represented by material figures. The wild and alien landscape of the cordilleras through which Palumba wanders is brought to life by the synaesthetic amalgamation of sound and image: 'never foot of man before', the narrator remarks, 'Stirred the sere tangles of scythed pampas-grass' (ll. 331-32). The sibilance recreates the rustling sound of the dry and withered pampas, animating this word-picture. However, the idyllic vista is agitated by the destruction presaged by the word 'scythed', a symbol of death, and death is the nucleus of the narrative poem around which Symonds developed his speculative theories of popular religion. This image is intriguing in its presentation of the garden: the cordilleras are untrodden by man, yet the language of gardening, implying human presence expressed by the agricultural tool ('scythed'), sweeps through the picture of an uninhabited wilderness. The looming threat of the tool (evoking the *itztli* later in the poem) suggests that the garden is a temporary haven, a transitory and illusive paradise at the mercy of unintelligible forces.

The deformation of the beautiful pampas and the speedy scything of its feathery panicles are not only augural, indicative of the swift and untimely death of the 'fair youth' (l. 213). The image of the deformed grass with its lopped panicles recalls the image of the forsaken men met by Palumba earlier in the poem as he enters a 'lazar-house' (l. 385). Shaking 'against the skies in impotent blame | Their handless arms' (ll. 420-21), they resemble Dante's 'melancholy herd' (*Inferno*, XXVIII. 120) in the eighth circle of Hell: 'And one who walked with both his hands hacked off, | while lifting up his stumps through the dark air' (*Inferno*

within the context of the garden to discuss the innovation of scientific theories of evolution, philosophical ideas of ontology, and the unity between humankind and plants is realised in *The Loves of the Plants* in Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*. In a note on the poem, Erasmus expressed the power of plants to survive and adapt to the surrounding environment, referring to the ingenious efficiency of the 'aerial leaves of vegetables' (Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, p. 110).

[40] Cf. 'as the wakeful bird | Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid | Tunes her nocturnal note' (*PL*, III. 38-40).

XXVIII. 103-04). The metaphorical scythe of Time and Death anticipates the horrific manner of Palumba's sacrifice, his chest ceremoniously serrated with a 'sharpened flint' (l. 787). Symonds's description of Palumba's death indeed retained historical accuracy as he reworked Prescott's account into his poetic narrative:

> Five priests secured his [the victim's] head and his limbs; while the sixth, clad in a scarlet mantle, emblematic of his bloody office, dexterously opened the breast of the wretched victim with a sharp razor of *itztli*,—a volcanic substance, hard as flint,—and, inserting his hand in the wound, tore out the palpitating heart. (Prescott 37)

Death as allegory, the 'scythe' as metaphor, and the garden as ephemeral paradise reappear in Symonds's critical study *Giovanni Boccaccio, As Man and Author* (posthumously published in 1895), which also sought to comprehend the mysteries of life and death. The study revealed the deep impression made upon Symonds by Boccaccio's vivid portrayal, in *The Decameron* (written between 1348-1358), of the garden as a space that offered man a provisional diversion from reality, specifically the horrors of the plague. Similar to the landscape that surrounds the cordilleras of *Palumba*, Symonds identified Boccaccio's garden as a physical space upon which man can moralise, and perceived the people hiding in the vivacious garden – which forms a backstage to the corpse-riddled streets of Florence – as reprehensible for the desertion of 'their fellow-creatures'.[41] The garden is a space that is physical but also temporal; its function as a place of seclusion is transient. The illusory nature of the earthly paradise is emphasised by Symonds in the following passage, which mirrors the imagery of ephemerality in *Palumba* and alludes to ideas of justice and the omnipotence of inscrutable metaphysical forces over the mundane:

> black Death is hovering near them too, and may descend with sweeping scythe at any moment on their paradise. […] The brilliant masquerade of earthly life which he [Boccaccio] has painted with such inexhaustible variety, has the grave behind it and before it, and Death is ever passing to and fro among the dancers. […] Boccaccio was too great an artist to point this moral in a work of mirth and relaxation. There it is, however, like the grinning skeleton who threads the mazes of a *Danse Macabre*.[42]

[41] John Addington Symonds, *Giovanni Boccaccio, As Man and Author* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1895), p. 87.
[42] Symonds, *Boccaccio*, p. 87.

The ‘brilliant masquerade of earthly life’ set by Boccaccio in medieval Europe is recontextualised and reinterpreted by Symonds as a ‘dreadful pageant’ (l. 50) located in Mesoamerica. In *The Decameron* and *Palumba*, the hyper-sensory garden-scene permeated with vivid colours and a sombre mood is seeming; the dry, withered, and deformed landscape becomes the stage on which the reader perceives, through the eponymous character, the tangling of ideas of cultivation and wilderness, socio-cultural discipline and nature, to reiterate the notion of obscure origins (especially of myths) explored by Symonds in the poem.

***

The question of belief and its significance in the world of humanity pulses through the speculative utterances of *Palumba*. The narrator of the poem, as the inquiring observer, invites the reader to thread through the numerous mazes of its meaning. Symonds’s narrative mingles ideas of wandering and wondering; the wandering through the maze of ‘great trees’ is allegorical to the introspective wondering within the labyrinth of the mind: ‘From cedar unto palm, from sycamore | To sugar-cane, by many wildering maze, | Downwards they wandered’ (ll. 333-35).[43] The labyrinth or maze is used metaphorically by Symonds to symbolise perplexity and bewilderment. It draws into its system of symbolisation the themes of *phusis* and evolution to speculate upon the mythologising instincts of man that have constructed the whole of this labyrinthine and therefore inextricable philosophy of ontology.[44]

> Who knows? Who knows? Like the funereal clang
> Of ghastly brazen belfries out of tune,
> From age to age the cruel question rang,
>
> Which none hath answered. (ll. 19-22)

[43] Cf. ‘Others apart sat on a hill retired, | In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high | Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate, | Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, | And found no end, in wandering mazes lost’ (*PL*, II. 557-61).

[44] Ideas of classical unicursal (single-path) and multicursal (branching) mazes allegorise the paradoxical nature of theological fatalism, the mystery that surrounds humanity’s fated doom, as is implied in the discussion of Palumba and Adam in relation to the *felix culpa*. For a detailed discussion of the evolution of the knot gardens of Renaissance Europe into hedge mazes and garden labyrinths, and their religious symbolism, see Christopher McIntosh, *Gardens of the Gods: Myth, Magic and Meaning* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2005).

The question of absolute knowledge has not progressed or developed beyond the fixed state of the unknowable, nor can it ever do so. 'Therefore' (l. 22), Symonds resolved, man attaches meaning to material, mundane objects and erroneously relies on sensory perception only to come into the possession of a limited sense or cognition of life. For Symonds, the natural elements of the extraneous world were the 'signs' (l. 31) by which men taught and 'the poems' (l. 28) through which humanity engaged with the problems of death, thwarted vitality, and the understanding of the end of its visible existence:

> Mere symbols we perceive—the dying beauty,
> The partial truth that few can comprehend,
> The vacillating faith, the painful duty,
> The virtue labouring to a dubious end.[45] ('An Invocation', ll. 29-32; *MM* 205)

Here, the prevalent mood is one of acquiescence bordering on well-reasoned nihilism that is symbolised by an unstable and ever-fluctuating 'vacillating faith'. In *Palumba*, however, glimpses of divine revelation or 'partial' truths appear only by means of light directly emanating from the sun – solar phenomena and the resplendence of the sun bearing special symbolism in comparative literary studies for anthropologists such as Müller, and of particular importance to *Palumba*, set in 'the City of the Sun' (l. 54). The 'unlidded' noonday rays issued forth from the radiant sun pierce through the fuliginous gloom of the 'black abysses' (l. 337) to reveal, through the metaphor of observation, flashes of the divine or Beauty, Goodness, and Truth. Symonds, once again, harmonised notions of materialism and idealism to present here a personal understanding of ontology that allowed him to exist tranquilly and 'resolvedly in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful' (*Memoirs* 469), in the manner of 'a Stoic-Epicurean' with a 'temper of mind which accommodates itself to everything, and finds everything passable good' (*Memoirs* 420).

Symonds's irrepressible scepticism, however, re-surfaces in the epilogue of *Palumba*:

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[45] Cf. 'Antiquarian theorists may persuade us that myths are decayed, disintegrated, dilapidated phrases, the meaning of which had been lost to the first mythopoeists. But they cannot tell us how these splendid flowers, springing upon the rich soil of rotting language, expressed in form and color to the mental eye the thoughts and aspirations of whole races, and presented a measure of the faculties to be developed during long ages of expanding civilizations. If the boy is father of the man, myths are the parents of philosophies, religions, and polities' ('The Periods of Greek Literature', *GP*1 14). The allegory of flowers as enduring, artistic myths invented by the mythopoeist is the visual representation of the thoughts and instincts intrinsic to the civilisation within which they exist.

Life is hurled
Hither and thither reckless on the tide
Of Being: yet the basest worm encurled

Within a tortured sinew, hath not died
Save by some dread immutable decree. (ll. 891-95)

The dissonance of a volatile and violent state of existence ('hurled', 'Hither, 'thither', 'reckless') is juxtaposed by the notion of an awesome force that possesses a controlled and changeless dominance over all things, by a 'dread immutable decree'.

On the restless sea,
Whereof our souls are waves a little while,
There is no room for Death. It cannot be.— (ll. 897-99)

While the expression of ontological confusion, of the material and nothingness, reflects the turbid nature of Symonds's thought, it also echoes, in phraseology and sentiment, the invisible and persistent torment of suicidal thought recorded in his prose: 'I contemplated suicide. But: Death is not acceptable; it offers no solution' (*Memoirs* 341). Just as the prologue of *Palumba* delineates a primordial state of nothingness, a beginning in which material and mental life spring from void, the poet's thought, in the epilogue, returns to a state of introspection and meditation.

The motif of disturbed and troubled waters – reminiscent of the metaphorical depiction of the uncertainty of man's faith and his place in the universe by Matthew Arnold in 'Dover Beach' (1867) as the mind's 'turbid ebb and flow | Of human misery' (ll. 17-18) – is reiterated throughout *Palumba* and employed by Symonds to elucidate the protean nature of his thoughts on religion and understanding of death.[46] The conflicting states of moral and religious virtue haunted Symonds from an early age and, in a letter to Henry Dakyns (November 1866), he similarly expressed his psychological struggle in a hydrological metaphor: 'my soul is a

[46] *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. by Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005), p. 374. See Symonds's letter to Henry Graham Dakyns (28 April 1879): 'As the wind blows, I whirl from the billows to the sandbanks & from the sandbanks to the billows. I have ceased to hold up Blake's arm of the soul from the midst of the waters that go over me. Goodbye. Exhibito nihil fit [Nothing is made of nothing]' (*L*2 590). Schueller and Peters suggest that the illustration to which Symonds refers is "Help! Help!" (*The Gates of Paradise*, Plate 10). (See *Illuminated Blake*, p. 273.)

maelstrom of thoughts and passions' (*L*1 677). The motion of the rivulets in *Palumba* is symbolic of the poet's disconcerted stream of thought, one that flows away from dogmatic perceptions and gravitates towards the existence of an incomprehensible divine force. The surges of water are forward 'fretting' and 'eddy[ing]' (ll. 133, 136), interrupted streams of thought that circle round in welling whirlpools to run against the easeful course of the tide, and expose the indefatigable, speculative nature of Symonds's mental temperament that evokes the familiar image of the man 'swimming down the stream of competitive existence' ('Preface', *ESS*1 viii).

The speculation of knowledge in relation to *mythus*, perceptions of the real and conceptions of the abstract, culminates in *Palumba*'s epilogue to express the belief that a greater unconceivable truth governs all things. Primitive myths, rudimentary as they may seem in light of scientific advancement, possessed an element of truth conveyed in symbols. These ancient faiths, more than the evolved systems of reasoned thought, permeated Symonds's mind and gave a characteristic tone to all his utterances: 'Whether we choose to call that world-stuff by the name of Spirit or Matter signifies nothing; for these names are merely symbols, like the *x* and *y* of Algebra' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 24). Humanity's ever-advancing knowledge of the external world, spurred by scientific innovation, paradoxically distanced human beings from discovering truth: 'Faith, Instinct, Science, Hope, can but beguile | Your ignorance with guesses light as air' (ll. 902-03), warned Symonds, and humanity, dwindling and hopeless, heaps 'Dust of delusion on your heart's despair' (l. 901). Although scientific investigations into theological and cosmological mysteries in the late-nineteenth century resulted in the ongoing attenuation of the idea of God, they did not entirely eradicate it:

> Slow knowledge widens to a perfect whole,
> From that first man who named the name of heaven,
> To him who weighs the planets as they roll,
> And knows what laws to every life are given.
>
> Yet He appears not. ('An Invocation', ll. 13-17; *MM* 204)

From divine knowledge immortalised in Scripture to rational knowledge blueprinted in the organisation of cosmological entities, God remains unknown, cloaked in darkness – 'Him, knowing not, we know' (*Palumba*, l. 909) – and the divine and imperceptible element of ether

remains ‘unseen’, wrapped ‘Round the extreme sphere | Of science’ (‘An Invocation’, ll. 17-18; *MM* 204).

In *Palumba*, however, the notion of God as a pervasive, metaphysical yet unidentifiable force is distilled from the *mythus* of world religions and assumes a renewed presence in correlation to hamnity’s scientific knowledge of the universe; it is concerned with the essential signification of science, culture, and religion within the larger sphere of universal and enduring ideas. The poem attempts to extract from symbols the quintessence of the benevolent force that is God and present it as a sympathetic and omnipresent energy that pulses through all matter, organic and inorganic. *Palumba*, therefore, attempts to assimilate its symbols with the work of nature and the arts connecting past and present generations to the pervasive force of the pantheistic World-Soul. This metaphysical philosophy that promulgates a belief in a cosmic unity is reminiscent of the speculative philosophy of Giordano Bruno that asserts an ‘intuition into the sempiternally inscrutable’ (*Memoirs* 469). Bruno, Symonds explained,

> sketched in outline the comparative study of religions. It is obvious that he regarded no one creed as final, no sacred book as exclusively inspired, no single race as chosen, no teacher or founder of a faith as especially divine, no Church as privileged with salvation. (‘New Spirit’ 443)

A similar humanistic spirit with a holistic tendency diffuses itself through *Palumba* to exalt syncretism in every possible form. Each extraneous creation of Symonds is vitally joined to his faith in the universe as a manifestation of a supreme, spiritual force. It is in all things, material and metaphysical – the whisperings of the ‘murmurous’ (l. 508) trees, the fiery mountain peaks and their torrential waterfalls, the apoplectic lightnings, and the star-like epiphany that pierces through the dim ‘vapours’ of thought and ‘soul’ (ll. 279-80) – that the supreme Force everlastingly abides. Although nations and creeds rise and fall with the progression of time, although thought and the physical landscape by which it is impressed is ever-changing, the sacred lamp of the World-Spirit perennially burns; and all things, including humanity, are sparks of its eternal light.

III

Cosmic Vistas: Astronomical Imaginings in Symonds's Poetry

The Copernican astronomical system that displaced the Earth from the centre of the universe, placing, instead, the Sun at the heart of our sidereal system, was a cosmological idea that profoundly influenced Symonds's thoughts on the variety of life, the infinity of space and time, and the mystery of man's place in a developing cosmos. The sense of doubt introduced by the hypothesis, its challenge to the assumptions of medieval Christianity, and its influence on systems of theology, metaphysics, and morals, reshaped the ways in which man regarded himself in the greater scheme of the universe. 'The discovery,' wrote Symonds, 'published by Copernicus in 1543, by simply shifting the position of our globe in space, shook the ponderous fabric of scholastic theology to its foundations' ('The Philosophy of Evolution', *ESS*1 4). Earth as a celestial object lost its rank as the superior creation of God; the Sun was relegated to the position of merely one of innumerable solar bodies in the vastness of unbounded space. After Nicolaus Copernicus, astronomy, too, denied received ideas of human 'eminence':

> Man's station of eminence in the kosmos ceased to seem manifest. It became difficult to take the scheme of salvation, God's sacrifice of himself in the Second Person of the Trinity for the advantage of a race located on a third-rate planet, literally. Some mythical parts of the religion, which had been previously held as facts, were immediately changed into allegories. For instance, the ascension of Jesus from the mountain lost its value as an historical event when the brazen vault of heaven, or the crystal sphere on the outer surface of which God sat, had been annihilated; when there was no more up or down, and when a body lifted into ether would obey the same laws of attraction as a meteoric stone. ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 4-5)

The astronomical discoveries which led to the growing resolution of the insignificance of humankind's place in the universe permanently influenced Christian dogma in a manner that was irreversible. What was once held, in popular belief, as literal, historical fact became relegated to the domain of mystical symbolism. 'The nature of this revolution in astronomy', Symonds added, 'made it of necessity destructive to the external coatings and integuments of religion' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 5). Though Symonds recognised the cyclical and repetitive

nature by which all forms of faith were irrecoverably affected by the ever-expanding grasp of scientific knowledge, he did not entirely renounce his personal sense of faith. Rather, he attempted to restore meaning to human existence by harmonising shifting religious and scientific perspectives. He created what he understood as 'a new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412), a presentation of philosophical thought expressed in prose and poetry that combined within it the creative energy of the ancient Greeks, the facts supported and defended by modern science, and his own highly personal synthesis of knowledge, so as to rekindle faith in the all-pervasive spirit of nature.

Symonds's correspondence offers an important context for understanding his creative engagement with popular scientific thought and experiments. His letters are also a record of his acquaintanceship with eminent persons of the period. Writing on 20 April 1865, he revealed to Henry Graham Dakyns that he had spent 'the last ten days' at Collingwood, Sir John Herschel's estate in Kent, which had a profound impact on Symonds: Collingwood, he explained, 'shames one: it is so full of good work done, so redolent of a high unselfish and contended life. I think we shall be here now for a long time' (*L*1 536).[1] The process by which Herschel attenuated astronomical speculations to formulate scientific hypotheses of man's place in the universe is apparent in Symonds's pattern of thought. Herschel started *Outlines of Astronomy* (1849) by delineating the process by which the student of science, in the attempt to gain knowledge and understanding, must necessarily purge their mind of all preconceptions of the universe, a crucial aspect in the advancement of intellectual thought in the early-nineteenth century. They must be willing to 'unlearn' all received notions of the world by becoming unprejudiced and open to knowledge derived from careful examination and rational argument.[2] He must, in turn, be unprejudiced and porous to knowledge derived from careful examination and rational argument. This mental disposition, according to Herschel, would facilitate the initial but vital movement 'towards the state of mental purity which alone can fit us for a full and steady perception of moral beauty as well as physical adaptation'.[3] Herschel elevated astronomy above all other scientific disciplines and celebrated its monumental achievements in relation to man's progressive thought about the universe and his place within it.

Symonds's poetry owes as much to his observation of nature and meditative reasoning as it does to his inventive imagination. Words became the symbols through which he

[1] Such was the involvement of the Symondses with the Herschels that Maria Sophia Hardcastle, daughter of John Herschel, was one of Catherine's bridesmaids at her wedding to Symonds, as her account included in *Memoirs* reveals (*Memoirs* 274).
[2] John Herschel, *Outlines of Astronomy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), p. 1.
[3] Herschel, *Outlines*, p. 2.

externalised a mental conception of the object as it was perceived by him in a particular mood. Heavenly bodies and cosmic space were emblems used as points of discussion concerning eternal problems: what is the origin and fate of mankind? Is there an underlying structure to the existence of all things in the universe? Where is the place of mankind in the larger scheme of cosmos? Why does life imply for mankind a laborious upward effort, and how does one cope with and endure such a lonely fate? These concerns Symonds expressed in, but are not circumscribed to, *Animi Figura* (1882), perhaps his most respected volume of verse, which contains one-hundred-and-forty meditative sonnets grouped as a set of sequences bearing individual titles, some of which were previously published in *Many Moods* and *New and Old*. It is a volume abundant in images of and references to the inwardly gazing eye and the vast fabric of the cosmos that is extramundane, and explores how these two seemingly separate realms inform and mirror one another. *Animi Figura* exemplifies the extent to which Symonds's poetry is analytical, as John Holmes has observed, and it raises, as this chapter will show, through its investigation of Victorian astronomy, profound moral questions.[4]

Symonds's way of reading nature combined within its system the Greek and modern manner of perceiving landscape. On the one hand, *Animi Figura* is imbued with a mysticism that, in line with Greek thought, deifies and anthropomorphises universal powers, symbolising them in nature. This process of the mind to attempt to understand the ideal through natural objects was called, by Symonds, the 'imaginative reason' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 79). On the other hand, the sonnet sequence syncretises the artistic rendering of mysteries by the ancients with Victorian science, specifically the study by the poet of the motions and positions of celestial objects as he perceived them in the night sky. The dialectic of the internal and external unfurls to reveal a universal rhythm. It shifts from an inward depth (the psyche) to an outward one (the cosmos), in an attempt to discover the ideal self, elevated and spiritualised. The synthesis of Romantic and religious imagery in the volume conveys the perspective from which Symonds viewed himself and his attraction to the gloriously active night sky, in addition to his singular way of relating to the literary and intellectual culture of his time.

[4] John Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Late Victorian Sonnet Sequence: Sexuality, Belief and the Self* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). Holmes emphasises the unique nature of *Animi Figura* in relation to its scope, and its significance within the poetic form of the late-Victorian sonnet sequence. The poem, he suggests, can 'hold its own alongside those of the Rossettis for […] poetic strength and insight' (p. 121). He acknowledges the sequence as 'the fullest and most sympathetic Victorian exploration of homosexuality in verse' while also making salient its brilliant poetry and inventive use of form: 'it is an eloquent and highly intelligent engagement with the spiritual crises of its day, and a pioneering representation of the human mind which anticipates aspects of structuralism and analytic psychology' (p. 121).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the interrelations of Symonds's poetry, particularly his sonnet sequence *Animi Figura,* and the science of astronomy, in a re-examination of his literary work that will intensify the understanding of the scope and complexity of the innovative interpenetrations of poetry and science in Symonds's thought. In addition to being a self-reflexive exploration of his homosexuality, *Animi Figura,* and indeed much of his poetical output, offers a lucid discussion of the interdependence of science and religion as expressed in poetry, considered by Symonds to be superior to all art forms. The chapter will therefore investigate the influence of the astronomical literature and terminology of the period, as well as Symonds's own star-gazing, for the formulation of intellectual thought processes in the creation of his 'new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412). His 'new metaphysic' – the formal, systematic presentation of his thought – conciliated the creative energy of classical thought and facts supported and defended by modern science, and established its own principles from his interpretation of the night sky. Symonds thus emerges as a poet who imaginatively grasps the conclusions of science, whose work is imbued with a belief that 'science is more vitally poetical than art' ('A Comparison of Elizabethan with Victorian Poetry', *ESS*2 271).

The discussion in this chapter will be organised in two sections. The first will bring into relief the connections between astronomy in nineteenth-century Britain – discoveries of the history and progression of planets and stars, and John Lubbock's demonstration of astronomical laws in his inaugural address to the British Association in 1881 – and Symonds's fundamental conception of the universe and the place of man within it. It will explore the influence of the experimental workings of nineteenth-century scientific discourse and the Graeco-Roman imagination on Symonds's literary output, and consider the ways in which this scientific and imaginative relationship facilitated Symonds's ideas about man's place in the universe, to present him as a poet who anticipated a 'new metaphysic' in the poetry of astronomy. The second section will explore the importance of landscape for Symonds's astronomical ruminations, specifically the reciprocal nature of the physical environment and his thought processes. The prospect afforded by his location in Davos and his position in valleys or on mountains was inextricably linked to Symonds's creative outputs. His aesthetic response to mountains and valleys, his 'Revelations of Elevation', presented this particular landscape as the material and mystical conjunction of heaven and earth, divinity and nature, the imagination and its material surroundings.[5] Symonds will thus emerge as a nature poet, 'a

[5] The expression 'Revelations of Elevation' is used by Simon Bainbridge as the title of the fourth chapter of his *Mountaineering and British Romanticism: The Literary Cultures of Climbing, 1770-1836* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

phrase that recurs with deadening regularity in the twentieth-century', within the abundant genre described by W. J. Keith as an 'intractable mass',[6] concerned with and exemplary of 'what happens when men and mountains (and other natural objects) meet, and their encounter is recorded in verse'.[7]

'THE PHAROS-FLAME OF ALGOL': THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN LUBBOCK'S WINKING DEMON ON SYMONDS'S POETIC IMAGINATION

In his inaugural address to the British Association in 1881, John Lubbock reflected on the history of science and its progress since the beginning of the Victorian era. In the half-century that had elapsed since the first meeting of the British Association in 1831, he suggested, the scientist, by the advancement of scientific methods of observation and experiment, was more capable of understanding the 'true meaning' (Lubbock 4) of things. Lubbock celebrated the prolific achievements in the field of biological sciences, and the extraordinary discoveries it had engendered, discussing at great length numerous branches of scientific and experimental development, which included embryology, microscopic organisms, disease, the condition of pre-historic man, botany (systematic and geographical), geology (the physical structure of the earth), palaeontology, geography (lakes, volcanoes, glaciers, oceans), hydrography, astronomy, colour theory, photography, electricity, mathematics, chemistry, and economic and mechanical sciences. Lubbock believed that man's admiration for the wonders of nature, although once simple, had advanced through the progress of science, to express a deeper and intimate understanding by man of his physical environment. The publication of modern scientific discoveries, ranging from that of the German naturalist Christian Konrad Sprengel (1750-1816), later popularised by Charles Darwin, of the surprising relation existing between flowers and insects that revealed the role of the latter in the distribution of pollen among flowers, to the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, illustrated the remarkable progress of the biological sciences.[8]

Although Lubbock addressed an age when science had been so prolific, he was aware that there was still much more to learn and that such insights into the biological nature of things

[6] W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 4.
[7] Keith, *Poetry of Nature*, p. ix.
[8] Although the discovery of the benefits of cross-pollination and the essential role of insects in the pollination and fertilisation of flowers made by Sprengel in the close of the eighteenth century attracted little attention, Darwin revived interest in the phenomenon with the publication, in 1862, of *The Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilised by Insects*, which was directly inspired by his reading of Sprengel.

were little more than 'glimpses' (Lubbock 4) of the truth – things, as they exist, are merely transient and imperfect glimmers. It is significant, however, to recognise that the 'glimpses of truth', offered to humanity by science, were not suggestive, in Lubbock's opinion, of the supremacy of nature as impenetrable and inscrutable. His emphasis, like the traditional historians of astronomy whose technical study exhibited its 'descriptive, explanatory and predictive power', lay in the possibility offered to humans by science to apprehend, through observation and experiment, reasonable explanations for the biological state of the universe.[9] Lubbock's faith in the revelatory power and momentous force of science as superior to the common perception that 'there are certain ultimate problems which must ever remain unsolved' (Lubbock 89) was reiterated in the conclusion of his speech. He refrained, however, from fixing to scientific discoveries such limitations, 'how unsafe it is to limit the possibilities of science' (Lubbock 54), and believed in the growing force of science – 'one great lesson of science is, how little we yet know, and how much we have still to learn' (Lubbock 90).

The improvements to methods of seeing made by such pioneering figures as Joseph Lister (1827-1912) and Francis Wenham (1824-1908) raised such inventions to eminent significance in the search for more profound and far-reaching conceptions of the universe. Developments in the spectroscope, the instrument that permitted scientists to investigate the composition of stars by measuring the light emitted by them, helped science to reimagine the heavenly firmament, including the constitution of the Sun, the composition of the stars, shooting stars, comets, and extinct stars. Lubbock celebrated the spectroscope and the extensive collection of observations generated by it, especially its use in the field of astronomy to analyse the luminosity of the heavenly bodies. In 1863, William Allen Miller (1817-1870) and William Huggins (1824-1910) used astronomical spectroscopy to make their own discoveries of the composition of stars (Lubbock 50). They provided photographic evidence of the spectra of the stars, observing that their composition was not impossible to explain. They stated with confidence 'that these beautiful and mysterious lights contain many of the material substances with which we are familiar' (Lubbock 50). The mighty revelation of chemical matter that was 'familiar' and not obscure in origin, was, for Lubbock, testament to the triumphant spirit of science to discern the mysteries of the universe. These celestial objects, pregnant symbols imbued by humankind, since ancient times, with the beauteous but ineffable spirit of the universe, were refigured by the scientist and denuded of their mystery.

[9] Pamela Gossin, *Thomas Hardy's Novel Universe: Astronomy, Cosmology, and Gender in the Post-Darwinian World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 21.

Lubbock praised the unwavering capability of the scientist to exercise authority over cosmic systems. He assigned to the astronomer a power to apprehend, through his intellect and the invention and use of 'powerful engine[s] of investigation' (Lubbock 50), a superior knowledge of the physical universe: 'we can make the stars teach us their own composition with light which started from its source in some cases before we were born' (Lubbock 51). Power is conceived in this phrase not as physical force, but as a matter of intellect; it is the potential and capability of man to unrestrainedly expand his knowledge of the cosmos. Symonds, however, regarded the limits of knowledge as the ultimate truth.[10] The expression of specialist knowledge and its categorisation into fields or treatises was, for Symonds, merely and perpetually provisional. Although he clung to the belief in the ever-recurring pattern of Law in the cosmos, logical explanations (scientific and philosophical) of the universe being successively abandoned as relative science progressed, he resolutely and sincerely believed in man's power to obtain knowledge of the world, but this was and would be always partial. Such logical conclusions were drawn from the retrospective analysis of the historical development of human thought. In *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879), the following fact vitalises Symonds's enthusiasm for his belief in humankind's ever-broadening grasp on partial knowledge:

> But as regards *absolute knowledge*—knowledge, that is to say, of what the universe really is, and of how it became what it seems to us to be—Lucretius stood at the same point of ignorance as we, after the labours of Darwin and of Spencer, of Helmholtz and of Huxley, still do. ('Lucretius', *SSI* 111)

These great figures of scientific advancement, Symonds stated, apprehended the universe as Lucretius did, as a fragment. They would forever grasp feebly at the 'filmy phantoms' ('An Old Gordian Knot', III. 14; *AF* 81) of their own creations. Every detail of the world humans know forms the essential facts of the universe as contemplated by man. But of God, the boundless and eternal organism of the universe, Symonds remarked: 'The mystery flies before us, and will ever fly' ('The Limits of Knowledge', *ESS*2 287).

[10] Cf. 'All we can do is to point to the fact that the circumambient atmosphere of human ignorance, with reference to the main matters of speculation, remains undissipated. The mass of experience acquired since the age of Lucretius is enormous, and is infinitely valuable; while our power of tabulating, methodising, and extending the sphere of experimental knowledge seems to be unlimited. Only ontological deductions, whether negative or affirmative, remain pretty much where they were then' ('Lucretius', *SSI* 114).

Yet science, perceived by Symonds as the systematic pursuit of certainty and, equally, as open to the idea of knowledge being challenged and revised, was not, for him, the object of dread. Although the keynote of 'The Limits of Knowledge' is Symonds's suggestion that man, as a part of the world, 'cannot get outside himself, cannot leap off his own shadow' ('Limits', *ESS*2 285) and is therefore able to conceive of the universe merely 'as a mode of his own consciousness' ('Limits', *ESS*2 286), this did not preclude his endorsement of modern science. He expressed a strong faith in 'the wisest' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 24) scientists, 'these strong brains that dare' ('On the Sacro Monte', VII. 3; *AF* 93), those who, like Darwin, practised science in a 'positive and neutral spirit' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 25) and accepted the existence of the great mysteries that will ever lie beyond the limited scope of man's intellect. Man's lofty intellect, although always a portion of the whole, is significant and inextricably bound to the progress of relative science, of which 'the demonstration of astronomical laws' altered 'the fundamental relations of thought' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 103). The shift in man's reception of ideas, influenced by the demonstration of astronomical laws, forever transformed the religion of that age and the conception of universal order. Symonds, like Lubbock, rejoiced in the grand discoveries bestowed upon the popular imagination by astronomy. However, unlike his contemporary, Symonds retained an adherence to the mystery and supremacy of God as Law: 'Naught shall remain of […] | This wondrous knowledge, these strong brains that dare' ('On the Sacro Monte', VII. 2-3; *AF* 93). Almightiness, that is to say, the Spirit of the universe (as opposed to Lubbock's conception of it as the excellence and superiority of man's boundless intellect), manifests itself to humanity through physical power; it is the Force of Life or, to borrow Percy Bysshe Shelley's expression, the 'Life of Life' (*Prometheus Unbound*, II. 5. 48), the divine architect and essence of all things immaterial and organic.

Symonds did not necessarily consider himself to be a poetic theorist in any significant sense of that phrase. He did not compose poetry that formally formulated or purported theoretical concepts. The inheritance of the peculiarities of his age, however, resulted in experimental compositions that attempted to absorb into their poetic framework the contemporary ideas and scientific experiments permeating the popular imagination. In this context, *Animi Figura* is a dynamic poem in which an imaginary personality moves through his moods as he attempts to understand his position in a world infinitely subject to the law of change. The progression of the poem relies on its self-reflexive quality, analysing its own thoughts with the motivation to achieve infinite harmony, or *versöhnung*, in its cognisance of

self and the world.[11] The first half of the volume presents the psychological unrest experienced by the poet-speaker, the contradiction of his passions and lamentations, whilst he attempts to reconcile his homosexuality with the varying philosophical problems on which he speculated. The latter half of the poem moves beyond the discussion of Symonds's sexuality and endeavours to combine, with the intent to transfigure, his inherent contradictions concerning faith, science, and cosmos.

The adoption of contemporary astronomical subject-matter in *Animi Figura* elevates its significance as a defining work of contemporary relevance, one that, alongside the works of Matthew Arnold, Alfred Tennyson, and Christina Rossetti, is symbolic and imaginative in its treatment of the ideas of the age. Throughout his correspondence, Symonds expressed the great extent to which theories (religious, scientific, and philosophical) and practical experiments influenced the ways in which he interpreted the world he observed. A letter written to Horatio Brown on 2 November 1881 (around two months after Lubbock's address) reveals how Symonds shaped his poems experimentally around theoretical concepts, even, at times, employing the appropriate vocabulary of the specific disciplines. Although the letter remains incomplete, the published fragment openly declares the influence on his imagination of the astronomical discoveries addressed by Lubbock in his paper: 'Funny: his [Tennyson's] imagination, like mine, has been taken by the fact recorded by Sir John Lubbock of the *dead suns*' (*L*2 703). It is, however, crucial to note that although Symonds, through his reading of Lubbock, exhibited an interest in the history of astronomy in its purely scientific context, his poetry did not intend to stress his speculations of the universe and man's place within it in the form of an exact science. Symonds's analyses and interpretations of the material universe were informed by astronomy and its history, but his work displays an amateur interest in, rather than a professional study of, cosmic systems.

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[11] *Versöhnung* is a concept that relates to Georg W. F. Hegel's social project of reconciliation of the individual with himself and with society. Although usually translated into English as 'reconciliation', the term in its German original is imbued with a positive connotation that the English, in its suggestion of submission and relinquishment, lacks. The English sense is found in the German *abfinden*. Hegel proposed a system of social and personal transformation through an acceptance of difference: only when two opposing parties in a state of discord embrace each other's difference and reform their moral and intellectual dispositions can there be a transformed social state, and true *versöhnung*, or harmony, achieved (see Timothy C. Luther, *Hegel's Critique of Modernity: Reconciling Individual Freedom and Community* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009). Symonds absorbed v*ersöhnung* as a guiding principle and delineated the workings of this system in music, for, in music, he found the truest artistic expression of *versöhnung*:

> The truest *Versöhnung* in art I know is to be found in Beethoven's C Minor Symphony. There he first posits all the contradiction of passions, aspirations, and sorrows, then combines them without losing their separate individualities; but so transfiguring them that the termination is triumph; the victory and majesty of the soul are wrought out of its defeats and humiliations. Music alone can do this. (To Henry Sidgwick, 22 August 1867; *L*1 750-51)

'On the Sacro Monte' is a cluster of twelve sonnets that appears in the latter half of *Animi Figura*. It begins with the poet-speaker's ascent of a mountain in Lombardy, on Easter morning. On his excursion, the poetical voice encounters a chapel, its physical location and architecture inspiring the speaker to contemplate the protean nature of faiths and to meditate upon the existence and (ir)relevance of man-made creeds in relation to the limitless expanse of the universe. Expressing the impact of Lubbock's address on his poetic imagination, the connection between astronomical discoveries and his imagination, Symonds composed the following stanza, included as the sixth sonnet in the 'On the Sacro Monte' sequence, and added, with minor variations, in the letter of 1881 to Brown discussed above:

> Man too shall fade and perish. That must be.
> The fields of space with seventy million suns
> Sparkle. For each, for all, time's hour-glass runs
> Toward some fixed moment of mortality.
> Look up: 'tis night: there on that starry sea
> The Pharos-flame of Algol ebbs and flows;
> Now shrinks to twilight, now intensely glows;
> Waxing and waning as the minutes flee.—
> For Algol had a comrade, whose clear song
> Resounds no longer from the angelic choir:
> Nameless and voiceless, round his brother's fire
> He circles dark amid the luminous throng:
> And there are countless worlds which, dead like him,
> Still roll through interstellar midnight dim. (VI. 1-14, *AF* 92)

The sonnet imaginatively discloses three particular facts adopted by Symonds from Lubbock's address: the curious nature of coruscating stars (as represented by Hermann von Helmholtz's and Lubbock's example of the star Algol); their revelations of the existence of extinct stars, or '*dead suns*'; and, most significantly, how these discoveries express and reflect the problem of Earth's (and, by extension, man's) insignificance in the vast fabric of time and space.

The main structure of the sonnet is a studied picture of nature that brings into relief the poet-speaker's reflections on human life, informed by his reading of astronomical demonstrations and, more specifically, Lubbock's inaugural address. The structure of the individual sonnet, its focused observation and study of external objects, lends dynamism to

Animi Figura and is representative of the structure of the entire volume of verse. In the first and final lines, Symonds sympathises with the transience of the stars, an ephemerality that reflects and confirms the law of all organic life, and draws from nature a pathos that he then applies to man: 'Man too shall fade and perish.' The adverb 'too' connects this sonnet to the remark presented in the volta of the preceding sonnet: the poet's meditation on the impermanence of the forms of faiths and gods that will 'fail', 'fade', and 'perish' ('On the Sacro Monte', V. 9; *AF* 91). This 'too' also invokes the progression and development of the philosophical debate, to deduce logically that the same fate will befall those colossal systems extant outside of our world. This sentiment is echoed in the final series of sonnets in the volume, to reiterate the poet's unwavering faith in the irrefragable law of the universe: 'Thou hast thy fate; so too hath yonder star' ('Mystery of Mysteries', XIII. 3; *AF* 133). Thus, man and the great celestial systems are united beneath the common rule of divine law that determines their extinction: 'That must be' ('On the Sacro Monte', VI. 1; *AF* 92).

To live in this 'condition of negation' (to Catherine Symonds, 5 June 1867; *L*1 723), as Symonds referred to it, without faith and oppressed by intellectual doubt and scepticism, was considered by him to be a misfortune. The discoveries of astronomy that confidently asserted that Earth was an insignificant speck, a 'terrestrial dust-mote', floating through a boundless void diminished, for some, the popular and enduring idea, inherited from religious traditions and formulas, in the belief of man's superior existence in the universe.[12] To his audience at York, Lubbock presented the vivid image of how, like the countless number of grains of sand in the sea, the sky, too, was populated with an unquantifiable number of stars. Although science had already predicted or implied the existence of these infinite worlds, Lubbock emphasised the significance of improved methods of seeing to the concretisation of these impressions. 'We now know', he claimed, 'that our earth is but a fraction of one out of at least 75,000,000 worlds' (Lubbock 56). In the second line of sonnet VI, Symonds combines the accuracy of scientific language with his poetic imagination. He imbues the 'fields of space [sparkling] with seventy million suns' with a philosophical spirit to express the penetrating sense of the insignificance of man and his planet in relation to the starry myriad in the boundless universe. The sonnet, too, reiterates Symonds's faith in the omnipotence of the supreme law that all things, 'each' and 'all', are part of a pattern of decay that reverberates through all material things.

[12] 'Sights with a Telescope (Reported from *The New York Sun*)', *The Brisbane Courier*, volume 37, 23 April 1883, p. 2. See 'Lucretius' (*SSI* 113) in which Symonds highlighted Lucretius's presentation, in *De Rerum Natura*, of similar speculations, regarding the decay and inevitable dissolution of Earth (II. 1144-52, LCL 181), and the unremarkable existence of our planet (II. 1084-86, LCL 181).

Although his personal condition fluctuated between ennui, or what he called 'soul-sickness' (*L*1 724), and an inviolable faith in the cosmic enthusiasm – moods represented in sonnet VI of 'On the Sacro Monte' and extended in the 'meditative lyric' (*AF* viii) that is *Animi Figura* – Symonds constantly strived to sustain his faith in the ideals of beauty, goodness, and harmony. To perpetually contemplate the inevitability of suffering and the horrors of existence, in the Schopenhauerian sense, to think 'seriously […] upon the facts of this life without a religious trust in God' (*L*1 723), was described by Symonds in a letter to his wife Catherine as 'a simultaneous suicide' (5 June 1867, *L*1 723). Thus, the dreadful realisation of the ephemerality of the suns and of man prompted Symonds to return to the sky some of the mystery explained away by science by mapping out his own poetic system of the starry sky ('On the Sacro Monte', VI. 5-8). In the fifth line, the speaker calls our attention to a twinkling star, 'Look up: 'tis night: there on that starry sea', which is significant to our understanding of Symonds's conception of how to live well. Here, the imperative commands the reader's attention, and the repeated use of the colon artistically renders the process of the telescope that offers a defined succession of views as it penetrates and magnifies the vista upon which the observer gazes. The action of steering and directing his gaze upwards to the night sky, much like Walt Whitman's solitary and wandering figure who 'from time to time, | Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars' ('When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer', in 'By The Roadside' cluster, from *Leaves of Grass*), forms the vital task of momentarily reminding Symonds of the beauty and goodness in the world.[13]

Upon observing the wide, open expanse of the fathomless heavens, with its countless scintillating points, which are as familiar to this star-gazer as they are to a sailor, Symonds was able to navigate his wandering soul, anchoring his wayfaring thought to a symbolically brilliant star.[14] There, in the 'starry sea' above, lies Algol, 'The Pharos-flame', ablaze and communing

[13] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. and intro. by Jerome Loving (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; repr. with corrections 2009), p. 214.

[14] Ideas of wandering and wondering permeate Symonds's works: those who wonder were, for Symonds, perpetually wandering, unbound and untethered to orthodox systems. Symonds titled his fourth volume of poetry *Vagabunduli Libellus*, 'the little book of a wanderer', and dedicated it to 'Vago Cuidam', 'a wanderer', a phrase he 'borrowed from one of Petrarch's familiar letters' (*VL* vii). The phrase has a generalised application and was meant, by Symonds, as addressing each individual reader that 'finds an echo of his thought or feeling in my verse', for 'all men on this earth are wanderers' (*VL* vii). His interest in the notion of wandering also has astronomical connotations – 'all men on this earth are wanderers' just like planets and stars were once perceived by ancient Greeks to be the wanderers of the sky, a likeness that reflects Symonds's belief in the interconnections of cosmos and human beings. Ancient Greeks perceived planets to be wanderers because of their seeming retrogression, and the Greek *planetes*, 'wanderer or vagabond', thus became associated with the astronomical planets (to which the Greeks called *planetes asteres*). See *planetes*, in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), II, p. 1411.

with the speaker.[15] The star, an ephemeral body bound to the law that determines its dissolution, is transfigured by Symonds into a durable remedy against the recurring condition of negation. Algol, the Winking Demon in the head of Medusa (in the Perseus constellation), becomes the mighty lighthouse of Pharos built by the Ptolemaic Kingdom in c. 280 BC for Ptolemy II of Egypt. This is the beacon that appears to the speaker as an illumination in the bewildering world where the boundaries of sky and sea are indistinguishable, forming 'Earth's everduring darkness round our feet' ('Mystery of Mysteries', XIX. 10; *AF* 139), and by which he is guided out of ennui and the misery of intellectual doubt.[16] The configuration of stars as anthropomorphic and guiding lights would have reminded Symonds of the last stanza of *Adonais* (1821), as Shelley imbued the final lines of his elegy on John Keats with nautical and stellar imagery that transformed 'The soul of Adonais' into 'a star' that 'Beacons' to the poet-speaker 'from the abode where the Eternal are' (*Adonais*, ll. 494-95), leading him out of decaying life into the spiritual renewal offered by death. The sight of the seventy million sparkling suns studding the floor of heaven evoked, for Symonds, multitudinous associations and, at times, conflicting sensations. In *Memoirs*, for example, the impenetrable depths of the heavens conjure a sense of dread and terror: 'Heaven', he confessed, 'goads us with infinity of secrets and torments of innumerable stars' (*Memoirs* 317). In sonnet VI of 'On the Sacro Monte', however, the speaker attempts to conciliate, as a means of expressing *versöhnung*, the mental conflict and agitation evoked by gazing upon the night sky. The external landscapes and objects that stretch across Symonds's poetry, the sea, sky, and stars, are penetrated with Symonds's thought and emotion. The unfathomable depths of the 'starry sea' ('On the Sacro Monte', VI. 5; *AF* 92) are evoked, in other poems, and mirrored in, for example, the 'watery wildernesses' ('A Dream of Burial in Mid Ocean', l. 7; *VL* 200) of the sea below.

The final cluster in *Animi Figura* reiterates the mystical union between poet and nature, whereby the stars impose a positive influence on the disconcerted poet:

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[15] The conflation of aerial and nautical navigation by way of a powerful, beaconing light that metaphorically guides or leads Symonds and the figures in his poetry, appears in 'The Innovators', the first sequence of sonnets in *Animi Figura*. The light that behaves as guide in sonnet II is kindred to 'Love's lamp' ('The Innovators', II. 1; *AF* 3), or Hero's lamp, that lures Leander 'through wild waves that freeze' ('The Innovators', II. 3; *AF* 3) to his ambiguous fate. It is a poignant symbol imbued with *sehnsucht*, Symonds's wistful yearning for male love and companionship that seems unattainable. The image of star as guide is depicted, too, in Symonds's blank verse narrative 'Hesperus and Hymenaeus. Or, The Shepherd and the Star', published in *New and Old*. In an image that parallels the episode of Hero and Leander from 'The Innovators', the shepherd invokes Hesperus, 'Moon among stars, but star beside the moon' (l. 3), to 'trim thy lamp | To guide me to the shepherd whom I love' (ll. 5-6).

[16] The organic conflation of sky and sea is an image reiterated throughout Symonds's poetry: 'the liquid spaces | Of the sea and sky are one' ('In Venice', I. 5-6; *NO* 173). See also the symbolism of the sea-star in *Stella Maris* (*VL* 11-81), an experimental blending of narrative and lyric in poetry whose subject was inspired by Angelo Fusato.

Deafened with voices from that hoarse-tongued sea
Howling around doubt's dungeon walls, I rise
And gaze at midnight on the liquid skies,
The calm clear stars with patient ministry
Performing each heaven's task unweariedly.—

('Mystery of Mysteries', XVII. 1-5; *AF* 137)

Again, it is in the action of looking upwards and examining the process of stars that the disconcerted poet is able to contemplate and reflect on his unhappy state. It is thus that he mystically communes with the stars, feeling a powerful kinship. The 'calm', 'clear', and 'patient' disposition of the stars, which juxtaposes the discord and tumult of the sea that represents the speaker's contending tones of thought, revitalises Symonds's faith and reinvigorates the Goethean ideal that governed his spirit: 'Im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen | Resolut zu leben.'[17] Symonds, again, brings into relief the eternal nature of the stars, rather than their transience. Their obedience to law is indefatigable and envisioned by Symonds as a form of spiritual work that inspires and inspirits the sceptic to himself be guided, too, by the Cosmic Spirit. He emerges, in the following sonnet ('Mystery of Mysteries' XVIII), from his tempestuous thoughts, his faith restored in the form of stoical mysticism, with a 'blind unwavering trust' ('Mystery of Mysteries', XVIII. 1; *AF* 138) in the all-pervasive energy of the universe.

In the wider conception of the 'On the Sacro Monte' sequence, the ebb and flow of Algol's light that emulates the flux and reflux of Symonds's 'meditative lyric' (*AF* viii) chimes with the poet's religious mysticism that is modified by science. The examination of the coruscations of the starlight was not only deemed by Lubbock as revelatory of the processes of the luminous heavenly bodies, but so, too, of the history and future of our own solar system and planet. For Lubbock, the scientific interest lay not in the visibility of the star and its dazzling scintillations. Rather, it was in the moments of darkness and invisibility, in the vanishing of the starlight as it flickered, that the scientist as investigator of great truths could read the fate of his own planet. In his address, Lubbock painted for his audience a powerful image of the semblance of Algol when viewed from Earth:

[17] Symonds translated this line as: 'To live with steady purpose in the whole, the Good, the Beautiful' ('The Genius of Greek Art', *GP*2 380fn).

> [Algol] shines without change for two days and thirteen hours; then, in three hours and a half, dwindles from a star of the second to one of the fourth magnitude; and then, in another three and a half hours, reassumes its original brilliancy. (Lubbock 56)

The mysterious nature of the star, however, its presentation of 'curious phenomena' (Lubbock 56), is eclipsed by the detection (engendered by the probing of Algol's star-system) of 'dark bodies' (Lubbock 56), celestial objects that emit little to no light. He called attention to Algol's mysterious companion, the discovery of the existence and behaviour of which is one of the triumphs of the spectroscope and modern science: 'These changes [of brilliancy] seem certainly to indicate the presence of an opaque body, which intercepts at regular intervals a part of the light emitted by Algol' (Lubbock 56). The revelation of the dark body amid the seeming flashes of the variable star determined, for the astronomer, that the sky was not only densely populated by bright stars; it is 'studded also with extinct stars, once probably as brilliant as our own sun, but now dead and cold, as Helmholtz tells us that our sun itself will be, some seventeen millions of years hence' (Lubbock 56-57).

The application of fact to mystery by the ever-growing grasp of astronomy upon the distance, size, and light of stars correlated to the astronomer's improved understanding of the physical nature of the heavenly bodies and the situation of Earth in the greater scheme of the universe. The intermittency of Algol's light, its coruscations between visibility and darkness as perceived from Earth by the naked eye, and the image of extinct stars inspired Symonds's poetic conception of the reciprocity between the processes of natural phenomena and the imagination of the poet as hierophant. In his letter of November 1881 to Horatio Brown, Symonds alluded to the phenomenon of Algol in a sentence that introduced the later modified sonnet VI of 'On the Sacro Monte', a sonnet that expresses his poetic reflections on the value of allegory in an age of scientific thought: 'Sir J. Lubbock counts over seventy million solar systems, and says there are many more extinct, one of which causes intermittency of light in Algol' (*L*2 703). The image of '*dead suns*' left an impression that informed and stimulated his future speculations on man and cosmos, a process that he acknowledged as effecting a similar power over Alfred Tennyson's poetic thought, albeit the poem composed by Tennyson was not so highly regarded by Symonds:

> Tennyson has written a dismal squalid poem called 'Despair,' about an atheist's suicide, in the *XIXth Century*. It is a scrannel sort of thing, which of course everybody says is

> tremendously powerful. I do not think so. Funny: his imagination, like mine, has been taken by the fact recorded by Sir John Lubbock of the *dead suns*. (*L*2 703)

The fact relayed by Lubbock of Helmholtz's description of '*dead suns*', is reimagined by Tennyson in the third section of 'Despair: A Dramatic Monologue' (November 1881):

> And the suns of the limitless Universe sparkled
> and shone in the sky,
> Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew that
> their light was a lie—
> Bright as with deathless hope—but, however they
> sparkled and shone,
> The dark little worlds running round them were
> worlds of woe like our own—
> No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth
> below,
> A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and
> woe.[18]

Tennyson's cynicism draws from and is influenced by the processes of the heavenly bodies associated by him with notions of deceit and lament. He equates the tremulous light of the suns he perceives with everlasting hope. However, the brightness, here, in both the literal and figurative sense, is, in the mind of the atheist, false. The knowledge of the speaker, modified

[18] Alfred Tennyson, 'Despair', in *Tiresias and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1885), pp. 37-53 (p. 39). The publication of the poem and its criticism of the materialistic and dogmatic ways of society, incited a controversy among literary reviewers and the public. One month later, in December 1881, Swinburne published in the *Fortnightly Review* an anonymous parody of Tennyson's poem titled 'Disgust: A Dramatic Monologue'. See the eighth section of Swinburne's poem that derides the scientific discourse of nineteenth-century metaphysicians:

> And there, you see, was an end of it all. It was obvious, in fact,
> That, whether or not you believe in the doctrine taught in a tract,
> Life was not in the least worth living. Because, don't you see?
> Nothing that can't be, can, and what must be must. Q. E. D.
> And the infinitesimal sources of Infinite Unideality
> Curve into the central abyss of a sort of a queer Personality
> Whose refraction is felt in the nebulae strewn in the pathway of Mars
> Like the paring of nails Aeonian—clippings and snippings of stars—
> Shavings of suns that revolve and evolve and involve—and at times
> Give a sweet astronomical twang to remarkably hobbling rhymes. (ll. 29-38)

(*Algernon Charles Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 424-29 (p. 425)).

by science, regards the flickering light of the stars as 'a lie' and identifies 'The dark little worlds running round them' as 'worlds of woe like our own'. Symonds's reception of Lubbock's facts, on the other hand, inculcated a confidence in the progress of astronomy – 'What an age it is! *Grand Dio*, what an age!' (*L*2 703) – and the divine scheme of universal order:

> Gods decline and die;
> Yet God endures: and still, while God recedes,
> Man probes the earth, weighs planets, sweeps the sky;
> But finds God here in his own heart and will.
>
> ('On the Sacro Monte', XI. 11-14; *AF* 97)

Here, Symonds's approach to the discoveries presented by Lubbock reveals a spirit more positive than Tennyson's, in which Symonds, like the analytical scientist, approaches curiosity by searching for 'much new knowledge in the hidden actions' (Lubbock 55) of things. 'We must cease to be clairvoyants', Symonds warned, 'and become analysts, verifying our intuitions by positive investigation' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412). To recognise the revelations of astronomy (and all fields of experimental science) regarding the universal pattern of biological development was not to discourage or destroy humanity's faith in the inexorable World-Spirit, for effort, both physical and mental, was 'the indispensable condition of advancement' ('Philosophy', *ESS*1 34).

Looking upon the external world, Symonds imbued natural objects with distinct characteristics and personalities to create images of idealised human forms. The physical relationship between Algol and his dark-bodied companion suggested, for Symonds, a form of spiritual comradeship. Likewise, Hesperus, the evening star, the sequestered body conspicuously glowing in the gloom of the sky's void, became a useful symbol for the spiritual connection between heaven and earth, and represented for him ideal love in its infinite forms:

> The evening star has a great charm for me. I have always loved it in connection with the old Greek legend, with Plato's verses, & with long since acquired associations of the summertime at Clifton. It has a lucidity, a solitariness, a 'distinction,' wh [*sic*] belong to no other heavenly bodies. It seems more spiritual, hung between the powers of heaven & earth, of day & night. (To A. O. Rutson, 12 April 1865; *L*1 534)

In his preference for Hesperus, Symonds participated in a long literary tradition that invoked this particular star and its binary Phosphorus/Heosphorus (both referents of the planet Venus) to symbolise a cherished companion and Symonds's vision of comradeship. Shelley transformed Keats into Adonais in the elegy of the same name, but Hesperus also proved a useful symbol, in the poem's epigraph, through which to memorialise Keats as a guiding beacon that shepherds the living. *Adonais*'s epigraph is one of the two Platonic 'epigrams on Aster', to which Symonds alluded in the letter to Rutson, wrongly attributed to the philosopher Plato, of whom Diogenes Laertius (incorrectly) explains that

> Aristippus in his fourth book *On the Luxury of the Ancients* says that he [Plato] was attached to a youth named Aster, who joined him in the study of astronomy […]. His passionate affection is revealed in the following epigrams which he is said to have written upon them [the youths].[19] (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III. 29; LCL 184, p. 303)

The influence of the Platonic epigrams on Symonds is seen in his own poetical representations of Hesperus. In 'The Shepherd to the Evening Star', the shepherd equates Hesperus to the 'Star of [his] soul' (l. 1, *MM* 12) and his 'lover' (l. 25, *MM* 13). The mystical power of the evening star, its potential to communicate with the spirit of the Earth-bound shepherd, is embodied in the shepherd's invocation to Hesperus to 'Breathe in my brain the thoughts that steal | Through heaven's blue wildernesses' (ll. 27-28, *MM* 13). In 'Hesperus and Hymenaeus' (composed in 1862), the evening star symbolises the supreme manifestation of love as 'equal' and 'mutual reverence' (l. 143, *NO* 56), and signifies, for the shepherd in the poem, the 'guide and friend' of all 'true lovers' (l. 151, *NO* 56). Symonds considered this poem one of the 'best pieces' in the 'poetic cycle—on the love of comrades' (*Memoirs* 436). It is, however, of great importance to bring attention to Symonds's substitution, in this line from *Memoirs*, of 'erotic' for 'poetic' and 'men for men' for 'comrades' (*Memoirs* 456fn79, 80), as Symonds's reading and progressive understanding of his own sexual identity in terms of planetary kinships permeated his poetical discourse. Another poem which is crucial to the understanding of Symonds's conception of human fellowship and its analogy in the correspondence between the celestial

[19] Symonds included two of Shelley's poetic translations of Platonic epigrams in *Studies of the Greek Poets*: the 'Hesperus' epigram to Aster (*Adonais*'s epigraph) – 'Ἀστὴρ πρὶν μὲν ἔλαμπες ἐνὶ ζωοῖσιν Ἑῷος' (Shelley's 'Thou wert the morning star among the living', *GP*2 293) – and an epigram to Agathon – 'τὴν ψυχὴν Ἀγάθωνα φιλῶν ἐπὶ χείλεσιν ἔσχον' (Shelley's 'Kissing Helena, together', *GP*2 323).

bodies is ‘The Birth of a Star’: ‘Within the voiceless confines of the void, | […] There dwells a planet. On the ocean buoyed | Of ever-during darkness, from her peers | Sundered, and ringed around with calm’ (ll. 1-7, *NO* 212). The sonnet depicts Symonds’s imaginative version of the nebular hypothesis and culminates in the Sun ‘thrill[ing]’ (l. 11) into life, with its beams, the lonely ‘bulk that indolently lifeless lay’ (l. 12). Not only does the sonnet echo the scientific reality of the dependency of all organic and animated things on the Sun, but it also poetically renders the dependency of the anthropomorphised sleeping and ‘lifeless’ planet on the genial influence of the Sun’s vitalising rays.

In the fellowship of the stars, Symonds translated his personal longing for comradeship, a bond conterminous with the Whitmanesque idea of ‘“adhesiveness”’ (*L*2 201). A letter to Whitman, written on 7 February 1872, reveals the profound and everlasting impression of the American bard’s idea of ‘“adhesiveness”’, expressed in *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and a poem from the Calamus section of *Leaves of Grass* that is concerned with comradery between men, on Symonds’s perception and conception of ‘passionate friendship’ (*L*2 201). The spirit of the idea, the faith in a commitment between men that was steadfast and abiding, stimulated Symonds’s exploration of male-male bonding in ancient Greece, Rome, the medieval and modern period, and supplied the thought for his own poetry.

> Those brethren o’er the dew-regenerate hills
> Went smiling.—Arm in stalwart arm enlaced,
> Alike resplendent, and with wedded wills,
>
> They seemed twin gods, fraternal stars embraced.
>
> (‘Love and Death’, ll. 157-60; *MM* 167)

In his letter to Whitman, Symonds continued to express his thoughts on ‘the Love of Friends’ (*L*2 202) and the irrevocable impression of *Leaves of Grass*:

> Especially did I then learn confidently to believe that the Comradeship, which I conceived as on a par with the Sexual feeling for depth & strength & purity & capability of all good, was real—not a delusion of distorted passions, a dream of the Past, a scholar’s fancy—but a strong & vital bond of man to man. (*L*2 201-02)

The use of scientific language in 'Hesperus and Hymenaeus' (the trembling light of stars), combined with the intense emotion felt by the poet (of love and friendship), imaginatively embodies the union of Hesperus and Hymenaeus. Between star and man there is a consensus of action, an agreement, a harmony: the shepherd 'in the light | Of Hesper trembles with the trembling star' (ll. 103-04, *NO* 54). Symonds's way of regarding nature, the presentation in his poetry of an anthropomorphic sympathy with it, reflects the myth-making mind of the Hellenic period. The spirit of the poet and the physical things he perceived are reciprocally interpenetrating. When he gazed upon Algol, he saw a solitary figure sequestered far from him and unable to achieve a union. In the great company of the stars he saw humanity, 'each' and 'all' ('On the Sacro Monte', VI. 3; *AF* 92) wandering in the wide and fathomless universe. Longing for a fellowship of his own, Symonds watched the sky and, stirred by the aerial landscape and the motion of planetary orbit, imagined himself a vital part of 'the luminous throng' (VI. 12).

In his poetry, Symonds demonstrated and consolidated the unity of humanity and the whole of nature. Earth, like the countless planets, is as much a member of the vast sky as humankind is a member (*melos*, 'limb') of the 'divine life of the universe' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 407). The rhyming couplet that concludes sonnet VI of 'On the Sacro Monte' – 'And there are countless worlds which, dead like him, | Still roll through interstellar midnight dim' (ll. 13-14, *AF* 92) – resolves that all things that exist are perishable and transitory, and that the soul, following the death of the mortal self, resumes its place in God that is 'eternal unity' ('Versöhnung', III. 14; *AF* 73) and the 'supreme abstraction' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 104). Humankind, like the globe it inhabits, is not singular or exceptional. In the long history of existence, our world is but one of many that 'Pulses with life' ('A Problem of the Night', l. 6; *VL* 88) and will inevitably decay. 'We are no permanent owners,' Symonds wrote,

> but the brief tenants of our tiny globe. Nor need this terrify or startle us. Each man expects the certainty of his own dissolution. The race must learn that it also is ephemeral. For this our religions have already prepared us. ('Conclusion', *GP*2 411)

What remains indisputable is humankind's corporeal dissolution. The decline of medieval theology, its assertion of the superiority of our species and globe, and the progressive expansion of the formative ideas engendered by astronomical curiosity, developed humanity's understanding of its inability to influence the law of cosmos. Symonds, here, simultaneously

diminishes the physical and symbolic grandeur of humankind and the Earth; not only does he bring into relief man's transitoriness – he merely occupies rather than possesses the earth – but he too emphasises the diminutive stature of the planet. Science and religion acquiesce to the fate of man's dissolution; however, quantitative and fact-based data have determined that the termination of life comes 'not by a sudden tempest of vindictive fire from heaven, but in the tranquil course of the long life of nature' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 411). For Symonds, it is not by the spontaneous and miraculous exercise of divine intervention that our physical condition is terminated. Rather, it is 'God as Law' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287) that determines the fate of all physical matter, and humankind must learn to willingly accede to this process of life, the inevitable law that moves humanity onwards towards its demise but which can be embraced as a tranquil journey, a 'euthanasia […] prepared for men' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 411).

The dreadful vision of 'Annihilated worlds' ('On the Sacro Monte', VII. 10; *AF* 93), which is a continuation of the poet's meditation on the '*dead suns*' in sonnet VI of the cluster, was not, however, enough to dispirit or intimidate Symonds's faith in man's transcendent soul:

> Earth shall grow cold: the humblest, hardiest weeds,
> That spread tough filaments to Arctic air,
> Shall fail from our frore planet, while the bare
> Dry vacant globe still through void ether speeds.
>
> ('On the Sacro Monte', VII. 5-8; *AF* 93)

Symonds imagines the Earth as uninhabited, frosty, and barren, its tenants no longer extant. Yet, the Earth, devoid of all life, remains bound by gravity to its orbit. Although the sentiment is passive in meaning, the verb is active in form ('speeds') – the earth is "dead" and yet it is in perpetual motion. The role of nature reappears in the frequent contrast between the cyclic course of the planets, representing the course of all biological matter from life to death, on the one hand, and the finality of human death on the other. Biological impermanence is transfigured by Symonds to mystically embody the infinite nature of the Cosmic Spirit: 'There is no dreadfulness in death and doom. | Annihilated worlds daunt not man's soul' ('On the Sacro Monte', VII. 9-10; *AF* 93). The poet-speaker looks beyond the cemeteries of the sky to seek the greater truth that is the unwavering faith in the order of universe. Although, according to Symonds, body and soul were intimately connected and both were necessary integers of the Whole that is God, the soul, unlike the organic body, was imperishable:

She looks beyond the tempest and the tomb
Of faiths and lives and systems, based secure
On her own strength that dateless must endure,
Joying in Beauty, Goodness, God, the Whole.

(‘On the Sacro Monte’, VII. 11-14; *AF* 93)

This Stoic-Epicurean sentiment expressing man’s unwavering commitment to God as Law is echoed in Symonds’s prose reflections: ‘nothing can come amiss to those who have brought their wills and wishes into accord with universal order’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 27). In the sonnet, the soul in some divine sense is not doomed to the same fate as the Earth and, unlike the great planetary systems, retains a perduring and mystic value. ‘She’ possesses resilience that is manifold and unique. Her strength transcends all creeds and schemes. It is a ‘dateless’ strength that, at once, reaches far back into a time that is immemorial and stretches eternally into the unforeseeable future. This strength, however, is not only everlasting; it, too, is transformative. Ultimately, by the end of his life, Symonds willingly acquiesced to the fate of man, his foreseeable death as gentle, quiet, and easy, and wholly submitted to the awesome power of God as Law that is realised in a plain truth that lays bare Symonds’s conception of man’s relation to the universe: ‘As the universe subsisted countless aeons before our birth, so will it survive our loss, and scarcely keep a trace of our existence’ (‘Conclusion’, *GP*2 411). It is by the unapprehensive conformity to this law of nature, by the soul’s self-governance, its ability ‘to endure’ (‘Versöhnung’, V. 5; *AF* 75), and its submission to ‘Reason’ (‘Mystery of Mysteries’, XVIII. 9; *AF* 138), that human beings can live well in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful.

Speculating on man’s grasp of his relation to the universe and God, Symonds deduced that the mental atmosphere of each generation was inevitably informed and fashioned by preceding ages. He observed the crisis (but not the abandonment) of faith in dogmatic Christian theology, yet emphasised the crucial and impending ‘synthesis of faith and science’ (‘Notes on Theism’, *ESS*2 293) that he believed would concretise and sustain what was, at the time, ‘blank and abstract in our idea of God’ (‘Theism’, *ESS*2 293). Nevertheless, Symonds remained aware of the pattern that could be extrapolated from these revolutions of the religious idea and their promulgation by the synthesis of faith and science: ‘That [synthesis], in its turn, will have to be decomposed like elder, simpler syntheses’ (‘Theism’, *ESS*2 293). Each transformation, thus, is not final but, rather, a succeeding stage that one day too will blend into the ‘simpler’ modes of thinking of their past. This process, according to Symonds, would continue ‘so forth

perpetually, until the inevitable day of *Götter-Dämmerung*, the day of dying for our planet, comes' ('Theism', *ESS*2 293). In putting it like this, Symonds presented his knowledge of the ever-renewing co-dependence of science and faith in an analogy that harmonised within it ideas of a self that was both scientifically- and mystically-minded. He found a similitude between the views of faith and science in their prediction of the natural order of organic life; neither offered an escape from physical dissolution. Whether decreed by Scandinavian mythology or the fact presented by Lubbock of the final condition of our planet, one truth remained clear to Symonds: biological life must one day terminate and this is the inviolable condition of the cosmos towards which both the human and heavenly bodies inexorably move.

'Specular Mount Sublime': The Interpenetrations of Physical and Imaginative Landscapes

Great things are done when Men & Mountains meet
This is not Done by jostling in the Street.[20]
(William Blake, 'Satiric Verses and Epigrams')

The physical environment embodied for Symonds a power that was twofold: it was the medium by which the philosophical poet could meditate upon the problem of ontology and, even more significantly, it was in the external symbols of the physical world that the poet could translate his ineffable thoughts. Thus physical seclusion, which enabled the private moment of recollection, could be conducive to both the conception and expression of philosophical poetry, a poetry capable of uniting knowledge and emotion, reason and the imagination. His study of Lucretius as poet *qua* philosopher, which appears in *Sketches and Studies in Italy*, reveals a truth that was fundamental to Symonds's personal conception of the role of philosophy in poetry: 'it is only at the meeting-points between science and emotion that the philosophic poet finds a proper sphere' ('Lucretius', *SSI* 106). The metaphorical point of conjunction of science and emotion constitutes an analogy for the sacred nature of mountain summits, that is to say, the physical conjunction of the terrestrial with the heavenly firmament, a recurring notion in Symonds's oeuvre. In the 'On the Sacro Monte' cluster, the chapel appears on 'the mountain's brow' ('On the Sacro Monte', I. 13; *AF* 87), its position on the summit imbued with a religious and mystical significance: it is there that the poet, along with his company of country folk, feels

[20] *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, foreword by Harold Bloom (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965; revised 1982), p. 511.

the life-force, the breath, of 'a something more divine' ('On the Sacro Monte', II. 3; *AF* 88). The shrine adopts the divine attributes of the mountain summit on which it is located, described by Symonds as 'A meeting-place where heaven on earth might shine' ('On the Sacro Monte', II. 6; *AF* 88). This spiritual, mountainous landscape is also presented in 'Hesperus and Hymenaeus':

> Rise, for my star upon the mountain dawns,
> And heaven in sapphire silence yearns for thee.
> Climb the grey crags and thread the dusk ravine
> Where filmy veils of vapour downward drop:
> My star shall guide thee, shining fair between
> The gaunt grey pines and gleaming mountain top. (ll. 66-71, *NO* 53)

The solemn scenes of Switzerland, the majestic heights of the mountains and the boundless, glimmering carpets of snow that were accompanied by the overwhelming silence of the place, were the conditions vital to Symonds's profound reflections on the relations of humanity and *kosmos*. The prospect of valleys, mountain-peaks, and pine-forests generated 'an indescribable stillness and a sense of incubation', as the poet described Davos in winter, conditions favourable to Symonds's spiritual and poetic development.[21] The inhospitable weather, too, was congenial to his speculative thought on that subject. In the preface of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, Symonds revealed that his twelve-year seclusion in Davos, 'with short and occasional interruptions ('Preface', *ESS*1 vii), his subjection to the extensive winter months, 'bred in me a mystical habit of regarding man's relation to the universe' ('Preface', *ESS*1 viii). Symonds's deteriorating health also brought into relief the reality of human transience and compelled him subsequently to reflect on the world at large: 'a student comes insensibly to think more of nature and the world, less of humanity and self […]. The universal, little understood, but powerfully felt, assumes ascendency over his imagination' ('Preface', *ESS*1 viii). The student of nature, akin to the philosophical poet, appears in the following analogy: 'He is like one who surveys the world of things from a solitary mountain peak or from the centre of a boundless desert' ('Preface', *ESS*1 viii). The similitude, one commonly depicted

[21] John Addington Symonds and Margaret Symonds, *Our Life in the Swiss Highlands* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), p. 18.

by Symonds, is not simply a convenient analogy but a philosophically valid correspondence illustrating the dependence of the poet's apprehension of higher knowledge on his solitude.[22]

In *Memoirs*, Symonds recalled the spiritual significance of an Alpine excursion, a journey he made on 22 July 1863 with his travelling companion Cecil Bosanquet.[23] Unable to translate into utterance his mood and feeling, Symonds consulted nature, which, like many Romantic precursors, he recognised as 'at once the oracle and the audience of humanity' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 114).[24] The sight and imagined music of the stars he viewed were sensory elements transfigured in his mind so as to embody a 'spiritual melody' (*Memoirs* 221):

> Then far above our heads […] Hesper swam forth, clear and hopeful, in his liquid spaces of aerial gold. Pure were the heavens around him, and their crystal chasms seemed cooler, happier than the leaden waves. As I gazed into their brightness, it was as though I saw the choir of heaven's cathedral, wherein sat angels innumerable, harping on their harps and singing songs above the reach of words. Though I could not understand the burden of those songs, the spiritual melody went to my heart, and there translated its sweet message into mortal consolation. 'Seek not the tomb', my heart responded, 'dote not on the wormy grave. Live your life as God shall give it. Trust in Him, and try to be of better cheer. After the dull day comes glory and peace.'[25] (*Memoirs* 221-22)

[22] The same analogy is applied by Symonds to his perception of Michelangelo as the genius and revolutionary who devoted his thought to the realisation of beauty: 'the elevation at which Michael Angelo habitually lived in thought and feeling was so far above the plains of common life, that from the summit of his solitary watch-tower he might have followed even such high-fliers as Bruno or as Campanella in their Icarian excursions with the eyes of speculative interest' (*MBTC* 24-25). The pioneering spirit of these figures, and its significance to Symonds's conception of poet as prophet and hierophant, will be discussed further in chapter four of this thesis.

[23] Symonds wrote that 'The thought of Hesperus and Hymenaeus, combining with Goethe's "Über allen Gipfeln Ist Ruh", haunted me at Engelberg, at Meiringen, at Interlaken' (*Memoirs* 221), the regions he visited during this Alpine excursion. In her edition of *Memoirs*, Amber Regis translates the German phrase as: 'Above all summits | There is peace' (*Memoirs* 247fn62). The German utterance was taken from the second poem that forms the two-part 'Wandrers Nachtlied' (written in 1780), or 'Wanderer's Nightsong', by Goethe. The first poem in the composition was written in 1776.

[24] The phrase used here is taken from Symonds's analysis in *Essays* of the contemplative and religious form of nature-worship expressed by William Wordsworth in the poetry he composed later in his life. Symonds concluded that, in the 'Lucy' poems, 'Nature being the robe of life woven perpetually by God, becomes at once the oracle and the audience of humanity' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 114).

[25] This extract forms one of three '"prose-sonatas"' (*Memoirs* 221) composed by Symonds on the theme of Hesperus, and is reprinted in *Memoirs*. The passage highlights, too, the variegated symbolism of Hesperus, the evening star that would represent for Symonds ideal love in its infinite forms. The significance of mountains as sacred sights, where the spirit confers with itself about the mysteries of the universe, is reiterated in 'Hesperus and Hymenaeus' when the shepherd climbs a mountain to be united with Hesperus.

Like the speaker in William Wordsworth's 'A Night-Piece' (composed in 1798), who 'Is left to muse upon the solemn scene' (l. 23), Symonds searches here for material (elemental) and spiritual (celestial) harmony.[26] The word 'innumerable' in Symonds's passage echoes the scientific reality of the countless number of stars that populate the sky, as Lubbock explained in his address to the British Association, an image revisited throughout Symonds's poetry. In the spiritual episode, the bright stars are anthropomorphised into singing and harping angels. Of more significance is the mystical process of conversion – between the senses that perceive and the imagination that understands – which occurs as Symonds contemplated the night sky. It is while he gazed at the 'brightness' in the heavens that his mind's eye – 'it was as though I saw' – transmutes literal luminosity into sound. The awesome sight of the glittering heavens translates, by a process that transcends the human sphere of knowledge, into the language of music, which penetrates the heart, the vital life-force (literally) and the seat of feeling (figuratively) of Symonds. The intercepted message is pleasant and comforting, a sacred music that justifies his striving and vitalises his faith in the congruity of all things, and the perfect example, for Symonds, of *versöhnung*:

> When I thought over works of art which have *Versöhnung*, I came back and back again to music. After reading a tragedy, or experiencing some mental conflict, or reflecting on the *misères* of the commonplace and the miseries of an agitated existence, I feel a great symphony or an organ voluntary can alone present the perfect reconciliation. "Where words end music begins" is a proverb, never more true than in this application. (To Henry Sidgwick, 22 August 1867; *L*1 750)

Much like the process of the refraction of white light into several colours in a prism, the natural objects seen by Symonds pass through his intellect and are transformed into symbols, polysemous in nature, that commemorate the immensity and ineffability of his feelings and mood. This pattern of thought, the analogy between the prism and the process of the mind as it apprehends physical objects, is represented in 'The Prism of Life', the third sonnet of the 'Versöhnung' cluster in *Animi Figura*, a cluster that precedes 'On the Sacro Monte' and appears in the latter half of the volume. Although these objects appear to the observer as

[26] *William Wordsworth: Selected Poetry*, ed. by Stephen Gill and Duncan Wu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; reissued 2008), p. 15.

prismed, separate entities, collectively, or *versöhnt*, they reminded Symonds of the unity in nature, how all things belong to a universal power that binds the fabric of the universe:

> All that began with God, in God must end:
> All lives are garnered in His final bliss:
> All wills hereafter shall be one with His:
> When in the sea we sought, our spirits blend.
> Rays of pure light, which one frail prism may rend
> Into conflicting colours, meet and kiss
> With manifold attraction, yet still miss
> Contentment, while their kindred hues contend.
> Break but that three-edged glass:—inviolate
> The sundered beams resume their primal state,
> Weaving pure light in flawless harmony.
> Thus decomposed, subject to love and strife,
> God's thought, made conscious through man's mortal life,
> Resumes through death the eternal unity. ('Versöhnung', III. 1-14; *AF* 73)

The craggy, lonely mountain-peaks frequented by Symonds on his excursions through Europe and the 'frost-bound, snow-clad' landscape of Davos are recurring images in his autobiographical, prose, and poetic compositions.[27] Although his isolation in these environments intensified his ennui, they were presented by the poet as conducive to solitary meditation and, thus, to the attainment of an intimate rapport between personal emotion and nature. In 'The Love of the Alps', the second poem of the 'Among the Mountains' section from *New and Old*, Symonds expressed the spiritual significance of his solitude in the Alpine mountains and how it was conducive to philosophical speculation. Here, above and away from the city, the poet was able to view the 'silent stars | In dim procession through the untroubled sky' (ll. 37-38, *NO* 143), listen to the winds, and the voices of the streams, flowers, and woods communing with one another. More significantly, he saw reflected in the formal and ordered ceremony of the stars the sentiment of Cleanthes of Assos, which compelled human beings to conform to the laws it gradually ascertained by its experience of the world, as opposed to those invented formulas inherited from dead and living priests, and, most importantly, to do its duty.

[27] Symonds, *Swiss Highlands*, p. 7.

In the concrete reality of the stars, Symonds recognised his personal affinity with nature, how he too formed a part of the universal spirit that permeates all things:

> These wrought the change; for these from childhood's dawn
> Had nurtured me; through these, as through the rites
> Of due initiation I was drawn
> Into communion with those sacred heights
> On which God's glory broodeth as a cloud,
> Which with the voice of very [*sic*] God are loud.
>
> ('The Love of the Alps', ll. 43-48; *NO* 143)

Thus, landscape, and Symonds's interaction with it, is transformed into the spiritual space whereby the poet addresses and develops his speculative thought.

The image of the solitary poet positioning himself upon a summit with a clear view of the sky and *terra firma* is analogous to the practice of the astronomer, patiently persevering in his study of the heavenly firmament. Symonds's spiritualisation of mountain summits as the meeting-place of heaven and earth, and his belief in their connection to the vitalisation of sincere emotion was expressed in his analysis of the poets of ancient Rome: 'There are, were, and always will be high imaginative points of vantage commanding the broad fields of knowledge, upon which the poet may take his station to survey the world and all that it contains' ('Lucretius', *SSI* 106-07). The image is reminiscent of Symonds's personal spiritual experience in Lombardy, at sunset, with the prospect of the Alps and Apennines extending out in front of him. The autobiographical vignette titled 'On a Mountain' captures a mystical episode in which Symonds expressed a religious enthusiasm inspired by his solitude, and the intermittent starlight viewed by him from his vantage point in the vales of Lombardy:

> It is good to be alone here at this hour. […] At last the plain is reached, and all the skies are tremulous with starlight. Alas, that we should vibrate so obscurely to these harmonies of earth and heaven! The inner finer sense of them seems somehow unattainable—that spiritual touch of soul evoking soul from nature, which should transfigure our dull mood of self into impersonal delight. Man needs to be a mytho-poet at some moments, or, better still, to be a mystic steeped through half-unconsciousness in the vast wonder of the world. Cold and untouched to poetry or piety

> by scenes that ought to blend the spirit in ourselves with spirit in the world without, we can but wonder how this phantom show of mystery and beauty will pass away from us—how soon—and we be where, see what, use all our sensibilities on aught or nought? ('Lombard Vignettes', *SSI* 373-74)

This passage sees Symonds, like the hermit in John Milton's *Il Penseroso*, attempting to 'sit and rightly spell, | Of every star that heaven doth show' (ll. 170-71). The stars are awe-inspiring and their glinting light, immediately impressive to his imagination, becomes analogous to and harmonious with the vibrations of the human soul in an episode that echoes the spiritual accord between Hesperus and the shepherd, who 'trembles with the trembling star' ('Hesperus and Hymenaeus', l. 104; *NO* 54). The passage not only indicates the external conditions believed by Symonds to be genial to the transcendental experience whereby descriptive and reflective thoughts can be cultivated; it also emphasises the importance of a receptive mental disposition, a mind that is sympathetic and sensible to the outer world and to poetry that is, according to Symonds, the superior form of art that most accurately presents, through words, 'life and all that life implies' ('The Provinces of the Several Arts', *ESS*1 144). Thus, the enhanced perception of the landscape, the concentration on the symbols in nature, and the mystical communion with the 'vast wonder of the world' as mytho-poet and mystic, is, concordantly, an act of self-reflection.

Symonds's instinctive enthusiasm for nature was germane to his understanding of the philosophical poet as a figure who perceived, interpreted, and preserved the ineffable beauty of the physical landscape. His devotion to nature, his celebration of the universal life-force that chimed with Whitman's reverence of what Symonds referred to as 'the democratic ideal' (*WW* 88), was, indeed, a vitalising element of his verse and prose word-paintings. He shared, too, the attitude of the poet-philosopher Giovianni Domenico Campanella (1568-1639), later Tommaso, who, almost entirely unknown to Victorian audiences prior to Symonds's translation of his sonnets,[28] perceived that 'true knowledge can only be gained by the interrogation of nature' (*MBTC* 20).[29] Campanella's idea of interrogation encompassed both a

[28] Symonds considered the practice of translating the Italian sonnets as congenial to his mastery of sonnet-writing: 'Translating Michelangelo and Campanella had given me technical command over the sonnet. I now used this as a vehicle for my own thoughts and feelings. *Animi Figura* appeared in the spring of 1882' (*Memoirs* 443). By 1883, another volume of sonnets was in the process of formation, *Vagabunduli Libellus*, which was published in 1884.

[29] The quotation relates to Campanella's philosophical group of sonnets in the volume translated by Symonds. The other groups were arranged by Symonds under the following headings: 'Political', 'Prophetic', and 'Personal'. Symonds's *The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella* (1878) is a curious volume of verse permeated with the inspirations of artistry and philosophy that, for Symonds, figured 'in the

scientific attitude – the direct examination of nature through the senses, as opposed to the Aristotelian model of conceptual data – and a philosophical essence, steeped in metaphysical speculation, that discussed the idea of 'vitality' (*MBTC* 20) that was imminent in the material universe.[30] The concept of nature as both teacher and the living embodiment of God is expressed in Campanella's sonnet translated and titled by Symonds as 'The Book of Nature':

> The world's the book where the eternal Sense
> Wrote his own thoughts; the living temple where,
> Painting his very self, with figures fair
> He filled the whole immense circumference.
> Here then should each man read, and gazing find
> Both how to live and govern, and beware
> Of godlessness; and, seeing God all-where,
> Be bold to grasp the universal mind.
> But we tied down to books and temples dead,
> Copied with countless errors from the life,—
> These nobler than that school sublime we call.
> O may our senseless souls at length be led
> To truth by pain, grief, anguish, trouble, strife!
> Turn we to read the one original! (ll. 1-14, *MBTC* 123)

The theistic conception presented in the sonnet of God as 'all-where' and the poet as hierophant, the philosopher who receives the divine message of what Symonds translated in the above sonnet as 'eternal Sense', motivates a personal conception of nature as 'that school

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evolution of the Italian genius' (*MBTC* 1). While the works of Michelangelo were widely known to Victorian audiences, Symonds's translations of his poetry made them available to the English-speaking reader for the first time in their truest, complete form. Campanella, on the other hand, as man and poet, was almost entirely unknown to Victorian readers (see *L*3 779fn780). Symonds added a note in the work that reads as follows: 'As far as I am aware, no complete translation of Michael Angelo's sonnets has hitherto been made in English. The specimens produced by Southey, Wordsworth, Harford, Longfellow, and Mr. Taylor, moreover, render Michelangelo's *rifacimento*' (*MBTC* 4fn1). The *rifacimento* to which Symonds alluded is the commonly perceived '"reduction"' of the poems published in 1623 by the artist's grand-nephew and namesake, which influenced even the translations of the sonnets by Wordsworth that were 'based upon a vitiated text' (John Addington Symonds, 'Twenty-Three Sonnets from Michael Angelo', *The Contemporary Review*, 20 (1872), 505-15 (pp. 505-06)). Phrases and concepts that had been 'mutilate[d]', 'distorted', and 'mangled' in the 1623 version by the younger Michelangelo obscured the voice of the artist by confusing it with that of his descendent ('Twenty-Three Sonnets from Michael Angelo', pp. 505-06), and continued to be reprinted until the nineteenth century when Symonds published his complete translation of the sonnets.

[30] Despite his scientific approach to the investigation of nature, Campanella had not outgrown the belief in planetary influences on the individual actions of humans and, subsequently, their course in life.

sublime' and the living embodiment of 'the universal mind'. In 'Lines Written on the Roof of Milan Cathedral' (included in the 'In Italy' section of *New and Old*), the solitary speaker gazes on the world from his vantage point on the roof of the Italian cathedral and is brought face-to-face with the beauteous world of things that he must interpret. The poet transforms the ancient cathedral into a 'mount of marble' (l. 5, *NO* 170) that, like the natural mountains depicted elsewhere in his prose and poetry, functions as the meeting-place between heaven and earth and is the place from where the poet ruminates on nature's language and the mystery of humankind's relation to God. His prospect of the 'strange symbols' (l. 10, *NO* 170) – God's creation of the majestic Monte Rosa, the mountain massif in the Pennine Alps, and the man-made marble cathedral on which the speaker stands – reveal to him the spiritual unity of God and man and, most significantly, the sympathetic correspondence between hierophant and the world:[31]

> God on man's work here
> Hath set His signature and symbol clear;
> Man's soul that thinks and feels, to God's work there
> Gives life, which else were cold and dumb and bare.
> God is man's soul; man's soul a spark of God:
> By God in man the dull terrestrial clod
> Becomes a thing of beauty; thinking man
> Through God made manifest, outrival can
> His handiwork of nature. (ll. 29-37, *NO* 171)

Where Lubbock had confidently identified the scientist with unbounded omniscience – no longer was 'the book of Nature […] like some richly illuminated missal, written in an unknown tongue' (Lubbock 4) – Symonds ascribed to the poet-philosopher a unique majesty and boldness. He presented the power of God and man as dichotomous – 'God and man | Confront each other, with this narrow span | Of plain to part them' ('Lines Written on the Roof of Milan

[31] See etching (figure 4) titled 'Plains of Lombardy from the Roof of Milan Cathedral, with Monte Rosa and the Alps in the distance.—from a drawing by S. Read', *The Illustrated London News*, no. 979, vol. 34, 18 June 1859, p. 584. Samuel Read (1815-1883) was an English illustrator and member of the Royal Watercolour Society, and contributed regularly to *The Illustrated London News*. The etching was attached to a poem titled 'The Plains of Lombardy, as seen from the top of Milan Cathedral. An Aspiration' (p. 583).

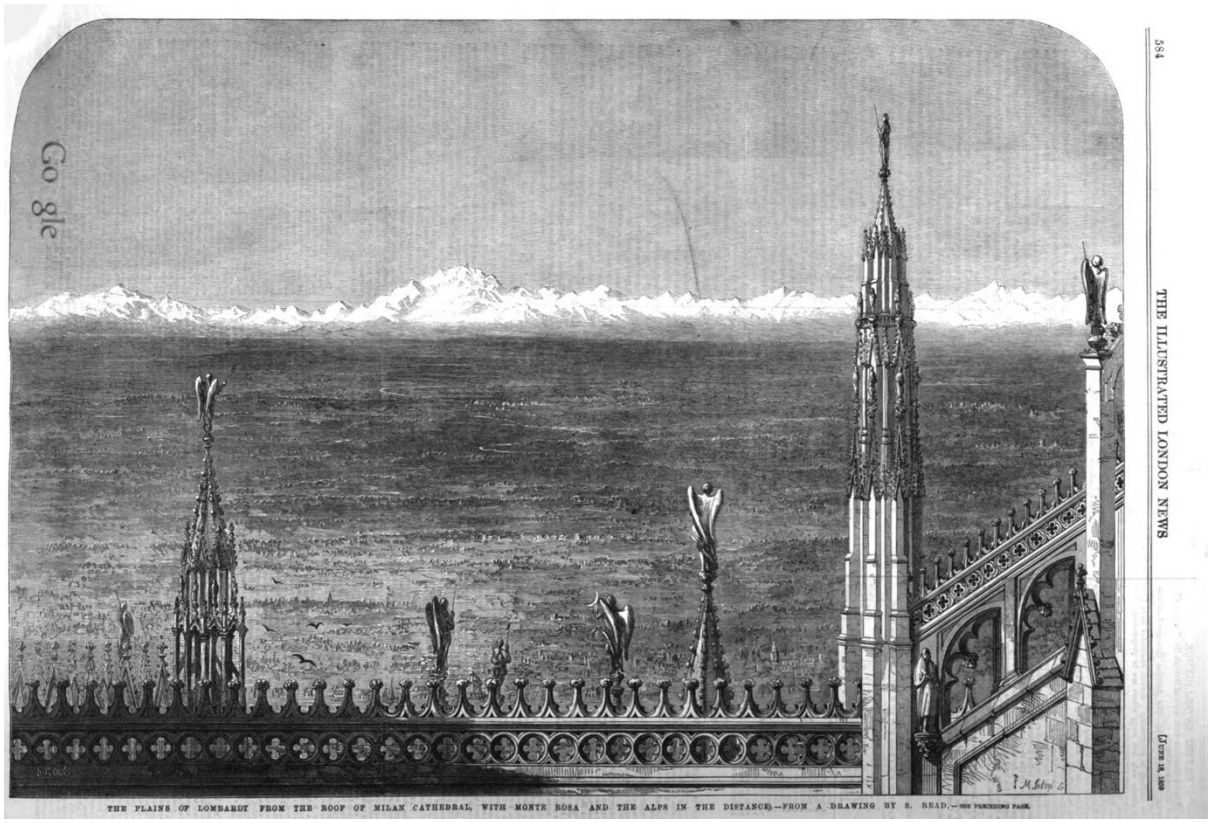

Figure 1. Samuel Read, 'The Plains of Lombardy from the Roof of Milan Cathedral, with Monte Rosa and the Alps in the Distance—a drawing by S. Read'.
The Illustrated London News, no. 979, vol. 34, 18 June 1859, p. 584.

Cathedral', ll. 23-24; *NO* 171) – and ended the poem with the following sentiment that, although ambivalent, suggests that God and man are one:

> Do we dream
> Mingling reality with things that seem?
> Or is it true that God and man appear
> One soul in sentient art self-conscious here,
> One soul o'er senseless nature stair by stair
> Raised to create by comprehending there? (ll. 37-42, *NO* 171)

The symbols of nature become the resource by which the speaker understands and confirms his own creative power. The inanimate mountain, a spiritless organism, is penetrated with the thought and feeling of man, a sensible and sentient being, who, in turn, vitalises God's creation and endows it with life. It is important, however, to recognise that although Symonds recognised the potential of humankind to read 'the book of Nature', he, unlike Lubbock, was

not concerned with man's ability to fully apprehend the mysteries of the universe – an impossible feat, according to Symonds, and expressed in the following lines: 'Shall we gain insight; or the more we know, | Still find new limits for our widening powers?' ('The Thought of Death', VI. 13-14; *AF* 104). Rather he recognised in Campanella's sonnet the Stoic-Epicurean maxim that chimed with and gave substance to his religious mood of mind: 'Here then should each man read, and gazing find | Both how to live and govern, and beware | Of godlessness' ('The Book of Nature', ll. 5-7; *MBTC* 123).

'Winter Nights in the High Alps', appearing in the 'Among the Mountains' section and published in *Vagabunduli Libellus* (1884), has an autobiographical basis that recollects the period of the poet's life spent in convalescence in the Alpine town of Davos.[32] The poem presents a sequence of four sonnets that move between the poet's reflection on his solitude in the natural environment of the Alps (I); his reminiscences of the contrastingly 'populous' (l. 2) London from which he has withdrawn (II); his spiritual engagement with nature, specifically the stars, recurring emblems in his meditative poems (III); and, ultimately, an event typical of Symonds's reflective verse: the poet's resolution that he too is a vital part of the spirit of the universe that forms, connects, and is everything (IV). The first sonnet offers a vivid picture of the solitary poet wandering the frozen landscape of Davos:

Notes of a mute, not melancholy world,
A world of snows and darkness and moon-sheen,
Of still crystalline air and stars serene,
And stationary pines in slumber furled:
Notes of the sober night, when drift is whirled
By tireless winds over the solemn scene,
When the lake-pavement groans, and mists between
The shadowy mountain tops are coldly curled:
Notes of a meditative man who walks
Those white fields and that ice-floor all alone,
Yet draws warm life from winter's frozen wells:
Notes of a soul that most divinely talks

[32] This section from *Vagabunduli Libellus*, which is comprised of a series of sonnets, should not be confused with another section titled 'Among the Mountains', a compilation of sixteen poems published four years earlier in *New and Old*. See Percy L. Babington, *Bibliography of the Writings of John Addington Symonds* (London: John Castle, 1925; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), pp. 42, 54.

> Unto herself in silence, and hath known
> The God that in the mystic moon-world dwells. (I. 1-14, *VL* 81)

The process by which Symonds juxtaposed images and meaning in the sonnet reflects an intrinsic element of Symonds's epistemology. The sonnet is a sketch in chiaroscuro, depicting a landscape permeated by 'snows and darkness' (I. 2), and in which the clear images of the 'moon-sheen' (I. 2) and 'white fields' (I. 10) are contrasted with the obscure or partly veiled images of 'sober night' (I. 5) and 'shadowy mountain tops' (I. 8). Although the poem describes the speaker's search for companionship that is both physical and intellectual, the condition of displacement, represented by the speaker's solitude, features prominently in the poem. The effect of isolation and dislocation is gained by contemplative projection, an intellectual enterprise of embarking on 'thought's voyage' ('Mystery of Mysteries', XII. 5; *AF* 132), in which the reader is encouraged to join the speaker in looking upon the world and the self from the outside, to experience an unfamiliar but inspiring vision of humanity's place in the universe. It is by this process that the Earth in the sonnet is transformed by the poet, through an optical illusion, into the strange, otherworldly landscape of the moon, 'A world of snows and darkness and moon-sheen' (I. 2). The lunar epithets – 'mystic moon-world' (I. 14) and 'these moon-scenes desolate' (III. 4) – emphasise the remote and bare landscape in which the speaker dwells, an image of the Alpine scene also powerfully and poignantly rendered by Robert Louis Stevenson, who spent time with Symonds in Davos, in a letter written on 11 November 1888 while in Tautira, a Tahitian village in the Pacific. Upon remembering 'the absence of congenial friends', Symonds's name and image came to his mind: 'The glittering, frosty solitudes in which your days are cast arose before me: I seemed to see you walking there in the late night, under the pine-trees and the stars; and I received the image with something like remorse.'[33]

The lunar likeness of Davos is an optical illusion which approximates scientific reality. These pictures of 'snows and darkness', 'shadowy mountain tops', and 'white fields' present characteristics of scenes depicted in the astronomical treatises and guides of William Herschel, Richard Proctor, and other astronomers. In the popular guidebook *Half-Hours with the*

[33] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Sidney Colvin, 4 vols (New York: Scribner, 1917), III: 1887-1891, p. 90. This letter, a draft of a proposed dedication to Symonds by Stevenson in his South sea travel-book, was sent by Stevenson to Symonds, requesting his permission for the letter to be printed at the beginning of his account of the voyage. Stevenson goes on to say: 'It was you, dear Symonds, who should have gone upon that voyage and written this account. With your rich stores of knowledge, you could have remarked and understood a thousand things of interest and beauty that escaped my ignorance; and the brilliant colours of your style would have carried into a thousand sickrooms the sea air and the strong sun of tropic islands' (*Letters of Stevenson*, p. 90).

Telescope (first published in 1868), Proctor illustrated the peculiar vista of the moon when observed with a telescope in an image that evokes the snowscapes painted by Symonds in 'Winter Nights in the High Alps': 'We see regions of the purest white—regions which one would be apt to speak of as *snow-covered*, if one could conceive the possibility that snow should have fallen where (now, at least) there is neither air nor water.'[34] In *Flowers of the Sky* (1879), too, Proctor described the physical features of the moon when viewed with a telescope. Though the moon appeared to possess a white light when observed in the sky from Earth,[35] close examination revealed a landscape, not dissimilar to Earth, that consisted of crags and 'mountain ranges', or 'lunar mountains' that cast expansive shadows onto the landscape.[36] That the images found in those scientific treatises not only stimulated Symonds's imaginative and intellectual thought but resonated with his poetic sensibility is powerfully illustrated in how 'Winter Nights in the High Alps' echoes their language and images. In the poem, Symonds conceives himself as a moon-bound observer, sequestered from his companions in London 'whose feet are far' (II. 1, *VL* 82) and who, unlike the speaker, revel in each other's company, 'Moving upon a loved and populous land | In sweet society and mutual band | Of fellowship, star linked to breathing star!' (II. 2-4).

The shift in the physical landscape, in sonnet I of 'Winter Nights in the High Alps', between light and shadow, appropriately represents the mental complexion of the poet, the dynamic nature of his faith that wavers between pessimism and optimism, ennui and enthusiasm, as he strived to determine his place in the universe.[37] Juxtapositions permeate the poem, extending beyond descriptions of the physical landscape, and Symonds used the word 'Notes' in an extended metaphor to encapsulate this notion of difference. 'Notes' is a self-reflexive term, a conscious allusion of the poem to itself as a compilation of notes, or written record of the poet's life that will be sent to his acquaintances in England (II. 1, *VL* 82). The term, understood in its musical sense, is suggestive of sound and melody, and paints the poet in the calm of Davos, the soul that 'talks | Unto herself in silence' (I. 12-13, *VL* 81), as Shelley's nightingale 'who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 680), an image that also informs a similar scene in *Animi Figura*:

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[34] Richard A. Proctor, *Half-Hours with the Telescope* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1873), p. 96.
[35] '[I]t must not be supposed', Proctor wrote, 'that she is a white body. Careful estimates of the quantity of light she reflects show that she is more nearly black than white, though in reality she is neither one nor the other' (Richard A. Proctor, *Flowers of the Sky* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1879), p. 147).
[36] Proctor, *Flowers*, pp. 141, 144.
[37] A similar pattern is depicted in *Palumba: A Mexican Tale*, in which the dynamic quality of the mind is reflected in the physical landscape, the 'dappled glade' (*Palumba*, l. 498) that shifts between light and shade (see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 124-25).

What hope have I, here amid frozen firs
Mending the broken music of past years,
And like a man whom graver cares engage,
Cheering with song my own life's pilgrimage,
While scarce one echo to my signing stirs? ('A Dedication', ll. 4-8; *AF* 1)

Symonds's isolated poet, like Shelley's, finds optimism within the desolate environment. It is 'not [a] melancholy world', even if 'mute' ('Winter Nights in the High Alps', I. 1; *VL* 81): it is a world that, like the mind of the poet, is composed of and determined by tonal modulations. The juxtaposition of silence and sound, of the peaceful solitude of Davos and the 'tense' (II. 14), discordant life in an overcrowded London, emphasises the condition of difference and dissimilarity that permeates Symonds's poem and, *in extenso,* his life. Like the poetical reality described, he lived apart from his community, physically isolated and in exile ('With you I may not dwell', III. 1; *VL* 83), and he also perceived his mind as exceptional, 'a rich mine of psychological curiosities' (to Henry Graham Dakyns, 27 March 1889; *L*3 364). As he put it, 'I am certain that 999 men out of 1000 do not believe in the existence of a personality like mine' (*L*3 364).

The latter two sonnets of 'Winter Nights in the High Alps', by contrast, explore the means by which the speaker finds stability, in relation to both his mental temperament and physical displacement, in the philosophical correspondence with the stars (III. 8, *VL* 83) and the peasant folk in Davos he calls 'Friends' (IV. 1, *VL* 84). In sonnet III, in an act that mimics the meditative practice of an eremite, the speaker passes his long night vigils contemplating and conversing with the self:

I therefore, doomed to weave my lonely rhyme,
Here 'mid these pines, these moon-scenes desolate,
Have found therein a joy that mocks at fate;
And stationed on a specular mount sublime,
Have scanned yon fields low-lying, whence I climb
To commune with the stars inviolate. (III. 3-8, *VL* 83)

The image of the speaker positioned on the 'specular mount' echoes closely the preface to *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* in which Symonds related the reclused student of nature to

one ‘who surveys the world of things from a solitary mountain peak or from the centre of a boundless desert’ (‘Preface’, *ESS*1 viii). The meditative mood, instigated by the speaker’s lonely station on the mountain, inspires the spiritual union of man and star. The transient objects are transmuted by the poet-philosopher; permanence and endurance find expression in the symbols of the ‘inviolate’ (III. 8) and ‘sempiternal stars’ (III. 9), and the mind that perseveres. He, amidst the awesome beauty of the icy landscape, finds ‘a joy that mocks at fate’ (III. 5), celebrating and ennobling the genius of the poetic spirit, a power by which ‘the mind triumphs over place and time’ (III. 2). The seclusion, the dark and desolate landscape, and the juxtapositional sound of silence, are necessary elements conducive to the divine communion of the soul with ‘The God that in the mystic moon-world dwells’ (I. 14).

‘A Problem of the Night’, like ‘Winter Nights in the High Alps’, also appears in the ‘Among the Mountains’ section published in *Vagabunduli Libellus*, and it is an important sonnet for understanding Symonds’s interrogation of modern scientific knowledge as implacable fact:

> Full well we know that each star is a sun,
> Circled with congregated worlds that move
> In rhythmic choirs around one heart of love
> Vibrating flames which through their orbits run.
> Faith too hath held that of these worlds each one
> Pulses with life and life-pangs like our own;
> For some are fledglings, some to full age grown,
> Some over-worn, their labours told and done. (ll. 1-8, *VL* 88)

The first line here reflects the law demonstrated by late-nineteenth-century astronomy which determined that stars were generally considered to be suns (that they resembled the Sun in other respects than size, mass, or luminosity), and that each sun was orbited by other planetary systems or families of planets. This idea was confirmed by Proctor in *Other Worlds than Ours* (1870): ‘In the first place, we are forced to recognise in the stars *real suns*, not mere lights. […] We see that the stars are constituted in the same general way as the sun, and that further, they even contain elements identical with those which exist in his substance.’[38] Symonds then presented a conception of cosmos that squares with the knowledge promulgated by ‘Faith’, that

[38] Richard A. Proctor, *Other Worlds than Ours* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870), pp. 240-41.

the condition of life as it is understood by mankind is not unique to the Earth. All worlds are bound to the inexorable destiny of their dissolution.

The model of the universe, presented in the octave of 'A Problem of the Night', that represents a transition from the confined world of the ancient Greeks to a vast and vaulting space scattered with countless stars, each of which is a sun, is inundated in the sestet with the poet's mystical and transformative thought:

> These thoughts perplex me not. Far more I muse,
> On winter nights, when the wide heavens lie bare,
> Why is it that one region shines so fair
> With fabled constellations, fiery spears,
> Orbs within orbs, which cross and interfuse,
> While yon black gulf yawns well-nigh void of spheres? (ll. 9-14, *VL* 88)

While the speaker adopts the knowledge of both late-nineteenth-century astronomy and of 'Faith', his contemplation of interstellar space, the yawning 'black gulf well-nigh void of spheres', communicates to the reader a religious mood steeped in an esoteric meaning. The sestet, that culminates in a question, is concerned with two opposing images of the night sky: the region aggregated by stars, and the unlit, seemingly barren space of sky. The speaker's thought, however, is engaged with the "problem", the enigmatic question, of blank space, the absence of light. Symonds's note to the poem brings into relief the pervasive nature of the darkness on his contemplation of law and faith: 'Those who in winter have watched the luminous star-sown spaces of the heavens around Orion, and have observed the vacancy in the south-western skies, may have felt the force of this problem. It is very noticeable in a narrow mountain valley' (*VL* 206). The vision observed by the speaker of negative space – symbolic of absence, the unknown, or the condition of negation discussed earlier in the chapter – reproduces the description in contemporary scientific texts of the gaps visible to the star-gazer when scanning the night sky. The image depicted by Symonds in the note is suggestive of the Great Nebula in Orion, visible to the naked eye, even though few nebulae could be seen without the use of a telescope.[39] Proctor, along with other popular astronomers, documented the distinctive contrast of light and its absence in the nebula, and described the presence of a

[39] See Proctor's *Half-Hours* for a discussion of Orion, a constellation composed of double and multiple stars, clusters, and nebulae (p. 38).

trapezium that surrounded 'that very remarkable black gap within' it.[40] The mystical image illustrated by Symonds of the 'fiery spears' and 'Orbs within orbs, which cross and interfuse' unites with Proctor's factual presentation of the nebula as 'a vast system of comets travelling in extensive orbits around nuclear stars'.[41] Indeed, the complex streams of light, the spear-like tails of comets, the flames and interspersing brilliancy, stimulated the sympathy and wonder of Symonds in the same way that they excited other metaphysical poets of the Victorian age, such as Tennyson and Roden Noel.

Symonds touched upon the fundamental aesthetic experience of the night sky that enables the observing eye to influence the imaginative eye by knitting together the cosmic and psychic, the ethereal and earthly. While star clusters appear as a spot of pale, cloud-like light in the heavens, Symonds's observation presents a detailed, animated universe. The mighty movements of sidereal systems inferred by astronomers are seen in prospect by the imagination, as Symonds magnified and discerned them with his visionary eye. This optical illusion, the manipulation of the poet's perception of relative size and distance, is reminiscent of some lines drafted in 1800 by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a notebook, in which he records the dream-like phenomenon he experienced while gazing at a fire in the grate of his room:

> The poet's eye in his tipsy hour
> Hath a magnifying power
> Or rather emancipates his eyes
> Of the accidents of size.[42] (ll. 1-4)

Indeed, Symonds, in his philosophical verse, drew from the influence of the natural landscape, specifically his long and solitary night-watches of the sky, with its laws, and man in his relation to it. Celebrating the liberation of the intellect by modern science, Symonds as poet observed the wonders of the universe and viewed nature with unbiased eyes, emancipated from distinctions enforced by medieval Christianity. He perceived the beauty and divinity that lay enfolded in the illimitable sky and which invited the poet's sympathy. The actions of the celestial bodies, very noticeable from the plains of Davos surrounded by expansive mountain ranges, eternally captured his imagination. Images and concepts that reproduce scientific

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[40] Proctor, *Half-Hours*, p. 41.
[41] Proctor, *Half-Hours*, p. 42.
[42] *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 228fn2.

documentation are superseded, in the sestet of ‘A Problem of the Night’, by mystical symbols from which he created a landscape that suggested that all things in the universe, including the poet’s rhythm of thought, were truly equal and harmoniously shared in the universal rhythm. Although the poem, like much of Symonds’s astronomical poetry, retains the adventurous side of Greek astronomy in both the literal and the figurative or anthropomorphic sense – in the allusions, for example, to the luminous spaces of ‘fabled constellations’ (‘A Problem of the Night’, l. 12; *VL* 88) – both science and the imagination make the sky symbolic of emotion and thought that belong to the poet. In the poem, science is married with religion and imbued with a spiritual mysticism that is sensibly felt but remains inscrutable. Symonds’s imagery is thus panoramic, unbroken, and unfolding. Viewed philosophically, this is Symonds’s means of visualising his belief that every part of the universe is intimately connected and interdependent, and that his soul is a part of the World-Spirit.

IV

‘Poet and Pioneer’: Symonds’s Conception of the Religion of the Future

> To believe in one’s Poesy or Prophecy, to believe in oneself is the great point.
> Then to sing and preach. The rest the world must do and the man must leave unnoticed.
> (Symonds to Henry Sidgwick, 24 September 1871; *L*2 162)

The Italian Renaissance was, for Symonds, ‘the most marvellous period that the world has ever known’ (*Renaissance* 9), a unique epoch in Western history, that was revolutionary in its bold reaction against medieval modes of thinking, its preparation for modern scientific criticism, and the ways in which it advanced the spirit of humanism. More crucial, however, was the momentous significance of the epoch’s emergence from the dark ages ruled by ecclesiastical authority and, subsequently, the irrevocable development and progress of the human mind. This chapter considers the ways in which Symonds’s intuitive understanding of the Renaissance, his interrogation of and sympathy towards its epoch-defining ideas and radical personalities, shaped his own poetry and prose by allowing him to meditate on the problems of religion, science, and philosophy. This chapter also considers Symonds’s apprehension and understanding of the nature, relations, and functions of the poet and poetry in culture and the imagination. It will explore the ways in which Symonds engaged in a creative dialogue with his predecessors and contemporaries to determine the importance of the relationship between the poet as hierophant, the interpreter of the spirit of nature, and his vital function of imparting the message to those ready to receive it. An understanding of Symonds’s conception of the ‘hierophants of nature’ (‘Landscape’, *ESS*2 124), reveals a clearer conception of the central characteristics and qualities that Symonds identified with these unique personalities, considered by the poet as geniuses, innovators, pioneers, pariahs, heroes, martyrs, and prophets. These signifiers of the audacious and enterprising spirit of the figures that embodied them were applied by Symonds to describe the personalities of, for example, Dante Alighieri, Niccolò Machiavelli, Pietro Pomponazzi, and Michelangelo Buonarroti. Bernardino Telesio, Giordano Bruno, Tomasso Campanella, Lucilio Vanini, and Giambattista Vico were identified by Symonds as ‘*novi homines* or pioneers of modern thought’ (*MBTC* 15), enterprising and bold inquirers of the epoch whose instinctual scepticism was vital for the intellectual revival that would engender the progress of society. Symonds’s praise of such eminent and luminary figures was not, however, circumscribed to persons from the Renaissance period. Cleanthes of

Assos, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Jalâl Ad Dîn Mohammed Rûmî, William Shakespeare, Johann Wilhelm von Goethe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Darwin, Walt Whitman, and many more, formed a distinctive company of 'philosophic singers' ('Lucretius', *SSI* 107). Thus, the chapter will also consider Symonds's position as an interpreter of the spirit of his century, a role he was at times hesitant to embrace confidently and assert for himself. It explores the importance of music as a ruling sentiment in Symonds's prose and poetry, which he associated with the poet-prophets of past and present. Symonds, like the exponents of the various ages that remained salient for his imagination, communed with the spirit of nature to create poetry that is imbued with a fresh music that consoles and sings of his conception of 'the religion of the future' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 125), a democratic vista personally envisioned by him that harmonises his scientific insight of historically decisive epochs and individuals with his belief in the inherent spirituality of the universe.

'The Deicides of Elder Faiths': The Enterprising Spirit of the Italian Renaissance

Symonds perceived the Italian Renaissance as a decisive epoch whose revolutionary force and effects reverberated and irrevocably shaped the ways in which human beings thought about themselves and their relation to the greater universe. Symonds acknowledged these facts in *The Renaissance*, his prize essay delivered on 17 June 1863 in Oxford: 'the liberty of opinion, the advance of science, and the political progress it introduced, are still in painful progress in our own days' (*Renaissance* 11).[1] His perception of the Renaissance in his early twenties combined with his acknowledgement and acceptance of the particular and determining factors of the movement's spiritual reawakening remaining inviolable, persisted until the end of his life. In January 1863, Symonds expressed to Albert Oslif Rutson his difficulty to fully cognise and define the intellectual movement: 'I toil daily for an hour or two at the Renaissance period, but I have not yet come to understand what it is. Each day carries me a step back, & I put the time of reawakening earlier by a century' (*L*1 377). He resolved that despite the undeniable growth and evolution of human nature, reflected by, but not limited to, the innumerable discoveries and inventions of the age, 'there is no such thing as a Renaissance. […] there is nothing like a clear definite all including movement' (*L*1 377). Writing on the subject thirty years later in his

[1] *The Renaissance*, written in Malvern, won the Chancellor's Prize. On 17 June 1863, Symonds recited part of it to Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, then Prince and Princess of Wales, in The Theatre, Oxford (see *Memoirs* 215).

essay 'The New Spirit' (first published in March 1893 in *The Fortnightly Review*, a month before his death), Symonds's understanding of the Renaissance remained as elusive and inviolable as it had been in his letter to Rutson: 'I do not seem able, after thirty years of searching, to yield a better account of the aetiology of the Renaissance than I did then' ('New Spirit' 427).[2] Thus, Symonds's exploration of the revolutionary period was not concerned with a strict determination of the mysteries surrounding the cause of its growth nor the years that constituted the Renaissance – 'Indeed, to confine it to any period is impossible' (*Renaissance* 11).[3] Symonds aimed instead to explore the force and effects of the period, 'the presence of one reconstructive spirit, animating all in different degrees', resulting in 'one renovation of mankind' (*Renaissance* 10). Symonds thus resolved to refine the Renaissance to 'the interval between 1450 and 1550' (*Renaissance* 9) in his initial essay on the subject which he later expanded and published as the *Renaissance in Italy* (7 vols, 1875-1886).

The intellectual strife that governed the transition from the medieval period to the dawn of the Renaissance in Italy was, for Symonds, invaluable for the future progress of mankind in its emphasis on the self and the inward turning thoughts of human beings: 'Inestimable is the value of this restless period; for though it could not judge freely for itself, it prepared for us an emancipation from authority, by transferring its allegiance to human and rational traditions, instead of obeying the phantoms with which scholasticism had enthralled mankind' (*Renaissance* 46). Symonds determined that the revolutionary nature of humanism on a cultural and spiritual scale, the reawakening of intellectual freedom and independence incipient in Italy and which reverberated through Europe, was, most crucially, engendered by the exploration of the classical past necessitated by the social and political conditions of Italy during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Symonds thus emphasised in his study the importance of the revival of learning, specifically the attention of literary scholars who were 'almost exclusively devoted to the study and restitution of the classics' (*Renaissance* 40), and how this was intrinsically connected to the emancipation of thought that, from the mid-fifteenth

[2] 'The New Spirit' appeared alongside his essay 'Arthur Hugh Clough' as an American issue: John Addington Symonds, *Last and First; Being Two Essays: The New Spirit and Arthur Hugh Clough* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1919). In the introduction to the volume, Albert Mordell defined both essays as 'respectively, the first and the last most important contributions to literary criticism by John Addington Symonds' (p. 7).

[3] The force and effects of the Renaissance, evident and visible in the intellectual revival and physical progress of humankind and the several arts, did not, for Symonds, illuminate those mysteries that surrounded the 'the reason of its growth' (*Renaissance* 57). Such a 'reason' was, for Symonds, inscrutable: 'All we can do is to observe the awakening of the giant; […] to watch him growing in knowledge of himself and of the world, and gradually entering on that race which we ourselves are running' (*Renaissance* 57). Writing thirty years later, Symonds remained sceptical towards the proposed idea by eminent writers of 'a plausible theory of the causes which produced this reawakening of the human mind, or to define with absolute precision what was its vital essence' ('New Spirit' 427).

century in Florence, advanced quickly. Ultimately, Symonds argued that a necessary renewed and vital interest in antiquity was the point from which the reconstruction of the intellectual spirit could depart. 'Literature', he resolved, 'must always prove the surest guide to the investigator of a people's character at some decisive epoch.'[4]

The considerations of the intellectual, political, and religious atmosphere of the period directly preceding the first signs of what Symonds defined as 'a spiritual process, a reacquisition of mental lucidity and moral independence after centuries of purblind somnambulism' ('New Spirit' 429) are helpful to understand the transition from an era circumscribed by medieval habits of thought to the revival of intellectual energy in the Renaissance. The acquisition by the Medici family, for example, of obscure and neglected stores of literary records from around the world, and the study of these manuscripts, which Symonds considered as 'a whole untravelled empire of the intellect' ('New Spirit' 432), vitally informed the figures of the century who would lead the intellectual awakening that, he felt, endured in the spirit of modern European society. Symonds identified the emergence of personality – personal independence 'in the sphere of thought, self-conscious of its aims, self-governed in its conduct' ('New Spirit' 430-31) – and '*Curiosity*' ('New Spirit' 431) in the humanists of the period as crucial forces that would determine the direction of the intellectual spirit in 'an age when the Church and antiquity contended for the empire of the human reason'.[5] This unique combination of personality, as 'a sharply defined individuality [that] emerges into prominence' ('New Spirit' 431), and curiosity is evident in the bold inquirers (historical and contemporary) that Symonds identified as pioneers, hierophants, geniuses, heroes, martyrs, and innovators.

Symonds's celebration of the palingenesis of the intellectual spirit evident in the minds of such figures of the Italian Renaissance, as positive and optimistic as it was, was not blind to the surviving power of medieval Latin Christianity. Despite the vital and necessary existence of 'incipient scepticism' germinating in the thoughts of men like John Wycliffe, John Huss, Joachim of Flora, and the Goliardi (the wandering poets of Europe in the Middle Ages), they remained, according to Symonds, 'semi-emancipated' ('New Spirit' 432) and tethered to medieval habits of thought. The triumphant force of genius – evident in, for example, Antonio Beccadelli's *Hermaphroditus* (1425), a collection of erotic Latin epigrams dedicated to Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici (1389-1464) which Symonds considered, in a letter to Edmund Gosse

[4] John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 7 vols (London: Elder, Smith, & Co., 1875-1886), IV: 'Italian Literature, Part I' (1881), p. vi.
[5] John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, V: 'Italian Literature, Part II' (1881), p. 484

(written on 15 March 1877), as 'a marked sign of the humanistic paganism' (*L*2 467) of the age – was fused with the oppressive habits and thoughts of ecclesiastical authority, what Symonds called 'that Dark Side of Renaissance Superstition' (*L* 467). Astrologers, for example, 'persuaded Tyrants that victims were necessary to avert calamities in certain conjunctions of the planets' (*L*2 467).[6] Symonds suggested that the absorption of medieval modes of thought by the new spirit of the age was, however, a necessary stage in the process of intellectual revival and development, what Symonds termed 'negative importance'.[7] More significant was the triumph of personality that was inevitably acquiring its freedom from the psychological manacles of medievalism, vitally exercising its 'will to investigate principles, to interrogate Church doctrine, to reconstitute the scheme of society on some fresh basis' ('New Spirit' 431).

Dante was, for Symonds, a poet who, despite his medieval habit of mind and fervent orthodoxy, embodied this enterprising new spirit, 'the genius of the Renaissance' ('New Spirit' 429), and, more importantly, progress. Symonds described the *Divine Comedy* (composed c. 1308-1320) as 'the record of the man who made it the intense and fiery self-delineation of a haughty spirit' ('New Spirit' 431), attributing to the poet-laureate the qualities of a lofty and courageous personality.[8] Approaching the *Divine Comedy* through the eyes of the late-nineteenth century, Symonds reflected on the humanistic impulse that permeates the epic, how 'the personality which animates it' has endured in the modern era despite the poet's medieval conceptions of theology and science.[9] He presented Dante as a clearly defined personality in

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[6] The tyrants to which Symonds here refers are Pope Alexander VI and Pier Luigi Farnese. Their crimes against Astorre Baglioni of Perugia and the Bishop of Fano being impelled by astrological fears were, according to Symonds, 'a charitable suggestion of Burckhardt's supported […] by some obscure hints in contemporary chronicles' (*L*2 467). Two years earlier, in *The Age of Despots* (1875), the first volume of *Renaissance in Italy*, Symonds investigated the question of medieval superstition and its influence on the behaviour of Pope Alexander VI and Pier Luigi Farnese:

> How far, we may ask, were these dark crimes of violence actuated by astrological superstition? This question is raised by Burckhardt (p. 363) apropos of Sigismondo Malatesta's assault upon his son, and Pier Luigi Farnese's violation of the Bishop of Fano. To a temperament like Alexander's, however, mere lust enhanced by cruelty was a sufficient motive for the commission of monstrous crime. (John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, I: 'The Age of Despots' (1875), p. 363fn1.)

[7] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, V: 'Italian Literature, Part II', p. 484.

[8] Symonds's praise for Dante as an interpreter and singer of divine truths was powerfully expressed in his description of the poet as 'one of the supreme triad of epic singers [alongside Homer and John Milton], the interpreter of a chaotic middle age, the emerger from barbarian darkness and the babel of confounded dialects, the hierophant of novel mysteries and herald of a world's awakening, the voice that startled Europe from her somnambulism of a thousand years' (John Addington Symonds, *An Introduction to the Study of Dante* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1872), p. 95). Cf. Shelley's considerations on Dante, for whom the Italian poet was 'the second epic poet', after Homer, and followed by Milton, that dispelled the barbarisms of earlier ages and became 'the first awakener of entranced Europe' (*A Defence of Poetry*, *SMW* 692-93).

[9] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, IV: 'Italian Literature, Part I', p. 78.

history, a 'potent spirit', and an expounder of the mysteries of the phenomenal world and their relation to human beings and God: 'At once creator and spectator of his vision, neophyte and hierophant, arraigned and judged, he has not only seen hell as the local-prison house of pain, but has felt it as the state of sin within his heart. […] Dante is both the singer and hero of his epic.'[10] Symonds presents Dante as the singer of universal ideas that, although 'still a scion of his epoch' because circumscribed to modes of religious and scientific thought that have since been superseded, remain universal and pertinent in the modern age.[11] Despite living in a time when 'it had become an axiom that poetry was the art of lies', Dante transcended the intellectual limits of the medieval period to become the exponent of his age whose poetry published '"the truth concealed beneath a veil of fable"'.[12]

The decisive personalities of the epoch, with their transcendental thoughts and bold inquiries into the orthodox system of Christianity, shared an instinctual belief in the power of science and anticipated, according to Symonds, the modern mind arriving at clear and logical conclusions concerning the relation of human beings to God and the universe. Turning to antiquity, Symonds highlighted the importance of the Graeco-Roman revival to the resurgence of the progressive spirit that lay asleep in Italy – 'In the phenomenon with which we are now occupied [the interrogation of the new phase of civilisation], the propitious quarter, the nucleus of the ovum was Italy' ('New Spirit' 430).[13] Symonds stressed the importance of the inheritance of the Greek spirit by the new philosophers of the age: 'Plato's sublime guesses and far-reaching speculations suited the spirit of the awakening age' (*Renaissance* 47). Plato's innovative hypotheses and bold spirit, inspired humanists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino to transgress the classifying and limiting mindset of an Italy subservient to Papal power.[14] Campanella, too, was elevated by Symonds to the status of pioneer as a result of his bold new philosophy that fortified the bond between humanity and

[10] Symonds, *Study of Dante*, p. 95. Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, IV: 'Italian Literature, Part I', pp. 78-79.
[11] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, IV: 'Italian Literature, Part I', p. 82.
[12] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, IV: 'Italian Literature, Part I', p. 81.
[13] Cf. 'The reasons for this priority of the Italians have already been assigned. They never broke with the Roman past. They absorbed the Ostrogoths and Lombards. They resisted feudalism. They kept their language close to Latin. Their cities bore antique names, and abounded in monuments of the classical past. They created the Roman Church, and at the same time they were the least imposed on by its spiritual pretensions. Farther than all the sister-nations, they had advanced upon the path of material and social prosperity. […] It devolved upon them therefore to revive the positive and plastic genius of the antique world, and by combining this with what remained alive of mediævalism, to give form and substance to that hybrid which I have called the New Spirit' ('New Spirit' 430).
[14] Cf. 'After this we need not marvel that the Papacy, trembling for its power, denounced and persecuted philosophers. Paul the Second imprisoned and tortured the members of the Scientific Academy at Rome, and Leo fulminated from the Lateran against the asserters of new Pantheism. But notwithstanding their devotion to the master of the academy, these Platonists confounded him, not only with his Alexandrian successors, but also with pseudo-Pythagoreans and Orphics, and even with the Jewish Cabbala' (*Renaissance* 47).

nature, perceiving the latter 'as the source of knowledge' (*MBTC* 15). His admiration for Campanella was expressed in a letter to Edmund Gosse in the same year that his translations of the sonnets of Michelangelo and Campanella were first published: 'I do not expect much notice will be taken of it. So few people care for Italian. The great point about C is the modernness of his ideas. They reflect one's own thoughts of yesterday with strange vividness' (13 February 1878, *L*2 526). Niccolò Machiavelli and Pietro Pomponazzi, whose thought contained the germs of the spirit of modern science, were also heralded by Symonds as exceptional examples of the revolutionary and radical thinking of the time, as he celebrated their pioneering and enterprising genius:

> Machiavelli and Pomponazzi contemporaneously philosophised the realism on which science was destined to be founded. They were the deicides of elder faiths; the hierophants of a new revelation, as yet but dimly apprehended; the Columbus and Vespucci of an intellectual hemisphere which it remained for their posterity to colonise.[15]

The analogy aptly presents the two men as daring interrogators circumnavigating the kingdom of the mind and spirit, discovering new truths in their intellectual enterprise. Symonds boldly celebrated Machiavelli and Pomponazzi as the prophets of a new philosophy that celebrated the tenets of modern genius and liberty and, more interestingly, as courageous individuals killing the conceptions of gods created since time immemorial by orthodox systems of faith. Like the *novi homines* Telesio, Bruno, Campanella, Vanini, and Vico – the men who Symonds determined 'were conscious of Pariahdom, and eager to be martyred in the glorious cause' (*MBTC* 16-17) – Machiavelli and Pomponazzi possessed an adventurous and chivalrous nature, combined with an instinctive sense of speculation animated by a humanistic current.

Symonds's admiration for the innovative spirit of such pioneering and bold figures forms part of his critical scheme that surveyed, interpreted, and revealed in his poetry and prose the intrepid and enterprising figures that influenced the movement of intellectual thought in history. 'The Limits of Knowledge' opens with an emphatic statement that certifies humanity's incapability to entirely comprehend the external universe; it is only partially perceived through the limiting senses: 'Nothing is known by human beings which is not in the consciousness of collective or individual humanity—in the mind of the race or the person' ('The Limits of

[15] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, V: 'Italian Literature, Part II', p. 486.

Knowledge', *ESS*2 285). Yet Symonds's belief in humanity's inability to know the whole, to fully understand God, did not preclude his admiration and enthusiasm for the individuals in history that attempted to increase their 'grasp on partial knowledge' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287) of the world. For Symonds, this perpetual and unceasing ambition, driven by a moral instinct that sought to improve humankind as opposed to being spurred on by a hubristic impulse, brought human beings 'continually more and more into the presence of a Force, a Life, a Being, […] which he [man] was bound to recognise and worship as the essence which fashioned him and which keeps him in existence' ('Limits', *ESS*2 287). Symonds's belief in enterprise as a vital element in his description of the pioneer thus formed the subject of many of his critical essays and poems. In his essay 'Is Poetry at Bottom a Criticism of Life?', a review of Matthew Arnold's *Poems of Wordsworth* (1879), Symonds examined poetry in its several forms in an attempt to understand the nature of great poets and how their poetry attained a more complete presentation of the complexities of human life and thought, in an effort to sustain the moral impulse concerned with unifying humanity. Symonds equated the 'poetry of revolt' ('Is Poetry at Bottom a Criticism of Life?', *ESS*2 153), the force of the intellectual spirit of the age that incites change, with the ethical quality of the person that embodies it:

> The energy of the rebellious spirit is itself a kind of moral greatness. We are braced and hardened by contact with impassioned revolutionaries, with Lucretius, Voltaire, Leopardi. Something necessary to the onward progress of mankind—the vigour of antagonism, the operative force of the antithesis—is communicated by them. They are in a high sense ethical by the exhibition of hardihood, self-reliance, hatred of hypocrisy. ('Poetry', *ESS*2 154)

It is evident that, for Symonds, a free and fearless attitude of mind was an essential trait of the decisive figures in the intellectual movements in particular historical epochs. To these characteristics we may add 'Pariahdom' and martyrdom, a willingness to self-sacrifice in defence of a belief or cause that prioritised above all else liberty and human welfare. The nobility of the poet's daring enterprise is evident in 'The Philosophic Flight (*Poi che spiegate*)', a sonnet generally attributed to Bruno by literary critics. Symonds prefixed his translation of the sonnet as the proem to *The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella* (1878). It was reprinted in the 'Translations' section in *Vagabunduli Libellus* with Bruno's name cited as the author. In the introduction to *The Sonnets of Michael Angelo Buonarroti and Tommaso Campanella*, written in November 1877, Symonds speculated about

the perception among English literary critics that the sonnet belonged to Bruno, claiming that he found 'good reason to suppose that it was really written by Tansillo' (*MBTC* 24). Nonetheless, Symonds recognised the effusive spirit that permeates the poem, its enthusiasm and resolute determination to explore new intellectual realms:

> Whoever may have been its author, it expresses in noble and impassioned verse the sense of danger, the audacity, and the exultation of those pioneers of modern thought, for whom philosophy was a voyage of discovery into untravelled regions. Its spirit is rather that of Campanella than of Michael Angelo. Yet the elevation at which Michel Angelo habitually lived in thought and feeling was so far above the plains of common life, that from the summit of his solitary watch-tower he might have followed even such high-fliers as Bruno or as Campanella in their Icarian excursions with the eyes of speculative interest. (*MBTC* 24-25)

It is clear that the subject of the sonnet, whether composed by Bruno or not, appealed to Symonds's speculative personality, especially in its enthusiasm for the spirit of humankind that is audacious and enterprising. In his translation of the poem, Symonds's adopted the sentiments expressed above concerning Michelangelo's radical spirit, reworking the myth of Icarus to associate brave high-flying ambition with innovative enterprise instead of complaisance:

> Now that these wings to speed my wish ascend,
> The more I feel vast air beneath my feet,
> The more toward boundless air on pinions fleet,
> Spurning the earth, soaring to heaven, I tend:
> Nor makes them stoop their flight the direful end
> Of Dædal's son; but upward still they beat.
> What life the while with this death could compete,
> If dead to earth at last I must descend?
> My own heart's voice in the void air I hear.
> Where wilt thou bear me, O rash man! Recall
> Thy daring will! This boldness waits on fear!
> Dread not, I answer, that tremendous fall:
> Strike through the clouds, and smile when death is near,
> If death so glorious be our doom at all!

(‘The Philosophic Flight’, ll. 1-14; *VL* 184)

The sonnet is a reflection of what is typical of the Renaissance spirit: the beauty of art and the freedom of philosophy transcend the fixed symbols of all that is mundane and corporeal. Ascension, boundlessness, and liberty are ideas that permeate the poem, and the concepts of hubris and over-ambition, typically associated with chastisement and punishment, are subverted. Not even the example of Icarus’s fall is enough to deter the philosophic flight of the intrepid soul. It is in the sestet that the momentous and triumphant spirit of the Renaissance is realised. The speaker turns inwards and, with him, the reader hears the heart conversing with the mind, reflecting and meditating on the fears and doubts that stifle progress. The poem concludes with a series of emphatic instructions, the speaker commanding his volition to ‘Dread not’ and ‘Strike through the clouds’ that obscure the untravelled region beyond his immediate sight.[16] Finally, death, as a symbol of fear and the unknown, is transfigured by the poet into something ‘glorious’. The use of the conjunction ‘If’ represents the speculative mind of the poet who suggests that death, the demise of the physical body, is not necessarily the final condition of the conscious mind. Philosophy, the kingdom of thought, prevails over corporeal matter.

Bruno was considered by Symonds as one of the ‘Platonistic dreamers’ of the latter half of the sixteenth century, who breathed into his works ‘the visionary Pantheism for which he suffered at the stake’ (*Renaissance* 48). Like many other great thinkers of the Renaissance, Bruno’s thought, according to Symonds, possessed ‘an equal share of Mediæval mysticism and modern scientific insight’ (*Renaissance* 48). Nonetheless, such revolutionary thinkers like Bruno, fearlessly interrogating and extinguishing the sacred truths of the Church, yet inevitably absorbing them in their own progressive philosophical theories, advanced onwards, clearing the path for successive generations to continue their labours:

[16] The contemplation of the dichotomy of the mind and body as separate entities and the complexity associated with the nature of apprehension – to physically seize or grasp and to perceive through the intellect, and to understand – are powerfully rendered in the following lines from Symonds’s translation of Michelangelo’s sonnet that envisions another kind of philosophic flight:

> But, lady, feet must halt where sight may go:
> We see, but cannot climb to clasp a star.
> The pure ethereal soul surmounts that bar
> Of flesh, and soars to where thy splendours glow,
> Free through the eyes; while prisoned here below,
> Though fired with fervent love, our bodies are. (‘Flesh and Spirit’, ll. 3-8; *MBTC* 54)

> They threw themselves upon the world and God with simple self-devotion, seeking nothing extraordinary in this life or the next, accepting things as they beheld them, attempting to mould no institutions, leaving the truths they had discovered to work like leaven, aiming at justice and a perfect clarity of vision, discarding economies and accommodations of all kinds, casting the burden of results upon *that* or *him* who called them into being, standing unterrified, at ease, before time, space, circumstance, and any number of sidereal systems. (*Memoirs* 469)

Bruno, who Symonds identified as one of his 'friends from divers centuries' (*Memoirs* 469), along with Cleanthes, Marcus Aurelius, Goethe, Whitman, and Darwin, through his insightful and progressive intellectual spirit, had traversed the scope of knowledge determined by the religious fictions of the age and inherited from the previous age. Symonds venerated these figures of genius, these 'superiors' (*Memoirs* 469), and the truths they espoused, which inevitably encouraged the growth of fresh intelligence in future individuals and their societies. The pervasive influence of these figures, their transformative and profound effect on the inward operation of Symonds's thought, can be felt in this admission: 'They helped me by their richer or riper experience, by flights beyond my reach, by knowledge denied to my poor studies, by audacities which thrilled the man in me' (*Memoirs* 469).

Symonds's identification of the 're-awakening of intellectual energy' ('New Spirit' 428) in the Renaissance, determined from his extensive surveillance of the epoch and the physical and mental conditions that engendered it, is a process identifiable in Symonds's own personal mental evolution. His intellectual development, traceable in the ideas presented in his prose and poetry, mirrors the spiritual progress of the Renaissance, emerging from doubt and uncertainty to a firm apprehension of self-governance and spiritual *versöhnung*. It is interesting to notice how the intuitions of the numerous pioneering thinkers, especially their recognition of the universe as a living whole and their positive apprehension of the scientific genius, resume with Symonds's personal instincts. In 'The Innovators', a five-sonnet cluster with which *Animi Figura* opens, Symonds was concerned with the hypothesis of institutionalised and systematised forms of religion, their evolution and adaption alongside the ever-changing cultures of the world, and the place of the hierophant as intrepid expounder of truths apprehended by the interrogation of nature. These ideas are not limited to this sonnet cluster but evolve and develop throughout *Animi Figura*. The first sonnet in the cluster opens with an image that powerfully renders the paradoxical nature of faith and the allusiveness of truth. The speaker laments the nameless enterprising figures that are the subject of his poem:

Woe unto those who, swerving from the ways
Of kindly custom, set their soul's desire
On rapt imagination's wavering fire;
Uncertain whether the light that lures their gaze
Be dawn's star orient in the heavens of praise,
Or phosphorous exhalation from earth's mire,
Where husks of creeds, lost lives, foiled hopes expire:
Outcasts from home, faith's Pariahs, in the maze
Of doubt and fear they journey 'neath dark skies,
Lone and despair-bewildered. ('The Innovators', I. 1-10; *AF* 2)

The symbol of the illusive light effectively presents the problem of truth and reality with which the mind of the speaker is concerned. Uncertainty pervades the poem as both reader and speaker cannot determine whether the verb 'lures' suggests that the light is a divine beacon and guide, or a form of negative temptation. However, the image presented in the following lines – the 'Outcasts' and 'faith's Pariahs' on a solitary journey into the untravelled regions symbolised by the 'dark skies' – is reminiscent of the intrepid spirit of the *novi homines* of the Renaissance, the men who Symonds determined 'were conscious of Pariahdom, and eager to be martyred in the glorious cause' (*MBTC* 16-17).

The second sonnet in the cluster reworks the tale of Hero and Leander to highlight and interrogate love as it is conceived and determined by authoritarian institutions. The sonnet possesses a biographical undertone that is the veiled expression of Symonds's personal distress concerning the rejection by religion and society of male-male love. The poet presented his personal struggle in images that parallel those depicted in the first sonnet: Symonds presented himself as part of the company who, like Leander, have been lured by 'Love's lamp' (II. 1, *AF* 3) over the turbulent and 'untravelled seas' (II. 2, *AF* 3). The sonnet ends poignantly with the poet uncertain of the outcome as he strives to pursue love. The 'Pariahs' of faith and those lured by Hero's lamp are figured in the first line of the third sonnet in the cluster as 'doubt's pioneers' (III. 1, *AF* 4). Here, Symonds meditates on the notion of faith set forth by the religious symbolism of preceding ages, and how these prescribed ideas, in turn, bind men to 'oaths' (III. 13, *AF* 4) and 'the hallowed antique creed' (IV. 2, *AF* 5) of Scripture:

Woe to doubt's pioneers! Against them rise

> Banded the guardian priests of hearth and home,
> Who feed faith's altar flame 'neath custom's dome,
> And draw world-wisdom from tradition's eyes. (III. 1-4, *AF* 4)

Symonds, in the manner of the pioneering figures in history, intrepidly invites the world to listen to his interrogation of religions and their stringent doctrines. He forces the reader to dwell on the inevitable conditions of transformation and mutability, the evolutionary conditions to which he believed all things were bound. However, in the last line of the sonnet, Symonds shifts the power of gravity from the 'Banded […] guardian priests' to doubt. He dissociates doubt from its negative connotation as the antithesis of faith and envisions the incipience of scepticism that liberates the mind from the suppression of dogmas as 'doubt's apocalypse' (III. 14, *AF* 4). Symonds imaginatively connects the etymological meaning of apocalypse ('revelation') with its eschatological significance that implies the transformative force initiated by doubt and its wide-reaching repercussions on systems of faith, truth, and knowledge.

The fourth sonnet in the cluster continues the drastic shift of the poem's tone and represents the climactic revelation of the poet as 'a bold inquirer into morals and religion' (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, *SMW* 231), to borrow Shelley's phrase. The repetition of the phrase – that shifts between 'Woe unto' and 'Woe to' – that opens the first three sonnets in the cluster is converted in the first line of sonnet four to a tone that positively and optimistically conceives the nature of doubt:

> And yet Christ doubted what those Pharisees,
> Those Rabbis of the hallowed antique creed,
> Held as it were heaven's very truth indeed
> Promulged and 'stablished in God's chanceries:
> And doubt dwelt in the heart of Socrates,
> When 'mid Athenian groves he sowed the seed
> Of living faith and deathless hope, which freed
> Thought's dove-wings from despair's Symplegades. (IV. 1-8, *AF* 5)

In Christ and Socrates, Symonds conflates ideas of heroism and doubt to render the two figures as innovators and their principles as equiponderant. They are presented audaciously by the poet as the embodiments of doubt. The 'incipient scepticism' ('New Spirit' 432) determined by Symonds in the individuals that reawakened the dormant spirit of the Renaissance period is

detected in Socrates and Christ. Symonds thus highlighted the correlation of these figures to boldly indicate the mutual relations and unity of all these seemingly disparate systems of faith.

'The Innovators' offers a reflection of what is typical of the Renaissance spirit: the beauty of nature and the freedom of thought transcend the fixed symbols of religion and the ritualistic practices of the Church. It is, in a manner, an example of the poet's process of self-effectuation, a personal spiritual reawakening or renaissance that realises Symonds's desire 'to play his own note in the universal symphony' (*L*3 588). The poet's enterprising will to investigate and interrogate doctrinal law figures Symonds as one of his 'deicides of elder faiths', as his philosophic poetry realises more optimistically the inherent spirituality of the universe.[17] The final sonnet in the cluster poses the problem of the place and function of the innovator, the individual who 'sets his dauntless intellect to school' (V. 5, *AF* 6), who utters truths apprehended through a rational understanding of nature and history that are in conflict with the divine truths promulgated by religious forms of authority:

> Is he sage, madman, malefactor, fool,
> Murderer or martyr, the world's scorn or pride,
> In Bedlam cells gagged and despised to bide,
> Or crowned with bays give laws from wisdom's stool. (V. 1-4, *AF* 6)

Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) informs this passage: the 'frail Form', Shelley's self-portrait in the elegy for John Keats, has a 'branded and ensanguined brow, | Which was like Cain's or Christ's' (ll. 271, 305-06), a consciously ambiguous depiction that highlights the uncertain fate of the innovator – it is for posterity to decide whether he is 'Murderer or martyr'. The varying terms Symonds employed to characterise the figure of innovator effectively trace the ubiquity of the evolutionary process to which, according to Symonds, all things are bound. The treatment of the innovator, that shifts between adoration and vilification, is evidence of the condition of life that is in continual progress. It is thus impossible, for Symonds, to represent the whole reality of human nature. Faith and doubt are not in Symonds's mind antithetical but ultimately the conditions of experience. The myriad meanings of innovator, its apprehension from divergent perspectives, are determined by the individual mind that perceives them. For the 'guardian priests', with their predilection for order and obedience to ecclesiastical doctrine, the innovator is 'madman, malefactor, fool'. For Symonds, a man who, like the historical and

[17] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, V: 'Italian Literature, Part II', p. 486.

contemporary figures he celebrated, aligned his mystical beliefs with the latest results of modern science to support a religious mood of mind that abided by the universal law that the life-spirit of the universe penetrates all things and constitutes human essence, the innovator is the 'sage' and 'martyr', the laureate 'crowned with bays'. The task of the innovator to interpret and elucidate the latent suggestions of truth – suggestions because the apprehension of absolute truth for Symonds was impossible – that tends to challenge 'the hallowed antique creed' of religion is powerfully expressed in his following observation of religion:

> For it is in religion that innovations are always tardiest. Philosophies may rise and fall, empires may vanish and races die away, but one dogma meantime pursues its slow and even progress from vigour to complete corruption. Religion is grounded in the life of nations, and bound up with the hopes of every man. (*Renaissance* 56-57)

'THE HIEROPHANT OF MYRIADS': THE POET AS EXPONENT OF THE AGE

O to die advancing on!
Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come?
Then upon the march we fittest die, soon and sure the gap is fill'd,
Pioneers! O pioneers!
[…]
These are of us, they are with us,
All for primal needed work, while the followers there in embryo wait behind,
We to-day's procession heading, we the route for travel clearing,
Pioneers! O pioneers![18]
(from 'Pioneers! O Pioneers!', in 'Birds of Passage' cluster, from *Leaves of Grass*)

There is a recurring idea in Symonds's prose and poetry that an unintelligible force permeates all things, its power influencing and being influenced by poets. For Symonds, the functions of poet and pioneer were inextricably connected: poetry was religion, and poets were the prophets and singers of truths. These poets, the descendants of those 'Olympian bards who sung | Divine ideas below' (ll. 60-61), to borrow Ralph Waldo Emerson's lines from 'Ode to Beauty', were perceived by Symonds as the inheritors and hierophants of transcendental truths that

[18] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. and intro. by Jerome Loving (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; repr. with corrections 2009), pp. 183-86.

determined the ways in which humankind could live more resolutely in the whole.[19] This exclusive 'tribe of philosophic singers' ('Lucretius', *SSI* 107), or 'doubt's pioneers' ('The Innovators', III. 1; *AF* 4), received nature's divine messages – symbolised, for example, in the stars, flowers, mountains, and rivers – by subtly and profoundly comprehending the natural world around them and, most crucially, imparted those conversations to those willing to receive them. These poets vitally possessed the instinctive ability to expound and translate the mysteries of the universe, whilst heralding the scientific spirit which revealed the hidden processes of all things, and their permanent relations.

The expression 'Poet and Pioneer', which this chapter takes as its title, comes from the title of Henry S. Salt's biographical study of Percy Bysshe Shelley which reconsiders the Romantic poet in the context of the 'remarkable *unity*' of his character, his resolute adherence in thought and action to those philosophic principles formed in his early years, and how this was 'the true and only key to a right understanding of his genius'.[20] In *Seventy Years Among Savages* (1921), a work in which Salt meditated on the convoluted notion of civilisation and resolved that twentieth-century England had, in fact, absorbed the primitive customs of the barbarian "other" they admonished, he recalled the positive influences of Shelley and Walt Whitman on Symonds's conception and belief in democracy:

> Mr. J. A. Symonds, like his friend Mr. Roden Noel, at whose house I met him, was one of those writers who, starting from a purely literary standpoint, came over in the end towards the democratic view of life. His appreciation of Whitman is well known; and he told me that since he wrote his study of Shelley for the "English Men of Letters" series he had changed some of his views in the more advanced Shelleyan direction.[21]

Salt determined what Herbert Schueller and Robert Peters later remarked, and which this thesis addresses: that Symonds 'flirted with many panaceas; perhaps in his ability to absorb thought

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[19] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Poems* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), p. 101. The following lines from the ode appeared as the epigraph of Emerson's essay 'The Poet' that was first published in *Essays: Second Series* (1844):

> Olympian bards who sung
> Divine ideas below,
> Which always find us young,
> And always keep us so.

(*The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, intro. by Alfred Kazin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987), p. 220)

[20] Henry S. Salt, *Percy Bysshe Shelley, Poet and Pioneer: A Biographical Study* (London: William Reeves, 1896), p. x.

[21] Henry S. Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 113.

into his inner vision he reminds one of Shelley more than of anyone else' (*L*1 32). John Burroughs, writing to Edward Dowden (9 March 1872), asked the Shelleyan scholar, 'Do you know of John Addington Symonds? He writes Whitman some very appreciative letters, and has sent him quite a long poem in print inspired by Whitman's "Calamus." It is lofty and symphonious, and reminds of Shelley', referring to *Love and Death* (*MM* 161-71), which borrows its tone and language from Shelley's poetry, especially from *Adonais*.[22] For Symonds, Shelley formed a part of a luminous constellation of poets, an exclusive fraternity of enlightened intellectuals '"Framing a message for the watchful mind | More clear than words"' ('Music. *For a Picture*.', ll. 11-12; *VL* 117).

In 'The Debt of English Literature to Italian Literature', an essay in *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879), Symonds highlighted the genius and innovation of Shelley, along with John Keats, William Wordsworth, Thomas Chatterton, Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Arthur Clough, William Blake, Robert Browning, Algernon Swinburne, and Alfred Tennyson, presenting them as 'the stars which stud our literary firmament' (*SSI* 187). They were vitally attuned to and in constant communication with the spiritual rhythm of nature, a transcendental music which was the source of their religious and philosophical inspiration. This species of poet was isolated by Symonds from his or her contemporaries, by what he considered as an intuitive certitude for what is sincere and natural. He or she is driven by an enlightened intellect and noble humanity, hopeful that humankind, sooner or later, will apprehend more truthfully and positively their place in the universe. These poets, called by Symonds 'hierophants of nature' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124), are instrumental in expounding the sacred truths that remain hidden to others, whilst simultaneously serving as the representative of mankind. Most crucially, these ministers of revelation, imbued with the scientific method of systematic examination and visionary power, possess the sympathetic and interpretive force to penetrate and translate the divine cadences represented in and by nature's beauty to become 'the religion of the future' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 125).[23]

'The religion of the future' echoes in phrasing and sentiment Whitman's 'The Poetry of the Future' which was first published in February 1881 in the *North American Review*.[24]

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[22] *The Letters of Edward Dowden and his correspondents*, ed. by Elizabeth Dowden and Hilda Dowden (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914), pp. 59-60. For more information on *Love and Death*, see p. 192fn24 in this chapter.

[23] 'Scientific criticism proceeds by induction, historical investigation, morphological analysis, misdoubting the certainty of aesthetic principles, regarding the instincts and sensibilities of the individual with distrust, seeking materials for basing the canons of perfection upon some positive foundation' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 98).

[24] Walt Whitman, 'The Poetry of the Future', *North American Review*, 132 (1881), 195-211. The influence of Whitman's works, especially *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and *Leaves of Grass*, on Symonds's personal critical speculations on the problems of art, science, and religion, was profound and permanently shaped his attitude towards how he approached life. In a letter to Whitman (written in 1871), Symonds confessed the regenerative

Whitman's sublime imagination, his intrinsic connection to nature, and his concern for the social and moral welfare of humanity, was admired by Symonds in *Walt Whitman: A Study* (1893), in which he described the American poet as 'the would-be prophet of a new gospel and the founder of a new method' (*WW* 141). In *Memoirs*, too, Symonds figured Whitman among his 'friends from divers centuries' (*Memoirs* 469) , as one of the daring figures whose incipient scepticism informed their philosophical speculations and gave substance to their 'intuition into the sempiternally inscrutable' (*Memoirs* 469), a religious instinct with which Symonds personally identified.[25] In 'The Poetry of the Future', Whitman expressed his enthusiasm for the power of poetry as a democratising influence, a belief Symonds sympathised with and recapitulated in his own poetry, letters, and essays.

In his essay, Whitman not only acknowledged the significant role of the poet but also proposed that the spirit of progress, in the long history of humankind's existence, was in a constant state of creation and inheritance:

> The course through time of highest civilization, does it not wait the first glimpse of our contribution to its cosmic train of poems, bibles, structures, perpetuities—Egypt and Palestine and India—Greece and Rome and medieval Europe—and so onward? The shadowy procession is not a meager one, and the standard not a low one. All that is mighty or precious in our kind seems to have trod the road.[26]

The depiction here of the progress of humanity as a 'cosmic train' is reflected in Symonds's essay 'Democratic Art, With Special Reference to Walt Whitman' (in the second volume of *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*), in the form of his theory concerning the mental progress

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effect of *Leaves of Grass* upon his mental and physical health, finding in the poem 'the free breath of the world' (*L*2 167). In this letter, Symonds revealed that he first encountered *Leaves of Grass* at the age of twenty-five in Frederick Myers's room at Trinity College Cambridge. Along with the letter, Symonds sent to Whitman a printer's proof of his poem *Love and Death: A Symphony* (later published in 1878 in *Many Moods*), that was dedicated to Whitman and inspired by 'Calamus'. *Love and Death* appeared in the privately printed pamphlet *Love and Death: A Symphony* and was reprinted at the beginning of Symonds's *In Re Walt Whitman* (1893). See Percy L. Babington, *Bibliography of the Writings of John Addington Symonds* (London: John Castle, 1925; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), pp. 25, 120. Writing to William Michael Rossetti on 30 January 1872, Whitman expressed his 'admiration' for Symonds's *Love and Death* and, a few days earlier (27 January 1872), revealed in a letter to Symonds how he repeatedly read the 'beautiful & elevated' poem and 'consider[ed] it of the loftiest, strongest & tenderest' (Walt Whitman to William Michael Rossetti, in *The Walt Whitman Archive* <https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/nyp.00300.html#nyp.00300_n12> [accessed 1 June 2021]; and Walt Whitman to John Addington Symonds, in *The Walt Whitman Archive* <https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/loc.01702.html> [accessed 1 June 2021]).

[25] See chapter one of this thesis for a discussion of Symonds's religious enthusiasm and those who influenced his conception of religion.

[26] Whitman, 'The Poetry of the Future', p. 210.

of humanity: 'Modern forces evolve themselves inside the sphere of men and manners, which have been shaped by influences derived from remote antiquity' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37).[27] The final line of the extract cited above ('All that is mighty and precious in our kind'), which articulates Whitman's belief in and acknowledgment of salient moments and individuals in the history of civilisation, treading this sacred cosmic road, squares with Symonds's reading of decisive epochs in history and the role of the poet as pioneer, elevated above the rest of humanity while an essential and necessary representative of it. Indeed, the 'shadowy procession' is observed by Whitman as belonging to a remote and, to some degree, inaccessible past, but it is, most crucially, a symbol and reflection of the future:

> Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!
> Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than
> before known,
> Arouse! for you must justify me.
>
> I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
> I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the
> darkness.
>
> I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a
> casual look upon you and then averts his face,
> Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
> Expecting the main things from you.[28]
>
> ('Poets to Come', in 'Inscriptions' cluster, from *Leaves of Grass*)

The poem, like 'The Poetry of the Future', is conscious of humanity as a part of a greater ineffable whole.[29] The imperative – 'Arouse! For you must justify me' – powerfully invokes

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[27] In the essay, Symonds investigated the problems concerning the democracy of art, how past ideals (Graeco-Roman and medieval) struggle to align with the modern and scientific intellectual atmosphere into which humankind has entered. This theory is considered by Symonds mainly from the perspective offered by Whitman in his writings.

[28] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 18.

[29] Symonds read the essay and acknowledged Whitman's 'position with regard to the innovatory and superseding destiny of the United States' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 38). He added: 'the essay ought to be read by students of Whitman, for it is full of fine things' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 38).

the poets who are yet 'to come', those visionary figures who, with the advantage of experience and hindsight, are imbued by Whitman with the capacity 'to prove', 'define', and 'justify' the poet. Whitman's ideology, elements of which can be identified in Symonds's prose and poetry, is concerned with the initiation of processes, not the manner by which they terminate – understanding the phenomena of instigation and commencement as integral to the bard's conception of poetry as 'future-founding'.[30] He articulated, in essence, projections of the future of aesthetics and politics with democracy at the heart of his vision. Symonds, too, believed in the remodelling power of democracy, observing in 'Democratic Art' that 'in some form or other this must happen' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 39). However, Symonds's vision of democracy transcended the spheres of aesthetics and politics. He argued that democracy, more significantly, 'contains the germ of a religious enthusiasm' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 38-39). Democracy, for Symonds, concealed within it the seedling of a type of spiritual poetic mood that functioned as a reconstructive and harmonising force, advancing towards the unification of humanity as it was guided towards a truer apprehension of the permanent relations between and amongst men.

Symonds reflected on the function of the poet as the singer of divine melodies in 'The Singer', a short lyric of three quatrains (*NO* 19-20). The images and ideas in the poem highlight and emphasise evolution as law, an inescapable and undeniable universal process that Symonds recognised as 'the commanding philosophical conception of our century' ('On Some Principles of Criticism', *ESS*1 88). In the poem, however, the poet optimistically perceives the unavoidable reality of death that comes to all biological matter, terminating the poem instead with a celebration of the eternal music of the singer that is inherited and sounded forth by the next generation of singers portrayed in the symbolic form of nightingales. Life thereby triumphs over decay, and the transient nature of corporeal matter in the poem is transmuted into the divine music of nature that manifests itself as permanent, ever-during sound.

He fills the world with his singing,
    High notes of the heavenly morn
For ever and ever ringing
    As age after age is born.

[30] The phrase is used by Sascha Pöhlmann in a discussion of Whitman's poetry and its conception and exploration of the 'future-founding imagination' (Sascha Pöhlmann, *Future-Founding Poetry: Topographies of Beginnings from Whitman to the Twenty-First Century* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2015), p. 40).

And then he is still, and we know not
    Whither his thoughts have fled;
Only the clear notes flow not,
    And we say, the singer is dead.

But the nightingales that he cherished,
    They carol and cannot die;
Though the man whom we loved hath perished,
    His melody throbs for aye. (‘The Singer’, ll. 1-12)

The holistic impulse of the poem moves from contemplating the individual singer (‘He’) to dwelling upon the many (‘nightingales’) that assume the role of singer. It extends beyond this to consider greater revolutionary schemes and systems at work – for example, the transition between epochs. Although the theme of the poem is the procession of life, presenting the law of succession by countless generations, it is imbued with a melancholy tone from the sense of intervenient death and transformation. Symonds contemplates the thought of decay towards which all perishable things unavoidably move. However, the idea of the eternal triumphs as he expresses his philosophy in verse, combining the reality of historical process (‘age after age is born’) and the power of rhythm. The ‘ringing’ of the ‘singing’ sounded in the first stanza resonates through the lyrical stanzas up until the final syllable of the poem. Here, the heightened emotion of the poet as philosophic singer is felt, the lyric’s advancing melody and open vowel sound in ‘aye’ (the final word in the poem) mirroring the dilated imagination of the poet that optimistically envisions the future as the illimitable expanse of time that overcomes the death of the original singer. Although the initial singer, the forerunner of the nightingales, is no longer present, his neophytes, those followers initiated by him into this esoteric religion that heralds truth, assume his songs and forever carol forth those truths. The scientific theory that reads the process of rise and decline in the mental and physical progress of humanity, that abides by the universal law that all forms of change and development imply absorption and reassimilation, is reminiscent of the maxim Symonds presented in his essay that explored the intellectual reawakening of the Renaissance in Italy: ‘for one people completes the work which another had begun’ (*Renaissance* 7).

In ‘The Singer’, Symonds touched upon an aspect that was fundamental to his conception of human life and, by extension, how to live well. The mental progress of humanity, like the biological, is not effected by abrupt fractures and sudden divisions. ‘Every process of

change', Symonds observed, 'implies absorption, blending, compromise, recombination' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37). His approach to the popular evolutionary principles attributed by Charles Darwin to biological matter is transferred, here, to the psychological realm.[31] Symonds suggested that the law of evolution that determines the progress of physical matter is, to some extent, analogous to the animating spirit of the mental sphere.[32] Symonds, in the habit of adorning his philosophical discussions with scientific illustrations drawn from his wide reading, clearly presented this correlation between physical substance and the intellect, and the universality of process: 'As in the case of a glacier, if movement implies fracture, it also involves regelation. The spirit of an age or race yields to that of its successor, but abides within it still as an essential ingredient—assumed, transformed, and carried forward' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37).[33] The process of assumption, transformation, and continuation is thus presented on a microcosmic scale in 'The Singer', in which the nightingales, as the succeeding generation of singers or poets, evoke the image of Whitman's '*ever-during bards*' and their 'immortal songs'[34] ('As I Ponder'd in Silence', in 'Inscriptions' cluster, from *Leaves of Grass*) which 'cannot die' ('The Singer', l. 10). They adopt the function of the singer, re-transmute the lost notes that 'flow not' (l. 7) to produce a fresh music that consoles, and sustain the sacred melody for future disciples.

Whilst Symonds's philosophic poem seems mystical in its recognition of the inestimable value of the poet as pioneer, it acknowledges, on a scientific level, the law of inheritance in the context of the historical progress of humanity, which Symonds explored in 'Democratic Art':

> We are the complex outcome of a tenfold mingled ancestry, not any portion of which has been, or can be, absolutely cast aside. To escape the fatality of hereditary transmission is hopeless. No individual man can be wholly original, in the sense of being independent of his progenitors and predecessors. ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37)

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[31] See chapter one (pp. 79-80) for a discussion of Symonds's observation of Darwinian evolution and his attempt to harmonise it with his personal enthusiasm for the Greek maxim of 'God as Law' ('The Limits of Knowledge', *ESS*2 287).

[32] Symonds's belief in the governing power of evolution, change and process being the force and spirit of all things, was not in conflict with his acceptance of humankind's inability to 'dispel the mystery which surrounds life' ('The Philosophy of Evolution', *ESS*1 7). To the end of his life, he resolved that humanity, in all its stages of intellectual evolution, could never truly or absolutely know God.

[33] In a letter to his sister Charlotte, written on 31 July 1863, Symonds wrote: 'The Norths lent me a Quarterly with a good article on glaciers. Tyndall seems on the whole to have superseded Forbes' (*L*1 408). John Tyndall's *The Glaciers of the Alps* (1860) discussed the various principles behind the phenomena of ice formations and glacial movement, recorded from his personal experience of Alpine mountaineering.

[34] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, p. 9.

This reflection on both the order of the universe and a mystical religious mood is reminiscent of Symonds's own understanding of the philosophic mood of poetry and the pantheistic spirit with which it is imbued. In 'Lucretius', Symonds reiterated his conception of poet as hierophant, beholder of divine ideas, and singer of truth, whilst observing the ways in which pantheism vitalised his poetry:

> Pantheism occupies a middle place between a scientific theory of the universe and a form of religious enthusiasm. It supplies an element in which the poetic faculty can move with freedom: for its conclusions, in so far as they pretend to philosophy, are large and general, and the emotions which it excites are co-extensive with the world. Therefore, Pantheistic mysticism, from the Bhagavadgita of the far East, through the Persian Soofis, down to the poets of our own century, Goethe, and Shelley, Wordsworth, and Whitman, […] has generated a whole tribe of philosophic singers. (*SSI* 107)

Symonds's observation here is of a shared economy, a universal brotherhood of singing poets who, by their patient interrogation of nature, intonate in 'Clear rhythmic utterance, full-formed melodies' ('Music Past and Present', l. 6; *VL* 116) to reconcile humanity with life. Symonds celebrated 'those first song-poets' ('Music Past and Present', l. 1; *VL* 116), the initial bards in the long succession of hierophants, in his sonnet 'Music Past and Present' as the highest and divinest minds, part of 'a visionary company', to borrow Harold Bloom's apt phrase.[35] Symonds was alert to the nature and function of poets, how they behold the beauty of nature and strive for the common weal or democracy:

> Oh for those first song-poets! They who sent
> Man's voice aloft on wings that sought the skies,
> Sustained and steadied for that great emprize
> By the majestic disemburdenment
> Of man's heart's message in a calm content—
> Clear rhythmic utterance, full-formed melodies!

[35] Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961; revised and enlarged, 1971).

> The jubilant soul, struggling with tears and sighs,
> Hung on those notes and shared that song's ascent.
>
> ('Music Past and Present', ll. 1-8; *VL* 116)

The first poets, evocative of the bards of ancient Greece, are depicted here as the friends and teachers of generations by whom the impressions of nature are not so sensitively felt. Through their deeper insight and spiritual attachment to nature, these poets perform the sacred duty of articulating in lyric poetry 'man's heart's message' that humanity, 'struggling with tears and sighs', cannot comprehend on its own. The final two lines of the octave (ll. 7-8) reveal a concept that is crucial to Symonds's comprehension and conception of the function of music: the rhythms of music and the soul are interdependent. The soul 'shared that song's ascent' and becomes 'jubilant' as a direct influence of the ascending melody. The final line of the sestet of the sonnet ultimately alludes to the potential of the melody of the voice to liberate the soul – 'freed the spirit' (l. 14). The sonnet, as is also suggested by its title, thus understands the significance of the lyric element of poetry, its musical inflections as vitalising with sound the rhythms of the world, and the poet as the communicator of these ideas.

The sestet of the poem, however, laments the degradation of the vital connection between music and poetry in recent history:

> Our learned tone-poets in these latter times
> Scorn the pure vocal instrument of song.
> Man's voice with thrilled man's soul no longer chimes.
> And though brass tubes and trembling strings prolong
> Bacchantic rapture that to the earth's height climbs,
> The voice that freed the spirit suffers wrong.
>
> ('Music Past and Present', ll. 9-14; *VL* 116)

In 'these latter times', according to Symonds, song and sound are no longer 'pure'. He laments humanity's divergence from the spirit of nature, the essence of the world with which the ancient poets were in harmonious sympathy, which for the 'learned tone-poets' remains incognisable. In the sonnet 'The Poets of Our Age', grouped thematically, although not forming part of a poetic cluster, with 'Music Past and Present' and 'Music. *For a Picture.*' (a curious sonnet written in the form of a dialogue between Music and an unidentified speaker), Symonds compares the latter-day poets to 'A rout of chattering monkeys taught to spell' ('The Poets of

Our Age', l. 7; *VL* 118). Here, Symonds makes his distinction between the poet-prophet, as instinctively attuned to the music that frames '"through art, […] a message for the watchful mind | More clear than words, to soothe or stir the heart"' ('Music. *For a Picture.*', ll. 10-12; *VL* 117), and the lesser-poet who plays a role, aping the 'first song-poets' ('Music Past and Present', l. 1; *VL* 116). Symonds's poem depicts these mock-poets as violent 'mobs storm[ing] Parnassus' ('The Poets of Our Age', l. 9; *VL* 118), the pantheon of the first song-poets and the residence of Apollo and the Muses. Theirs is a discordant 'chattering', a myriad-voiced, 'dim confused anarchic swell' ('The Poets of Our Age', l. 3; *VL* 118) that confounds and bewilders the listener. These absurd imitators – whose voices compound 'A thousand voices, thrice ten thousand tones, | Various as North and South, as Heaven and Hell' ('The Poets of Our Age', ll. 1-2; *VL* 118), and scorned again by Symonds in 'An Old Gordian Knot' as the 'idiot on a crumbling throne', the 'ape | That grins and chatters' ('An Old Gordian Knot', VII. 4, 11-12; *AF* 85) – are not the natural inheritors of the role of true poet who sat 'Upon those ancient ermine-mantled thrones' of Parnassus ('The Poets of Our Age', l. 5; *VL* 118). Their simulative sound is dissociated by Symonds from the song of the innovators and hierophants that transpires from their communion with music that tries "'To read aright that rhythmic harmony"' of the spirit of nature ('Music. *For a Picture.*', l. 5; *VL* 117).

Shelley was separated by Symonds from this band of lesser poets that he derided. Shelley, although belonging to the poets of 'these latter times' ('Music Past and Present, l. 9; *VL* 116), was, for Symonds, one of the pioneering song-poets that sensitively felt and communicated the music of nature. In *Shelley* (1878), Symonds's biographical study of the Romantic poet, he compared Shelley to 'a landscape painter' (*Shelley* 125), his poetry harmonising his belief in a pantheistic spirit with the transcendental music of poetry:

> The essential thought of Shelley's creed was that the universe is penetrated, vitalized, made real by a spirit, which he sometimes called the Spirit of Nature, but which is always conceived as more than Life, as that which gives its actuality to Life, and lastly as Love and Beauty. To adore this Spirit, to clasp it with affection, and to blend with it, is, he thought, the true object of man. (*Shelley* 123)

Thus Symonds included Shelley in his pantheon of heroic and innovative song-poets, presenting him as part of a divine group of individuals, whose spirit 'perceives, interprets, and preserves the beauty of earth, sea, and sky, to the spirit of men ready to receive it' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124). Symonds turned to Shelley to articulate his adoration for poets, reiterating the

images and words used by Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry* (composed in 1821) to describe the function of the poet: 'What we owe to these hierophants of nature is incalculable. They are continually training our eyes to see, our minds to understand the world' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124). Here, Symonds optimistically perceives the role of the poet-prophet as diminishing the gulf between humankind and the natural environment, and Shelley, for Symonds, was one of the intellectual figures that lived in close communion with the spirit of nature and expressed the divine music of poetry. A similar idea is expressed by Symonds in 'Lines Written inside a Copy of Paradise Lost', a short poem of ten lines which appears in the significantly titled section 'Lyrics of Life and Art' in *New and Old* that emphasises Symonds's focus on music as a ruling idea and sentiment in his life and work. The poem is a meditation on John Milton and his vocation as poet-prophet as Symonds paints the composer of *Paradise Lost* as a powerful singer and seer that penetrates the true nature of things to communicate the reality of their universal correspondence:

> Thee have I read little book, and found in thy pages the music,
> Multitudinous, mighty, outpoured from the organ of Milton,
> Matching the waves in their breadth, and the hills in their strength, and the pinewoods
> Voiced with a thousand winds, and the wild waterfalls in their volume.
>
> ('Lines Written inside a Copy of Paradise Lost', ll. 7-10; *NO* 18)

In these lines Symonds imaginatively condenses notions of music as an abstract quality and descriptions of the physical landscape by employing terminology that carries multifarious significance and applies to both music and the waves. The words 'breadth', 'strength', and 'volume' are used to harmonise sound and image – the music 'Match[es] the waves in their breadth' – as the nouns allude to the undulatory movement of both 'the music' of *Paradise Lost* and 'the waves' of the external landscape depicted by Symonds in his poem. Symonds, again, connects the divine music of the hierophant with antiquity, as the setting he describes, where the speaker reclines 'on the hills mid thyme' (l. 3) to read the 'little book', recalls images of ancient Greece which are emphasised further in the 'sun-dimpled Ionian billows', the 'Parnassian peaks', and 'Arcady's own Erymanthus' (ll. 1-2).

Symonds's conviction of the force of poets as hierophants, their intellectual capacity to effect the changes they powerfully imagine, was Shelleyan in its conception and one to which the Romantic poet returned often. It is potently expressed in the closing lines of *A Defence*:

> Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World. (*SMW* 701)

The term hierophant, *hierophantes* (ἱεροφάντης), is a Greek compound noun that combines *hieros* (ἱερός), filled with or manifesting divine or sacred power, and *phainein* (φαίνειν), to bring to light, reveal, or disclose.[36] According to its etymology, it signified, in the classical period, one whose fundamental function was to expound or teach the official rites of sacrifice and religious worship, such as the initiating priest at the Eleusinian mysteries. Understanding *hierophantes* in relation to the notion of revelation proves significant in the context of Shelley's figuring of poets as 'the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' and of Symonds's depiction of the poet as seer and singer. To the primary sense of *phainein* as revelation and disclosure is added more nuanced and complex associations of the hierophant as a reflector of images ('mirrors') and inextricably bound to pure melody, to 'sound' made 'clear to the ear', a trait pertinent to Symonds's image of the poet as intrinsically imbued with nature's music and the exponent of its mystical language.[37]

In *Shelley*, Symonds examined the musical quality of *Prometheus Unbound*, a poem that had a profound and lasting effect on his conception of the power of lyric poetry. Symonds reflected on Shelley's position as a 'hierophant of nature' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124), a position opposed to the poets in latter times who Symonds considered to have deviated from nature's pure melody:

> The world in which the action is supposed to move, rings with spirit voices; and what these spirits sing, is melody more purged of mortal dross than any other poet's ear has caught, while listening to his own heart's song, or to the rhythms of the world. There are hymns in *Prometheus*, which seem to realize the miracle of making words, detached from meaning, the substance of a new ethereal music; and yet although their verbal

[36] See *hierophantes* in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Henry Stuart Jones, with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), I, p. 823; *hieros*, Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, I, p. 822; and *phaino*, Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, II, p. 1912.

[37] See *phaino*, 'A. Act., *bring to light, cause to appear* […]; *reflect* an image in water […]. 2. of sound, *make* it *clear* to the ear, *make* it *ring clear*', in Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, II, p. 1912.

> harmony is such, they are never devoid of definite significance for those who understand. (*Shelley* 124)

Here, Symonds touches upon Shelley's extraordinary ability to perceive thought and symbol as independent, and how this capacity for understanding the purity and significance of song was powerfully realised in his lyrical drama. Shelley, unlike the 'learned tone-poets in these latter times' who 'Scorn the pure vocal instrument of song' ('Music Past and Present', ll. 9-10; *VL* 116), represents in his verse the unbroken, pure music of the ancient bards of antiquity, 'purged of mortal dross'. Symonds's intuitive attention to the music of nature and his association of such ethereal song and sound with Shelley, especially his miraculous power to detach words from meaning, is reiterated in his prose. Writing to Henry Graham Dakyns in November 1877, Symonds presented an exquisitely coloured vignette in which he reflected on the snowscape of a wintery Davos, and how the vista instigated a spiritual experience, the feeling of which transcended the realm of words:[38]

> The strong level sunlight falls upon the snow; & where the light is, the snow-surface sparkles with a myriad stars, snow-flowers & crystals shaped like fern-leaf-moss. Where there is no light, the shadow is no less blue than the sky; so that the whole journey is like sailing through tracts of light-irradiate heavens & interstellar spaces of the clearest & most flawless ether. The movement is more gliding than any thing I can describe. […] Then the whole landscape is transfigured—lifted high up out of its commonplaceness. (*L*2 509)

Symonds begins to meditate on his transcendental experience evoked by the mystical nature of the physical environment as he apprehends it through the senses. In the manner of a landscape painter, Symonds vividly illustrates the almost surreal or otherworldly nature of the landscape: light is converted to darkness; the sunlight on the scintillating snow condenses in its reflections images of white Alpine flowers and crystalline stars;[39] land, sky, and sea merge; and movement

[38] See chapter three for an analysis of Symonds's poetical depiction of the snowscape of a wintery Davos, a recurring image in his poetry and prose, significant to his conception of humankind in relation to the universe.

[39] Images of stellate flowers were used by Symonds throughout his poetry and purple-prose to meditate on the universal process of life and death and the power of the imagination. Cf. 'A captive leaning from his tower | Looked forth and doted on a flower: | The flower beneath his prison-bar | Bloomed like a bright unconscious star' ('A Fancy', ll. 1-4; *NO* 21). In the biological process of the flowers he saw the life-cycle of the stars. The significance of this natural course of events for his philosophy on life and humanity's place in the universe is discussed further in chapter three of this thesis.

is transfigured into an act that is no longer physically laden but imbued with a sense of spiritual ease. What follows, however, in the vivid vignette, recalls the transformative power of music and how Shelley, in *Prometheus Unbound*, detached word from meaning to divulge 'the substance of new ethereal music' (*Shelley* 124):

> Words cannot convey the sense of immaterial, aerial, lucid beauty—the feeling of purity & aloofness from all sordid things—the magic of the light & movement. It is more musical—more like a spirit mood of Shelley's lyric-singing than anything else. The only thing comparable to it is rowing on the waters round Amalfio. And this is somehow more remote from earthliness. (*L*2 509)

This passage highlights the inadequacy of language in the form of words to successfully communicate to Dakyns the transcendental experience in its abstract purity. He denudes 'sense', 'feeling', and 'mood' of any linguistic associations ('Words') to emphasise, in a Shelleyan manner, the importance of music and, consequently, presents himself as a hierophant of nature attuned to the mystical rhythms of nature. Thus, for Symonds, music becomes the form of language that apprehends most closely his mystical and remote experience. For both Symonds and Shelley, it was by this sacred connection to nature's divine melody that poets, servants to 'the Power which is seated upon the throne of their own soul' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 701), penetrated the mysteries that hang over the processes of life to present them in poetry that 'lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world; and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 681).

Symonds's articulation of the process by which language, thought, and meaning are disentangled and reintroduced by the poet as transcendental music (represented in poetry), is recognised, too, by Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the final act of the lyrical drama, Shelley, through the voice of the Earth, meditates on the function of language: 'Language is a perpetual Orphic song, | Which rules with daedal harmony a throng | Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 415-17). Here, Shelley illustrates the importance of the linguistic re-edification of words detached from meaning for the reconstruction and amelioration of society. He redefines the concepts of 'Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory' (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV. 578), associated in the poem with ideas and images of tyranny, slavery, and revenge, and attaches new meaning to them so that they become reassociated instead with pure hope, forgiveness, and, most vitally, love.

For Symonds, the transformative agency of language was undeniable. In his poetry and prose, he contemplated the process by which the artist was in a constant communion with nature and mysteriously imbued with a divine power that enabled him or her to deliver nature's message to those 'ready to receive it' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 124). 'Any Sculptor to Any Model' is another short poem that appears in the 'Lyrics of Life and Art' section of *New and Old*, and is composed of twenty-seven lines and written in blank verse. The poem interrogates the function of the artist – in this case, a sculptor – to read aright the music of the spirit of nature. It is Symonds's personal reflection on the process by which art becomes the physical object into which the sculptor, in a similar manner to the poet, diffuses his thoughts and sentiments. The sculpture is transfigured into an object 'Whereby the poems of the soul are read | In symbols fashioned from the plastic form' ('Any Sculptor to Any Model', ll. 18-19; *NO* 19). The imagery of Platonic symbols is Shelleyan and the mystery that surrounds the artist's inventive process, too, recalls Shelley's depiction of the function of the artist in *A Defence*:

> This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts: a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb, and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process. (*SMW* 697)

Likewise, for Symonds, the sculptor as artist in his poem possesses a transformative power whose origins are mysterious and unquantifiable. The sculptor summons the divine spirit of nature, appealing to it to 'give me strength to feel thee, power to speak | Through this dumb clay and marble all the thoughts | That rise within my spirit while I gaze!' (ll. 2-4). It is only by the act of invoking the spirit of nature that he receives the inspiration and power to translate 'God' (l. 7) into the plastic object, 'The Thought made flesh' (l. 8). The role of the sculptor in the poem is thus essential as he mediates between the spirit of nature and the willing recipients of nature's lessons:

> Yea, it is mine by Art, the hierophant
> Of myriads when these moving lips are dumb,
> To find thy meaning, and to speak it forth
> Through marble and through bronze that shall not fade. (ll. 20-23)

The supreme importance of the poet is pertained to the role of the artist as 'the hierophant of myriads', the interpreter of myriad sounds and myriad images. The poem imaginatively and powerfully conceives the artist's extraordinary capability as it presents the transformative process whereby the abstract ideas and concepts ('Thought', 'meaning', and 'the world's soul') are transmuted into a definite and permanent form (the marble 'that shall not fade'). It is the duty of the artist to simplify nature's message and create harmony: he dissolves 'myriads' into 'One message for the minds of those that know' (l. 27). The final line of the poem – 'One message for the minds of those that know' – effectively emphasises the importance of the hierophant as the age's exponent of divine truths and his power to interpret and impart his visions. More significant, however, is his communication of a congruent message that reflects God that 'is pure, | Perfect, compact of correspondences' (ll. 16-17), a vision of unity that recollects and reflects Symonds's democratic spirit, and his association of the hierophant, especially the poet, with 'the religion of the future' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 125).

'THESE THINGS—THEY ARE NO DREAM—SHALL BE': SYMONDS'S DEMOCRATIC VISTA OF THE FUTURE

Symonds was attuned to the reformist and radical impulses that vitalised the works of pioneering figures such as Shelley, Whitman, and Bruno. He suggested that democracy, conceived as the change and reformation of cultures and societies, relied on much more than what he identified as the 'advent of the people', 'the cardinal phenomenon of the nineteenth century' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37, 33). Symonds's habit of self-deprecation, however, resulted in his self-perception as an individual sequestered from influential figures, contemporary and past, and ultimately painted himself as a passive observer of monumental historical movements. In a letter to his sister Charlotte Green (written in November 1886), Symonds included notes he wrote about her husband Thomas Hill Green following his death four years earlier, in which he praised the idealism of his brother-in-law, celebrating and admiring his determination to ameliorate the conditions of social life for those in need of it:

> Green's practical grasp on political conditions & his sympathy with the vast masses of a nation, the producers & bread-makers, the taxpayers & inadequately represented, strike all alike. Personally I may say that he inducted me into the philosophy of democracy & socialism—not in any sentimental or visionary or reactionary way—but

> on the grounds on wh [*sic*] both democracy & socialism are active factors in modern politics. (*L*3 176)

Symonds's illustrious presentation of Green as a leading figure for social improvement driven by a democratic force that seeks to realise its vision of civil liberty, overshadowed, to some extent, Symonds's presentation of his own humanistic spirit. His poetry and prose are permeated with discussions and visions of democracy in its various forms. Symonds throughout his life concerned himself with understanding the similarities shared between cultures, creeds, religions, and races, rather than emphasising their differences. He resolved that education, guided by moral interest and sympathy, would supply the harmonising force necessary for the amelioration of society and humanity at large. Education, what Symonds called a 'needful propaedeutic' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 99), especially the study of history, literature, art, and law, was essential as it anticipated the intellectual atmosphere of the future:

> The object of education is to provide us in youth with a sense of this common reason—a just if general view of what mankind as a whole is—a notion of what has been thought and wrought by our race in its totality of what humanity at its best and strongest has achieved by interrupted yet continuous effort, of how we come to be what we are and to think and feel as we do. ('Criticism', *ESS*1 99)

To this rational reading of patterns in history, a practice that was instrumental to Symonds's forecasting of the democratic vision of 'the religion of the future' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 125), he appended the importance of language as an essential component of education. 'Language,' he observed, 'the instrument of thought and the vehicle of utterance, remains an uncontrollable witness to the dependence of the present on the past' ('Democratic Art', *ESS*2 37). Language serves as an undeniable record of history and is the means by which surveyors of the past, imbued with a critical spirit, can successfully read the projections of the future.

The critic is envisioned by Symonds in 'On Some Principles of Criticism' as the communicator of the 'needful propaedeutic' that is education. In the essay, Symonds condensed the image of poet-prophet and critic by equating their essential function as at once the representative and the instructor of humankind:

> It is the critic's function to act as interpreter and balance-holder, to lead and enlighten the common intelligence which forms the final court of appeal in matters of taste, to

> shape and express the judgments of the *φρονίμοι* or men of sober wisdom. ('Criticism', *ESS*1 105)

Symonds's conception of the critic as the 'balance-holder', the impartial judge and receptacle of the divine truths written in the book of nature, is in line with Walter Pater's presentation of the aesthetic critic. Like Symonds, Pater emphasised the importance of sentimentality and feeling, the intimate and spiritual connection with external objects having a direct effect on the critic's understanding of the world around him:

> Education grows in proportion as one's susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety. And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what condition it is experienced.[40]

Moreover, Pater, like Symonds, acknowledged the vital role of the critic to powerfully connect with and interpret the symbols present in the external world of forms. The aesthetic critic should possess 'a certain kind of temperament' and 'the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects'.[41] Most significantly, however, Pater's critic, like Symonds's, was presented as the forerunner of the age in which he or she lived, the visionary and enlightened figure that read in the patterns of history the intellectual temperament of different societies and cultures that was reflected in the aesthetic representations produced by particular ages:

> To him [the aesthetic critic] all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal. In all ages there have been some excellent workmen and some excellent work done. The question he asks is always, In whom did the stir, the genius, the sentiment of the period find itself? who was the receptacle of its refinement, its elevation, its taste? 'The ages are all equal,' says William Blake, 'but genius is always above its age.'[42]

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[40] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873), p. ix.
[41] Pater, p. x.
[42] Pater, p. x.

In ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time’, an essay appearing in *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Matthew Arnold perceived the ‘critical power’ as a ‘lower rank than the creative’, suggesting that the creative power in relation to literature required ideas ‘ready for its use’.[43] Thus, for Arnold, creativity in literature depended entirely on the ‘synthesis and exposition’ of already existing ideas, on being inspired and influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the time and, ultimately, revealing them in ‘the most effective and attractive combinations’.[44] Focusing on the role of the poet and the elements necessary for the creation of poetry that is ‘worth much’, Arnold suggested that the poet must exhibit a great critical effort in order ‘to know life and the world’ before rendering his complex perceptions of them divinely in verse.[45] Thus, for Arnold, the epoch in which the critic and poet existed was the fundamental source of inspiration; ‘the man’, he argued, ‘is not enough without the moment’.[46] Symonds, however, perceived the relationship between the poet-critic and the environment in a more speculative vein, acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing whether the poet influenced the spirit of the age, or vice versa.

The equation of poet and critic as hierophant is reiterated in Symonds’s description of the latter as ‘the law-giver or law-expounder’ and ‘in the position of innovator’ (‘Criticism’, *ESS*1 100). Thus, the critic, like the poet, is assigned the duty of justly and sincerely diffusing his specialist knowledge to provide the *φρονίμοι* (*phronimoi*) with a truthful, albeit unavoidably general, view of the nature of mankind as a part of a greater whole.[47] Symonds, too, acknowledged in the essay the shortcomings of the critic’s role as expounder of laws, the paradoxical nature of the role that simultaneously required impartiality from the perspective of the critic and an adept and sensitive understanding of the object under scrutiny. Symonds suggested that the critic who believed in his personal apprehension of a new perspective upon some common subject, ‘is tempted to distort the truth in his eagerness to do the discovery full justice’ (‘Criticism’, *ESS*1 100). Consequently, the critic, in his or her aspiration for originality and innovation, tended to abandon truth as the paramount pursuit of sound criticism. Echoing the Heraclitan spirit whose abiding principles were sound judgement and reason, Symonds resolved that ‘It is better to repeat old things, if they are true, than to improvise new things, if they are not true’ (‘Criticism’, *ESS*1 100).

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[43] Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), p. 4.
[44] Arnold, p. 5.
[45] Arnold, p. 6.
[46] Arnold, p. 5.
[47] See *phronimoi*, ‘A. *in one’s right mind, in one’s senses*; […] 4. *practical wisdom, prudence*’, in Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, II, p. 1956.

It was thus the prerogative of the critic, as forerunner and intellectual predecessor, to be driven by the humanistic sprit of sincerity in the search for truth. The critic must measure his 'particular wisdom' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 101) against the apprehension of 'universal wisdom' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 101), harmonising the popular thought of his age with the lessons and revelations of the past, to apprehend more truthfully a just view of 'how we come to be what we are and to think and feel as we do' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 99). This formula, that adopts the Greek notions of *idia phronesis* and *koine phronesis* as its guides, is reminiscent of Symonds's conception of the 'new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412), the formal and systematic presentation of his thought that combined within it the creative energy of the Graeco-Romans and facts supported and defended by modern science. As already suggested in this thesis, Symonds's 'new metaphysic', a phrase he used to define the elevated and innovative poetry of his contemporaries, extends beyond his own poetic utterance to his letters and essays.[48] Symonds may thus be figured in the image of 'true critic' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 100) and innovator, an individual who sincerely abided by his obligation to truth, always sympathetic and modifying his subjectivity by the examination of things in relation to their historical associations. The revolutionary impulse which Symonds ascribed to the figure of the poet, the sometimes radical nature by which he expounded those truths interpreted by him in the symbols of the natural world, reverberates through his summation of the visionary role of the critic: 'Criticism, in brief, requires of a man the combined qualities of Conservatism and Radicalism, of patience and audacity, of humility and self-confidence, of severe respect for the past, and of an honest desire to forecast the future' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 101).

It is important to recognise that Symonds's sense of democracy, his vision of the religion of the future, was varied and complex, and prioritised an understanding of society that assumed the results of science and religion to understand itself as a part of the 'divine order' (*L*2 164) of life. Writing in October 1871 to the Bristolian artist and author Edward Clifford, Symonds clarified his vision for the future state of society, what he called 'a large programme of Beliefs (with a big B, very big B)':

> Among the many things I seem to disbelieve in, I believe firmly in God as the only one unchangeable reality in the Universe, in the religions of the World succeeding each other as partial institutions into the divine order; in a future religious Synthesis based upon a Scientific recognition of man's place in the world—then in Democracy as the

[48] See the introduction to this thesis, p. 26.

> inevitable Social form of the future,—then in a close & intense tie of fraternity, the love of man for man, binding what the domesticities of modern life have tended to loose. (*L*2 164)

This outlines clearly his pantheistic religious view, a belief he maintained throughout his life, that recognised and accepted the reality of God as immanent in the universe. He reiterates, too, a systematic understanding of history that highlights the abiding relations of all things, and envisions 'a future religious Synthesis' that reconciles within its system religion and the 'evolutionary conception' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 88). Symonds's perception of the gradual but evident apprehension by human beings of the unity and harmony of all things would, he felt, undoubtedly result 'in Democracy as the inevitable Social form of the future'. It is crucial to recognise that Symonds's 'democratic vista', to borrow Whitman's phrase, which 'encourages the habit of scientific toleration and submission' (*ESS*1 89), included and embraced in its progressive evolution the 'close & intense tie of fraternity, the love of man for man'. Symonds's prophecy for the future state of society attempted to harmonise all aspects of life, extending beyond race, religion, and other forms of what he considered to be societal constructions, to include all expressions of sexuality manifested in his works as ideal love. His humanistic attitude, his belief in the equality of human beings and their eventual realisation of this truth, was repeated in another letter written to Clifford two days later (6 October 1871): 'Why will Democracy make people unselfish? Because it will be an enthusiasm & a religion. To some people Xtianity has been a source of unselfishness; & Democracy is to be something as sustaining almost & as animating as Xtianity' (*L*2 166).

The power of vision as an essential component of prophecy was included by Symonds in his depiction of the poet as mystic. In 'The Camera Obscura' (*NO* 218), a stanza composed of sixteen lines in rhymed couplets, Symonds, in an act that is reminiscent of Shelley, adopted a scientific approach to inform his depiction of the imagination. Symonds presents in the poem the image and function of the scientific instrument to imaginatively illustrate the nature of vision. He reimagines the mind, the dwelling place of the imagination, as a camera obscura or dark chamber and the process by which the imagination or 'the wakeful brain' (l. 1) captures the images it surveys from 'Inside the skull' (l. 1). The poet-prophet is likened by Symonds to an astronomer who studies eclipses from his 'closed tower' (l. 4): he 'sees the sun | Cast faint-hued shadows, dim or clear, | Upon the darkened disc: now near, | Now far, they flit' (ll. 4-7). Here, Symonds resumes the power of poetry with science as he presents the function of both astronomer and poet to apprehend the truth, interpret it, and impart it to human beings:

Whate'er he sees, he notes; for nought
Escapes the net of living thought;
And what he notes, he tells again
To last and build the brains of men. (ll. 9-12)

The poem is steeped in Platonic symbols that present life – as it is perceived by humans through the senses – as illusory; however, the poet represented in the figure of the astronomer is endowed by Symonds with the prophetic power to pierce through the world of shadows to reveal a sobering reality: 'Shades are we; and of shades we weave | A trifling pleasant make-believe' (ll. 13-14). Both lines that form the rhymed couplet mirror each other in sentiment and tone – the regular use of iambic tetrameter – imaginatively representing the process by which the camera obscura faithfully replicates and projects the image of an external object. Symonds ultimately condenses the function of the poet with that of the scientific apparatus, and the former becomes the lens for apprehending a more accurate and truthful perspective of life.

The prophetic and visionary nature of the poet, however, is not limited by Symonds to mysticism and divine inspiration. Although these spiritual elements remain essential to his conception of the poet as hierophant who communicates with the spirit of nature, Symonds in fact presented the poet's power of prognostication and foretelling as a rational exercise. His own methodology that judiciously examined the role of the critic as a sympathetic reader of history, always concentrating on the abiding relations of things, is applicable to his comprehension of the future adopting similar patterns and processes: 'Criticism, in brief, requires of a man the combined qualities of Conservatism and Radicalism, of patience and audacity, of humility and self-confidence, of severe respect for the past, and of an honest desire to forecast the future' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 101). It is by the careful surveillance, examination, and judgement of recorded history that the poet as scientific analyst can produce the most accurate and rational projections of the future. Examining the revolutionary force of the Italian Renaissance, the historical period Symonds heralded as the 'renovation' (*Renaissance* 10) of the intellectual spirit of mankind, he highlighted the burgeoning spirit of modern science that permeated the thought of the pioneering figures of the age: 'If we owed nothing else to humanism, this alone should reconcile us with the Renaissance; for science itself may be said to have sprung into existence from habits of exact research aroused by the scrupulous examination and comparison of antique records' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 112).

The complex visionary nature of the poet as possessing the power of prediction determined by both mysticism and rationality is vividly represented in a letter Symonds wrote to Henry Sidgwick (6 October 1871). In the letter, Symonds discussed a conversation he had previously had with Roden Noel on the nature of the poet, which resolved in Symonds berating both himself and Noel as inferior poets: 'I thought both he and I had no chance in the long run against poets our superiors in delicacy of expression and energy of imagination' (*L*2 161). The following extract, however, reveals the influence of external nature that results in Symonds's spiritual conversion that sees him embrace more confidently his role as innovator and poet:

> Afterwards, alone among the hills, my Prophecy of Love of Comrades as a future institution of Democracy came upon me; and I began to believe more in my own poetic vocation. I wrote to tell him [Noel] so. I said: "I agree with you that it is no good being a Minor Poet. This and nothing else—disdain of the 3rd place—was the root of my railing in Hyde Park Square. But now I feel capacity for attaining the vast second sphere of Paradise—if not among the Seraphim and Cherubim, at least for sitting among Princedoms, Domination, Thrones. With adequate art, with something of a prophecy, may I not claim so much?" As for himself, I said "Go in and win!" (*L*2 161)

Here, the natural environment is conducive to a series of reflections and revelations that influence how Symonds perceives his position in the world. His self-doubt subsides as he is suddenly imbued with a strong conviction that it is his destiny and duty to follow his 'vocation' as a poet. He foresees in his 'Prophecy' a stage of development in society that manifests itself as fraternity and male-male love that is an essential part of the 'future institution' of democracy that he envisions. Thus, Symonds's depiction of his role as exponent and poet, especially his determination of the poet as possessing the power of foresight, recalls Shelley's allusion to poets as 'the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (*A Defence*, *SMW* 701). Here, like in Symonds's vision, Shelley images poets as the instruments which reflect and reproduce most accurately the events that will exist in the future.

In the letter to Sidgwick (*L*2 161), the spirit of self-assertion that vitalised Symonds is again fostered by a humanistic impulse – expressed in the letter to Clifford (*L*2 164) discussed above – that prioritises above all things what Symonds identified in his essay on the role of literary critic and criticism as matters of 'moral and mental importance to humanity' ('Criticism', *ESS*1 100). Symonds's realisation of his democratic vision is powerfully realised

in ‘A Vista’, a poem of fifteen stanzas and written in Whitman’s manner which embodies Shelley’s humanism and ideology. Symonds sent the poem to Henry Graham Dakyns, informing his friend that he had written the ‘versicles […] during the insomniac of a bad night’ (*L*2 519). To the poem, Symonds added the date of composition (23 January 1878) and the title ‘In Wanderstunden Geschrieben’ (*L*2 520), which Schueller and Peters translate as ‘Written in Hours of Wandering’ (*L*2 522), an image reminiscent of the democratic vision received by Symonds ‘among the hills’ (*L*2 161) described a few years earlier in the letter to Sidgwick. The poem was published as ‘A Vista’ in *New and Old* (225-28) and appears in the volume with minor linguistic changes. The powerful tone of the poem led to its popularity in America during Symonds’s lifetime and, ironically, to its dissemination as a socialist hymn sung at church congregations, catalogued as ‘Peace among Men’ in the table of contents and ascribed the title ‘The Coming Race’.[49] Symonds’s awareness of and frustration towards the mutilated republications of his poem was observed by Henry Salt who made a brief record of his discussion with Symonds concerning the matter:

> Mr. John Addington Symonds was an example of a poet who had suffered much, as he told me, from compilers and anthologies, especially in regard to some lines in his oft-quoted stanzas, “A Vista”.[50]

In the work, Salt reflected on the common corruption by publishers of the following lines from ‘A Vista’: ‘Nation with nation, land with land, | Inarmed shall live as comrades free’ (ll. 25-26; *NO* 226). ‘Inarmed’ was changed to ‘unarmed’ and, he observed,

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[49] See Hymn 408 in *Hymns and Tunes with Services for Congregational Worship: Selected from the Hymn and Tune Book and the Service Book* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1914). The mutilation of the poem in this hymn book – that omits the opening stanzas that express the poet’s internal ‘long strife’ (l. 5, *NO* 226) and project forth Symonds’s vision of a utopian future in which ‘faith [is] released from forms that chain | And freeze the spirit while we pray’ (ll. 9-10) – is also evident in the abbreviated version of the poem published in the Household Edition of *Songs of Three Centuries*, ed. by John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1890), pp. 371-72. Symonds’s stanzas from ‘A Vista’ were included in the enlarged edition of Whittier’s volume (first published in 1875) as part of the closing section which, according to the editor, ‘was never, in some respect, quite satisfactory’ (p. vii). Symonds’s stanzas, along with other poems later included by Whittier as a means of updating the relevance of the volume, were, according to the editor, a reflection of the intellectual atmosphere of the present date and ‘added to the value of the volume’ (p. vii).

[50] Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages*, p. 112.

> in that easier form had quite escaped Mr. Symonds's control. This error still continues to be repeated and circulated, and has practically taken the place of the authorized text. Truth, as the saying is, may be great, but it does not always prevail.[51]

The fate to which Symonds's poem was consigned is exemplified by its publication in 1915 in a tune-book used during the First World War.[52] Just over twenty decades later, eight of the fifteen verses of 'A Vista' were set to music by the English composer John Ireland to mark the coronation of King George VI on 12 May 1937. Ireland, commissioned by the BBC to compose a piece for the Coronation Concert being broadcast (between 9-14 May), called his composition 'These Things Shall Be'.[53]

'A Vista', by its title and subject, is reminiscent of Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and the term 'vista' – in its allusion to both a concrete view and an imagined prospect – embodies Symonds's perception of the dual nature of the poet as mystical hierophant and rational forecaster of futurity. The poem opens with the speaker despondently addressing his 'Sad heart' (l. 1) and questioning the future state of human beings and society:

> Sad heart, what will the future bring
> To happier men when we are gone?
> What golden days shall dawn for them,
> Transcending all we gaze upon? (ll. 1-4)

The speaker, although dejected in his mood, looks ahead to the 'golden days' that excel in their physical and philosophical excellence the present state of human affairs. As the poem progresses, the tone of lamentation dissolves into triumphant celebration, and the troubling questions that torment the speaker are replaced with positive and assertive resolutions. Doubt and pessimism expressed in phrases such as 'Will our long strife be laid at rest' (l. 5) and 'Shall faith released from forms that chain | And freeze the spirit while we pray' (ll. 9-10) are dissipated with the emphatic, optimistic revelation of the poet: 'These things shall be!' (l. 13).

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[51] Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages*, pp. 112-13.
[52] See *In Hoc Signo. Hymns of War and Peace with Tunes* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1915), p. 39.
[53] Symonds's poem was perceived by Ireland as 'a passionate expression of his own hopes and fears for mankind and for peace' (*The John Ireland Companion*, ed. by Lewis Foreman (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2011), p. 121). For details of some of the linguistic adjustments made to Symonds's verses, see Foreman, *John Ireland Companion*, p. 209.

The remaining stanzas that form the majority of the poem resound with a voice that is vitalised and compelled by certainty and an unwavering faith in the actualisation of democracy.

The process, outlined by Symonds in his letter to Clifford (*L*2 164), of the intellectual awakening of human beings as a state of mental evolution that moves from an understanding of God as immanent in the world, to apprehending religions as the transitory projections of transitory races, to a toleration of science that is ameliorative to humanity's understanding of its place in the universe; and 'then […] a close & intense tie of fraternity, the love of man for man' (*L*2 164), is clearly envisioned in the following stanzas in 'A Vista':

> These things shall be! A loftier race
> Than e'er the world hath known, shall rise
> With flame of freedom in their souls
> And light of science in their eyes.
>
> They shall be pure from fraud, and know
> The names of priest and king no more;
> For them no placeman's hand shall hold
> The balances of peace and war.
>
> They shall be gentle, brave, and strong,
> To spill no drop of blood, but dare
> All that may plant man's lordship firm
> On earth and fire and sea and air.
>
> Nation with nation, land with land,
> Inarmed shall live as comrades free;
> In every heart and brain shall throb
> The pulse of one fraternity. (ll. 13-28)

Here, the poet brings into accord faith, science, and morality, dissolving notions of religion and hierarchy created and established by human beings – humans will 'know | The names of king and priest no more'. There exists, too, in Symonds's democratic vista the equality of the sexes:

> Woman shall be man's mate and peer

In all things strong and fair and good,
Still wearing on her brows the crown
Of sinless sacred motherhood. (ll. 37-40)

The final stanza of the poem, however, effectively and vividly illustrates Symonds's prophetic power as a poet, his daring forecast of a democratic future that is shaped by his religious enthusiasm that is compelled by a humanistic spirit:

These things—they are no dream—shall be
For happier men when we are gone:
Those golden days for them shall dawn
Transcending aught we gaze upon. (ll. 57-60)

The imaginative power of the poet combined with his artistic authority – exemplified by his manipulation of syntax which reframes the seemingly doubtful vision presented in the first stanza – transforms the present and forges an Arcadian vision that recalls, in its celebration of lyric poetry and the unity of human beings and nature, the primordial harmony, peace, and prosperity of the Golden Age that is ancient Hellas:

They shall be simple in their homes,
And splendid in their ways,
Filling the mansions of the state
With music and with hymns of praise.

In aisles majestic, halls of pride,
Groves, gardens, baths, and galleries,
Manhood and youth and age shall meet
To grow by converse inly wise. (ll. 29-36)

The transformation of words and their associations to what Symonds identified in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* as 'the substance of a new ethereal music' (*Shelley* 124) is reiterated in the image of the music and hymns that permeate the homes of the people in Symonds's imagined democracy. Thus, like Shelley's lyrical drama, 'A Vista' attempts a deconstructive

process – 'the miracle of making words, detached from meaning' (*Shelley* 124) – that aims to liberate 'faith […] from forms that chain | And freeze the spirit' ('A Vista', ll. 9-10).

The external environment that is presented by Symonds as a setting congenial to the development of an ideal society, merges nature and man-made architecture (a common image in Symonds's poetry, present in *Palumba*) – 'Groves, gardens, baths, and galleries'. Turning to Shelley, Symonds reproduces the idyllic vision Prometheus describes to Asia and her sisters, which imagines a prosperous future that embraces in its vision harmony, prosperity, and love:

> There is a Cave
> All overgrown with trailing odourous plants,
> Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers,
> […] A simple dwelling, which shall be our own;
> Where we will sit and talk of time and change,
> As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged.
> (*Prometheus Unbound,* III. 3. 10-12, 22-24)

Symonds's prophecy similarly imagines the act of engaging in conversation, the interchanging of ideas as directly responsible for the intellectual expansion of human beings, the manner by which they grow 'inly wise' ('A Vista', l. 36). The poem imagines the 'loftier race' of human beings that inhabit this ideal state as being imbued by the spirit of freedom and the 'light of science' (l. 16). Science is conceived by Symonds as knowledge and wisdom acquired, most crucially, by education and study. The poem is the expression of his pioneering vision of democracy that he so powerfully felt while he was 'alone among the hills' (*L*2 161) and expressed in the letter to Sidgwick. Symonds, in the poem, assumes the role of guide, attempting to initiate a systematic methodology that absorbs into its system a positive enthusiasm for the past and present, and an optimistic spirit that projects forth an unwavering vision of democracy and social unity. 'A Vista' realises more vividly and resolvedly Symonds's philosophy of life presented in 'Lebens Philosophie' (*NO* 222-24) that ponders the potential for positive existence, 'If we could the world refashion | Closer to our own heart's passion' (ll. 12-13). It is a poem, like much of his poetry and prose, that harmonises and conciliates Symonds's acceptance of change as inevitable, his acquiescence to the law that 'All things with which we are acquainted are in evolutionary process' ('Principles', 88), and his unwavering belief in the pantheistic force that governs all things in the universe and is the positive determination of the abiding relations of all things as part of a greater whole.

Conclusion

Symonds was concerned with 'the literature of the future' (*L*3 344), as he put it in a letter to Walt Whitman written in 1889. This literature, 'pregnant with the modern scientific spirit' (*L*3 344), was revisited by Symonds in his poetry and prose, and permeated his critical speculations of the place of humankind in the universe. Symonds, however, has yet to be considered in what John Holmes and Sharon Ruston observe as 'the expansion in research' into the relationship between literature and science.[1] Science furnished the mysticism of Symonds's poetry in his conception of 'a new metaphysic' ('Conclusion', *GP*2 412), the discussion of which has been the primary concern of this thesis and a topic in the context of which Symonds has not been considered in a sustained manner. He exercised his perceptions and investigations of analogies, finding in the external and visible world the type and evidence of things within. The advancement of science, its developing understanding of the natural world, endowed the idea of cosmic law and order with 'a foundation of probability': 'Whether we call ourselves idealists or materialists signifies little. What remains indisputable is that man's interest in the world around him has been enormously developed by the decline of mediaeval theology and the progressive expansion of scientific curiosity' ('Landscape', *ESS*2 109). This evolution in humanity's perception of nature constituted for Symonds 'a new sphere of thought' (*ESS*2 109), one that incorporated formative (scientific) ideas into the region of aesthetics and was unavailable to Greeks, Romans, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance.

Symonds's poetry, studied with sufficient attention, reveals much about the man's life, his moods, his emotional crises and triumphs, ambitions, and ripening philosophy. His works, the vast majority continuously revisited and reworked by him and subject to his retrospective reflection, present a record of Symonds's developing inner life, an account of his poetic and spiritual development that was not strictly autobiographical. His poems, especially the major poems, offer intimations of such developments, which he expressed more overtly in, for example, *Memoirs*. Symonds was the poet of morality, of truths and principles guided by goodness. His powers of sympathy extended to distant times, different civilisations, and diverse schools of thought. He found comfort amongst the peasants of Davos whom he called his

[1] John Holmes and Sharon Ruston, 'Introduction: literature and science in the nineteenth century', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science*, ed. by John Holmes and Sharon Ruston (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-17 (p. 3).

'Friends' ('Winter Nights in the High Alps', IV. 1; *VL* 84), and was at times highly critical of London Society:

> I do not care for this kind of society. It bores me. Yet I am not blasé. I enjoy my own things hugely. Nor am I contemptuous. The ability of such people I cannot aspire to. But the conversation, frivolous, dealing of everything that is transient, dwelling upon nothing beautiful, serious only about political trumpery, & amusing only about Scandal, wearies me. Mrs May, a thorough woman of the world, pronounced me charming & took me into her confidences. So if I try I can succeed in these circles. But to go on trying would be slow death moral if not intellectual, for repose if not for energy, for dignity & honour if not for wealth & reputation.[2] (To Charlotte Symonds, 15 April 1865; *L*1 535)

Despite the adverse circumstances of the solitary life imposed on him by the prolonged struggle with his mental and physical pathology, Symonds was dedicated to the pursuit of goodness and truth in all things, a quality of his admired by Stevenson, Whitman, and others, in their somewhat poignant remarks about the man. Symonds's correspondence with many prolific writers of the period sheds light on a figure who was kept in high regard by many of his contemporaries but, also, a human being whose sentimentalisms suffered greatly from the unfavourable judgements of his poetry passed by his contemporaries. His ambition to gain the reputation of poet was constantly blunted by literary critics and, at times, his friends.

The portrayal of the man as distinctively and expressively pessimistic was engendered by his earliest biographers and has lastingly affected the presentation of his personality in literature. In the preface of their edition of Symonds's *Letters*, Schueller and Peters highlight this problem that perduringly influenced and formed Symonds's literary personality: 'Brooks' treatment is typical of analyses of Symonds in that it concentrates on his illness, pessimism, and intellectual dilletantism and colors everything with a saccharine melancholy. Symonds emerges as a weak and self-indulgent person' (*L*1 13). His struggle with antagonisms concerning faith and doubt, optimism and ennui, and a languid nature imposed and intensified by his ill health, became the images characteristic of Symonds's literary identity. Despite

[2] Mrs Erskine May was wife to Thomas Erskine May (1815-86), the first Lord Farnborough, writer of *Law, Privileges, Proceedings, and Usages of Parliament* (1844). See *L*1 536fn1. In the letter, Symonds referred to the 'London Society' that he was entertaining, which included the polymath Frank Galton and the politician Ughtred Shuttleworth.

moments of spiritual lethargy, described by Symonds as 'intellectual torpor' (*WW* 159), he emerged, more enthusiastically so in the later years of his life, vitalised by the doctrines of the intellectual luminaries he believed to have shared his 'intuition into the sempiternally inscrutable' (*Memoirs* 469). Cleanthes of Assos, Marcus Aurelius, Giordano Bruno, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Darwin, Walt Whitman – these were the figures from whom he drew inspiration and whose ethos and philosophies he assimilated into his own 'religious creed' (*Memoirs* 469) for an unwavering belief in the solidarity of the soul and the universe. This spiritual comradeship inspired Symonds's faith in the pantheistic 'World-Spirit' (*Palumba* 254), the Whole of which all things are a part, and, most importantly, inspirited him to approach the condition of life with confidence.

Although Symonds never defined his personal faith, what guided his conduct in life was clear. Symonds's pursuit of *versöhnung*, the unwavering dedication of the man to reconcile with optimism the humiliations and defeats of his soul, transfigured, without entirely resolving, his deepest spiritual conflicts. The introspection and self-reflexiveness exhibited in his poetry, letters, and essays bring into relief a mind that attempted to harmonise within its protean system ennui and optimism. His poetry absorbed into its philosophical speculations of man and universe, sources from diverse civilisations. It is unimpeded in its humanistic impulse to connect with 'races with whom we are imperfectly in sympathy' ('Caricature, the Fantastic, the Grotesque', *ESS*1 247), as is exemplified in but not limited to *Palumba*. He surmised that 'Hindoo idoles, Chinese and Japanese bronzes, Aztec bas-reliefs, and such things, seem to us grotesque. But it is almost impossible to decide how far this apparent grotesqueness is due to inadequate comprehension on our part, or to religious symbolism' ('Caricature', *ESS*1 247). His poetry also assimilated popular scientific hypotheses to his spiritual view of the universe. Indeed, the indolent state of the planets, as revealed by the latest scientific evidence, evoked the terrifying notion that celestial bodies could, like the human species, cease to exist. Symonds, in his philosophical poetry, however, repositioned wandering human beings, reminding them of Kantian law and order that is universal. In Symonds's thought, as in Bruno's, the universe was infinite. Like Bruno, he treated evolving opinions, ideas, and doctrines as relative, not absolute. Love, for Symonds, as it was for Shelley, was a manifestation of God, or the 'ever-during idea' (*Memoirs* 470) that was unbound from the dogmas and fantasies created by human beings to account for their existence. In 'A Problem of the Night', Love is imbued with the regenerative and animating power of the Sun, 'the one heart of love' (l. 3; *VL* 88). Similarly, in the symbolically perduring mountains of the Eiger and the Mönch, the 'Dread comrades' ('The Eiger and the Mönch', l. 2; *MM* 44), he found spiritual

expression for Love as a supreme, living entity: ‘Fit types are ye of Love whereby the spirit | Towers o’er the flux of change and chance divine’ (‘The Eiger and the Mönch’, ll. 23-24; *MM* 45).

Symonds speculated against medieval Christian doctrine that capriciously severed body from soul, man from nature, and consigned the Earth to sin and evil. He suggested that such *ipse dixits*, the ‘exclusive theories of spiritualism’ (‘The Philosophy of Evolution’, *ESS*1 24) dictated by the Church, came to be irrevocably bound to man’s perception of the universe and his position within it. These prejudices, promulgated by dogmatists and absorbed by humankind, were, too, absorbed by the mind of the medieval scientific inquirer. ‘Men of science’, Symonds observed, ‘dealt accordingly with Nature as something extraneous, outside the mind; as the object of inquiry, but not at the same time as the subject of the intellect that inquires’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 24). The fundamental error underpinning the scientists’ approach to man’s relation to nature was the belief in their existence as separate. Symonds suggested that nature was perceived and known solely as a material thing external to or distinct from the apprehending mind. It was not thought of in the metaphysical sense, as the underlying essence and substance of which the inquiring mind consists or from which it is made.

Not all men of science, however, were circumscribed by Symonds to the prejudices adopted by them from the Church concerning the division between nature and man. Those who abstained from writing in their pages ‘the word God’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 24) or kept silent their opinions on the place of man in the world gained ‘the reputation of atheists with the vulgar’ (*ESS*1 24). They possessed a spirit that was ‘positive and neutral’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 25) in its approach to crucially understand human beings as a part of nature, as opposed to being driven by a ‘mystical or theological bias’ (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 25). Symonds observed that the revelations made by science of the truth that man formed a part of nature were summarised as follows:

> If [man is] in a true sense part [of nature], then the truest part of us, ourselves, our consciousness, our thought, our emotion, must be part of Nature; and Nature everywhere, and in all her parts, must contain what corresponds to our spiritual essence. (‘Philosophy’, *ESS*1 25)

In *Memoirs*, he delineated the process by which he fashioned creeds, adopted from ‘friends from divers centuries’ (*Memoirs* 469), to allow him to live ‘not ignobly’ (*Memoirs* 301). He resolved from an early age that his father’s adherence to the constricted interpretations

of Christian Scripture, which he respected and understood, were too 'narrow' and 'illogical' (*Memoirs* 465) to express his personal intuition of God. It is essential, however, to emphasise that although Symonds identified with agnosticism, this was not indicative of himself as 'irreligious' (*Memoirs* 465): 'I never said there is no God. It would be a mad or rather an idiotic thing to say' (to Albert Oslif Rutson, 24 May 1865; *L*1 540). Symonds, unlike his father, pursued a more logical approach to his personal understanding of faith. He 'systematically' (*Memoirs* 465) poured over the works of ancient and modern philosophers, examining and revising his own thoughts concerning the mysteries of God, humankind, and the universe. His approach to life and his apprehension of all things within it was grounded in the belief that the universe was not, in fact, 'diabolically ordered' (*L*3 222). He perceived scepticism and faith as natural and essential attitudes for the ripening of his spiritual philosophy and the cultivation of his shared confidence in Whitman's notion of 'Cosmic Enthusiasm' (*Memoirs* 467), the Whole that is the living frame of God. In Symonds's philosophy of life, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty were inseparable from God. In this apprehension of the Divine Being, he resembled the Greeks, who, like Goethe several centuries later, understood the three concepts as the manifestation of one cosmic power. It was on this fundamental notion of the essential connection between truth, goodness, and beauty, and Symonds's 'moral attitude of willing submission to universal law' (*Memoirs* 466), that Symonds established his religious doctrine of God as Universe.

Symonds, thus, emerges from this thesis as a significant figure in the Victorian period, standing as a unique touchstone of religious experience, rising from the storm and stress of religious doubt that pervaded the intellect of Victorian figures such as Alfred Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, to ultimately grasp the mysteries of the universe and the revelations of advancing science with an unwavering and sturdy optimism. Unlike Tennyson's suicidal atheist in 'Despair', Symonds's faith in the architectonic pantheistic world-spirit was reinforced by the discoveries made in the field of astronomy. Unlike Arnold's suicidal Empedocles who 'liv'd in wrath and gloom […] Far from my own soul' (p. 66), Symonds did not 'sink in the impossible strife' (p. 66) of his contending doubts.[3] Piercing through the gloom of his despondent thoughts, Symonds firmly resolved that 'There is no room for Death. It cannot be' (*Palumba*, l. 899). Rather, he found order and repose in the patterns and abiding relations he observed in all things that were, for him, the irrefragable law of the universe.

[3] Matthew Arnold, *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (London: B. Fellowes, 1852), p. 66.

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