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# 'The soul is the prison of the body': John Addington Symonds and the challenges of sexual self-definition in Victorian society

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# The Soul is the Prison of the Body': John Addington Symonds and the Challenges of Sexual Self-Definition in Victorian Society

## Introduction

> While he obeys the flesh, he is conscious of no wrong doing. When he awakes from the hypnotism of the flesh, he sees his own misdoing not in the glass of truth to his nature, but in the mirror of convention.[1]

From childhood until death, John Addington Symonds grappled with a challenge which remained of paramount concern to him: how to be happy as a man who desired other men in a society which generally stigmatised such a phenomenon and often denied either its extent or even its very existence.[2] In order to achieve this Symonds therefore tried to find a means of self-making, and one which involved both transforming conventional views and repudiating self-reprobation which he seemed to have internalised.[3] It might be tempting to see his above words as a satisfying conclusion to this life-long struggle. They appear, after all, at the end of the memoirs which he wrote in the final years of his life.[4] Taken thus he would seem to have been avowing that, despite a certain failure to change prevalent opinions on same-sex desire, he had at least managed to find a degree of inner peace in the fact that his physically sexual behaviour was in accord with his nature because it was inseparable from it. However, despite having recognised these characteristics as fundamental to his being, it is clear that towards the end of his life Symonds had still failed to separate his own self-perception from the condemnatory influences of 'the mirror of convention'. For he referred to his behaviour as a 'misdoing'. Thus did Symonds ever truly find contentment in his desire for men? Answering this question forms the crux of the research in this dissertation, and in order to do so effectively and convincingly, a number of others must be asked. Why was Symonds struggling in the first place? How did he attempt to resolve his sense of inner conflict? Was the extent of his success limited by the means he employed to do so, and if so, why?

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[1] J. A. Symonds, *Memoirs* (written between 1889-1893; first published here by London, 1984, edited and introduced by P. Grosskurth), 283. Any small typing and grammatical errors in primary sources have been corrected throughout. Symonds was born in 1840 into an intellectual, middle class English life, and he died in 1893. He was a man of letters and a historian, whose *magnum opus* was the seven-volume *Renaissance in Italy*. He married Catherine North in 1864 and had four daughters. In 1877 he moved to Switzerland. See P. Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London, 1964), 5, 83, 109, 118, 177, 313-316; P. Robinson, *Gay Lives: Homosexual Autobiography from John Addington Symonds to Paul Monette* (Chicago, 1999), 18; Symonds, *Memoirs*, 13, 156

[2] S. Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Basingstoke, 2005), 1

[3] The word 'self-making', understood as self-expression or self-understanding, is taken from H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2003), 5

[4] It seems Symonds had a heightened awareness of mortality at this time, partly due to the death of his daughter Janet in 1887. If this were the case, it would have made the resolve to complete his task all the more urgent. Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds*, 295

Similar questions have been explored by historians studying Symonds and sexuality in the nineteenth century. Although relevant historiography will be discussed fully in the main body of the dissertation, a few points about sexuality must be summarised here. Sexuality is best understood as 'the ways sexual practices are turned into signifiers of a particular type of social identity', as a means of defining oneself and others based on perceptions of sex which are culturally constructed and historically specific.[5] Nor should these practices be confined to genital acts; they include 'all erotic and affective interactions' and thoughts which interrelate sex, love, desire and gender.[6] Indeed, Symonds's internal conflict was to a large extent predicated on a difficulty in conceptualising these meanings and relationships in terms which made him happy. The idea of this constructed nature of sexuality made so influential by Foucault especially has also been used to consider how individuals interact with such constructions, whether they apply them to themselves, reject them or re-mould them. It consequently enables the historian to contextualise and fully understand his subject.[7] This is of enormous relevance to Symonds, who as already suggested had an acute awareness of his relationship to larger society and the potential bearing it had on his sexuality. Accordingly, scrutinising the historiographical treatments of sexuality is essential to answering the research questions in as informed a manner as possible and to enriching the critical analysis of primary sources.

The essays *A Problem in Greek Ethics* and *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, which Symonds wrote in 1873 and 1891 respectively, serve as the basis of the research along with the *Memoirs*.[8] The essays are the most explicit arguments which Symonds articulated to explain the occurrence of male-male desire, the different forms it could take, and how and why social perceptions of it could differ according to time, place and cultural environment. The purpose was to challenge contemporary excoriating opinions on the subject. *Greek Ethics* contended that some modern forms of male-male desire (including his own) were akin to the

[5] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume One: The Will to Knowledge* (London, 1998, translated by R. Hurley), 105; S. Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (London, 2004), x; J. Weeks, *Sexuality*, 2nd edition (London, 2003), 6. This cultural and historical specificity also means that in speaking of sexuality in the past, one should avoid anachronistically employing current usage of the binary "homosexual" and "heterosexual", which in its rigid polarity threatens to obfuscate potentially subtler historical understandings of sex. See M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago, 2005), xiii

[6] Houlbrook, *Queer London*, xiii

[7] The subject is therefore neither autonomous from nor uninfluenced by external factors, an idea crucial to the understanding of Foucault and post-structuralists which is helpful in thinking about sexuality. N. Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh, 2003), 41

[8] Brady, *Masculinity*, 161, 176-7

*paiderastia* of ancient Greeks, who had ennobled certain male-male passions by 'deeming them of spiritual value, and attempting to utilise them for the benefit of society'.[9] *Modern Ethics*, while recognising this importance attributed to cultural shaping of attitudes, also explored sexual inversion in a framework of biological determinism.[10] Although the essays offer somewhat generalised critiques, their tone is nonetheless highly subjective. Therefore analysing the character and coherence of their arguments is invaluable in providing answers to the research questions because they provide insights into Symonds's own thought processes. These essays are complemented by the *Memoirs*, which, covering Symonds's entire life with particular emphasis on his sexuality, present a more personally reflective and individually specific context for many of the debates in the essays. Thus the *Memoirs*, as a manifestation of personal, therapeutic catharsis, help determine the extent to which Symonds applied his theories to himself.[11] Moreover, the temporal proximity between *Modern Ethics* and the *Memoirs* – and the temporal distance between them and *Greek Ethics* – can be used to highlight change and/or continuity in Symonds's reflections over both extended and restricted periods of time. By probing his deliberations in this comparative fashion, one can develop an informative understanding and explanation of Symonds's beliefs and of whether or not his tensions remained unresolved.[12]

However, a central limitation of the *Memoirs* in particular is that the material has been sifted through Symonds's own filters of selection and potentially distorted memory, be it consciously and/or unconsciously done so.[13] There is thus a risk of an incomplete appreciation of the text. Nevertheless, the final product is instructive because it signifies the manner in which Symonds wanted to be seen by others and even by himself.[14] Furthermore, an indication of what he chose to select and omit can be gleaned from the essays, which though also subjective are less explicitly personal. This helps complete the picture of his reasoning.

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[9] J. A. Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (written in 1873; 10 copies printed privately in 1883; republished here by www.forgottenbooks.org, 2007), 2

[10] Symonds used the term 'sexual inversion' to denote same-sex desire generally, whereas *paiderastia* was specific to ancient Greece and specific to men. M. Lynch, '"Here is Adhesiveness": From Friendship to Homosexuality', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1985), 93

[11] Grosskurth, 'Introduction', in *Memoirs*, 16

[12] B. Mack, 'Personal Accounts'
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/acctsmain.html> 28th April 2011

[13] Mack, 'Personal Accounts'
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/acctsq3.html> 28th April 2011
Grosskurth's edition has also excluded about a fifth of the total material, mainly in the form of Symonds's poetry on same-sex desire. See Grosskurth, 'Foreword', in *Memoirs*, 11. The tone of much of this poetry, which largely echoes the views expressed in the essays and *Memoirs*, can be recaptured by examining what other historians have said about it. See, for example, I. Venables, 'Appendix: Symonds's Peccant Poetry', in J. Pemble (ed.), *John Addington Symonds: Culture and the Demon Desire* (Basingstoke, 2000), 178-85

[14] Rather, perhaps, than how he *actually* saw himself.

The skewed character of his works thus has interpretive value because of, rather than despite, its limitations.[15] This value is enhanced by a grasp of the historical, social, cultural and geographical environments in which the texts were written.[16] Therefore use of these sources answers the research questions by explicating how Symonds formulated his ideas, how they interacted and how his relationships with his various contexts influenced these processes.

This dissertation will now examine source material and historiography in detail so as to ascertain the extent to which Symonds found happiness in his sexuality. It shall be argued throughout that this largely depended on the degree to which Symonds realised his ideal of *paiderastia*, and the manner in which he situated himself in relation to larger society. Chapter One will address Victorian debates on the nature of sexual inversion. Using these, Symonds argued that sexual psychology could be culturally and biologically pre-determined. These debates raised important questions about the morality and healthiness of sexual inversion. They also discussed questions of sanity, which historians have acknowledged but not always related specifically to Symonds.[17] Unfortunately, Symonds had difficulty in overcoming internalised stigmatisation, which meant that in defending determinism he also made it hard to separate the worse aspects of his sexuality from himself. Chapter Two will explore how these problems of inseparability were also tied up with Symonds's perceptions of his own masculinity and its close relationship to his sexuality. Symonds was engrossed with masculinity because it was fundamental not only to *paiderastia* but also to more conventional Victorian understandings of manliness. Symonds recognised the fragility of his own masculinity both in his apparent failures to live up to *paiderastia* and in public discussions of social and biological threats to Victorian masculinity which also undermined the morality of his sexuality. Chapter Three will examine how the expectations of Victorian masculinity involved affirming public, masculine identity. Here it is useful to apply ideas from historians of the Soviet period, such as Hellbeck, who have explored how discrepancies between

[15] Mack, 'Personal Accounts'
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/acctsmain.html> 28th April 2011
< http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/acctsq3.html> 28th April 2011
Further weaknesses in the sources will be addressed later. All three sources were intended for restricted private circulation among, generally, other 'inverts'. Brady, *Masculinity*, 161, 187. This suggests that by hoping to avoid public defamation, Symonds could be fairly candid in his writing. This idea will be explored in Chapter Three.

[16] These will be investigated in detail throughout the dissertation.
Mack, 'Personal Accounts'
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/acctsmain.html> 28th April 2011

[17] A notable exception is J. Pemble, 'Art, Disease, and Mountains', in Pemble, *John Addington Symonds*, 1-3, 6-8, 11-12, 18

publicly expected and privately realised attitudes and behaviour could exacerbate the *self*-marginalisation of the individual, a process arguably visible in Symonds.[18] Therefore investigating the different ways in which Symonds expressed his sexuality in public and private indicates how he operated in relation to prevailing opinions, and if this affected how accepting he was of his own desires. This can suggest the extent to which he was content. By developing these interrelated themes it will generally be concluded that Symonds was unable to find true happiness in his sexuality.

[18] J. Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia', *Kritika*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2000), 90. The incentive to employ Soviet historiography came from two second-year undergraduate essays I wrote in 2010 at University of Bristol, called 'To what extent did youth opposition and dissidence grow out of the Soviet system itself?' (see p. 3) and 'To what extent does Zamyatin's novel *We* contribute to our understanding of attitudes in the Soviet Union towards the individual's place in collective society?' (see p. 11)

## Chapter One: The Medicalisation of Sexual Sin

> ...a certain type of passion flourished under the light of day and bore good fruits for society in Hellas;...the same type of passion flourishes in the shade and is the source of misery and shame in Europe. The passion has not altered; but the way of regarding it morally and legally is changed.[19]

Symonds was effectively pre-empting Foucault's influential arguments about the importance of cultural specificity in shaping attitudes to sex by almost a century.[20] Both writers also recognised that the nineteenth century in particular had witnessed the creation of sexually-based identities.[21] Sexology emerged as a means of classifying people according to their sexual practices and desires, and so made sexuality the key to explaining the nature of human existence and experience.[22] Sexologists often explained manifestations of sexual inversion as a form of innate or acquired disease.[23] Therefore a general model of "pathologisation" transformed the crime of sodomy into the sickness of sexual inversion.[24] Accordingly, the moral implications attached to crime as the voluntary perpetration of a reprehensible act became medicalised, replacing culpability with pity for a condition which, while deemed unfortunate, was thought incurable and involuntary because it was elementary to an invert's very essence.[25]

Foucault has used such evidence for the creation of sexual identities to argue that it is misleading to regard the nineteenth century as one in which discourses on sex were silenced or absent.[26] Rather there was 'a veritable discursive explosion' from the eighteenth century onwards which precipitated constructions of sexualities.[27] One accusation brought against Foucault's criticism of this "repressive hypothesis" is that he generalised a "Gallocentric"

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[19] J. A. Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (50 copies published privately in 1891; republished here by www.forgottenbooks.org, 2008), 28

[20] Foucault, *History*, 105. For another influential and helpful article on this construction, see M. McIntosh, 'The Homosexual Role', *Social Problems*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1968), 182, 189

[21] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 70; Foucault, *History*, 42-3

[22] R. Felski, 'Introduction', in L. Bland and L. Doan (eds.), *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Oxford, 1998), 4; Foucault, *History*, 43; Garton, *Histories*, 14

[23] Brickell, 'Sexology', 428-30

[24] Sodomy encompassed any form of sex which did not aim at procreation, and so included, for example, inversion, contraception and sterile sex between men and women. J Weeks, 'Coming Out', 14, cited in R. Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 224; Brickell, 'Sexology', 424

[25] Brickell, 'Sexology', 427-8

[26] Foucault, *History*, 10. "Discourse" is taken to mean 'a system which structures the way that we perceive reality', an interpretation of reality rather than a verbalisation of reality as it actually exists. See S. Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London, 2003), 55

[27] Foucault, *History*, 17-18

argument as applicable across nineteenth-century Europe; in Britain, where Symonds spent most of his life, sexual inversion discourses were arguably less tolerated than in continental Europe.[28] Sexology was under-published in Britain and generally received little critical approval or attention, even from the medical profession.[29] The police were also reluctant to pursue prosecutions for sodomy as it was notoriously difficult to prove.[30] Moreover, British newspapers tended not to report the majority of sodomy cases, in the fear that to do otherwise would advertise the existence of such a vice felt to be unknown to the general population and encourage its persistence and imitation.[31] The relative confinement of sodomy to criminally-related discourses consequently sustained its association with immorality.[32] Thus Symonds had the difficult task of coming to terms with his sexuality in an environment which somewhat denied him the expressive tools to do so, except within a framework of corrupt morality.

Symonds's likening of his own sexuality to the virtuous ancient Greek practice of *paiderastia* was an attempt to overcome this limitation from his adolescence onwards. For Symonds, *paiderastia* was dignified because it reciprocally bound men 'in the chains of close yet temperate comradeship, seeking always to advance in knowledge, self-restraint, and intellectual illumination'.[33] This pedagogical emphasis prescribed a relationship between an older man and a youth.[34] Moreover, an impressive male physique was admired as a projection of the purity of the soul which it housed.[35] Thus sexual and romantic feelings for other men could be nobly motivated and practised, provided they were not excessively indulged.[36] Not only was *paiderastia* morally sound, it arose out of specific cultural conditions. The martial character and environment of early Greek settlers elevated bonds of comradeship which, in an initial and continued absence of women in public, male-dominated spheres of life, became romantic, sexual and enduringly consecrated.[37] Erotic interest attached to the male body was also heightened by naked wrestling and religious beliefs.[38] Symonds therefore observed that

[28] Brady, *Masculinity*, 9-10; Foucault, *History*, 10
[29] Brady, *Masculinity*, 119; J. Bristow, 'Symonds's History, Ellis's Heredity: *Sexual Inversion*', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology*, 87
[30] Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 73, 79, 82
[31] Brady, *Masculinity*, 42; Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 2-4
[32] Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, xiii
[33] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 84
[34] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 24
[35] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 86-7, 110
[36] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 110
[37] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 28-30, 55-6; Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 49
[38] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 99, 86-7

by a process of cultural normalisation of perceptions, the ancient Greeks found *paiderastia* 'within their hearts'; '*paiderastia* became a fact of their consciousness'.[39] Conversely, Symonds posited that same-sex behaviour in Europe had become 'condemned to pariahdom' largely thanks to the influence of Christianity, which regarded sodomy as a crime against 'God, nature, humanity, the state' in its abuses of the divinely-outlined, procreative purposes of sex and so made it a matter of juridical attention.[40] Furthermore, Christianity had developed praise for the *female* form thanks to the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception.[41] Consequently Symonds was led to the conclusion with which this chapter opened and which Foucault and other historians have since echoed: that the ways in which sexual thoughts and practices are perceived depends on social and cultural conditions. This conclusion is all the more interesting because it appears in *Modern Ethics*, written almost twenty years after *Greek Ethics* and thus exhibiting great continuity in Symonds's appraisal and understanding of *paiderastia*; it was clearly of fundamental importance to him and so must always be considered when examining his thought processes to determine the extent to which he realised the ideals he espoused.

In arguing that the interpretation rather than actual nature of same-sex desire was subject to social and cultural conditioning, Symonds essentially denied the existence of inherent, ontological morality in same-sex desire, since morality was a construct of human discourses.[42] Following from this, he criticised contemporary British society for stigmatising same-sex desire and advocated a reform of attitudes.[43] However, he saw no hypocrisy in simultaneously condemning some sexually inverted behaviour in others as highly immoral, measuring it against the discourse of *paiderastia*, and that of Victorian Christianity which he condemned![44] More disturbing for Symonds was the fact that he saw much of his *own* activity as morally reprehensible. Although in the *Memoirs* he asserted that he had had virtuous, *paiderastic* relationships with men, especially after he moved to Switzerland in 1877, such

[39] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 110-111
[40] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 1, 4; Foucault, *History*, 3
[41] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 87, 116-117
[42] Garton, *Histories*, 2
[43] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 105-9
[44] A good example is the disgust he expressed at lust in Harrow. Symonds, *Memoirs*, 94. Symonds admired and arguably internalised the moral standards set by his father, which were imbued with Puritan Christianity. M. B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca, New York, 2005), 16; Symonds, *Memoirs*, 52

rationalisation arguably betrayed an underlying uncertainty in conviction.[45] Indeed, he admitted that he had visited brothels for the sole purpose of unfulfilling, bodily gratification.[46] This contradicted *paiderastia's* abhorrence of prostitution as the license of unrestrained lust which worshipped the body only and not the soul, and as a phenomenon which consequently ignored endeavours towards spiritual teaching and enlightenment.[47] Even in the relationships which Symonds saw as comparatively noble, he seemed unsure about the virtue of the sexual element.[48] Thus, not only did Symonds judge himself in a way similar to the more conventional standards which he sought to overturn and escape, but he also projected a model of ancient Greek morality onto himself which though idealistic seemed impossible to achieve.[49] He had therefore trapped himself within two discursive systems of morality.[50]

Moreover, Symonds had rendered this immorality as fundamental to and hence inseparable from his being in three ways. Firstly, in the *Memoirs* he tried to prove that his *paiderastia* was inborn by contending that he had conceptualised his desires in terms similar to *paiderastia* before he had actually encountered ancient Greek texts on the subject at school and university.[51] Secondly, as early as 1872 he compared his desires to Walt Whitman's idea of "adhesiveness".[52] This was an idealised form of companionship between men which Symonds likened to *paiderastia*, and which was grounded in phrenology, a science which medicalised the capacity for companionship as dependent on the congenital composition of the brain.[53] Thirdly, as already observed, Symonds argued for the cultural conditioning of psychology in both ancient Greece and contemporary society. These three arguments ensured that Symonds therefore theorised a model of predestined sexuality. The problem was that in his own case this pre-determined state seemed to suggest that his immorality was innate and so incurable.[54] This was a frequent lamentation in the *Memoirs*, and it appears he entertained similar thoughts until his death.[55] In 1892, for instance, he confessed to his daughter

[45] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 274-8; M. Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (New York, 2003), 131; Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8
[46] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 277
[47] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 71-4, 83, 86-7. At this point it is also worth remembering that it was specifically genital and bodily sexual acts which he characterised as a 'misdoing' in the dissertation's opening quotation.
[48] For example he saw an initial sexual encounter with the gondolier Angelo Fusato as anomalous to the general nature of their relationship. Symonds, *Memoirs*, 277
[49] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8
[50] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55
[51] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 96
[52] J. A. Symonds, *Letters* (ed. H. Schuller and R. Peters and H. Schueller, Detroit, 1967-9), II, 201, quoted in Lynch, '"Here is Adhesiveness"', 93
[53] Lynch, '"Here is Adhesiveness", 69, 89-90
[54] J. Kemp, 'A Problem in Gay Heroics: Symonds and *l'Amour de l'impossible*', in Pemble, *John Addington Symonds: Culture and the Demon Desire* (Basingstoke, 2000), 46
[55] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 239, 281

Margaret: 'I love beauty with a passion that burns the more as I grow old. I love beauty above virtue'.[56] And, even though he wrote an appraisal of Whitman and "Adhesiveness" in 1893, that same year he also wondered in his essay *In the Key of Blue* 'whether the Platonic ideal evolved from old Greek chivalry of masculine love was ever realised in actual existence?'[57] At best, then, his desire was a corrupted form of *paiderastia*; at worst, it was primordially impure altogether. In either case, given that this impurity seemed elemental and consequently fundamental to his being, Symonds had made sexual sin inseparable from himself, just as sexologists had medicalised sodomy.[58] Therefore his imperfectly-realised attempts to overcome one internalised discourse led him to another which equally circumscribed moral acceptability, a problem from which he seemed unable to ever truly escape and which seemed to leave him incapable of finding real happiness in his sexuality.[59]

Symonds tried – and largely failed – to find ways of justifying his immorality which could remove feelings of guilt and shame he had imbibed from these discourses. One such effort involved accounting for unconscious thoughts and dreams. In the dissertation's opening quotation it is to be remembered that he explained his indulgence in the 'misdoing' of sexual practices as the result of 'hypnotism'.[60] This suggested that he was involuntarily cast under a spell and lacked full control of his faculties, judgement and consciousness, an argument he used to exonerate himself from the blame of responsibility. In a similar vein to the Christian perception of sodomy, he consequently identified sexual sin with a willing perpetration of immoral thought and action which was reprehensible because of its deliberate character;[61] simultaneously, he implied that he would never voluntarily pursue sexual excesses because he consciously knew them to be immoral. Rather, he only succumbed through an inescapable, unconscious hypnotism.[62] This inexorable, lustful element of Symonds's sexuality was further

[56] Symonds, *Letters*, III, 711, quoted in Pemble, 'Art', 13-14
[57] J. A. Symonds, 'In the Key of Blue' (1893), 83, 86, quoted in Pemble, 'Art', 12; Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 98
[58] Kemp, 'Problem', 49
[59] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 4; Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55
[60] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 283
[61] F. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, 2nd edition (London, 2000), 73.
[62] Similarly, see the way in which Symonds characterised his lustful appetites for other men as a 'wolf' which 'leapt out' and relentlessly 'assailed' him, unable to be controlled as a factor external to himself: Symonds, *Memoirs*, 187-8; Kaplan, *Sodom*, 12. It is interesting that Symonds criticised many people for over-indulging in sexually inverted acts out of willing depravity (and also criticised sexologists and criminologists for removing blame from their congenitally-affected subjects), whereas in his own case he deemed it involuntary so as to remove any sense of moral blame! Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 52

confirmed by his insistence on the pre-determined nature of sexual psychology.[63] A continued urge to excuse his behaviour as inevitable, irreparable, and blameless in its lack of moral consciousness demonstrated that he therefore remained constrained by moral scruples within discourses of morality which he could not escape; it was thus difficult to find true happiness in his sexuality.[64]

This emphasis on consciousness necessitates an exploration of insanity.[65] Symonds observed in *Greek Ethics* that some ignoble, over-sexualised forms of *paiderastia* were likened to madness. It is possible that he saw such sexual depravity as exhibiting a lack of morality and thus of reason and rationality; in which case, it was impossible for such depravity to be willingly indulged.[66] There is some evidence to suggest that Symonds applied this idea to himself, thereby absolving himself. Indeed, in the *Memoirs* he mentioned his 'inborn insanity'.[67] However, in *Modern Ethics* he generally refuted sexologists' equation of some sexual inversion with forms of madness, as to do so decriminalised the willing perpetration of sodomy but retained an attitude of pity and hence of perceived wrongness.[68] Here it must be noted that the majority of the *Memoirs* appears to have been written between 1889 and 1890, before Symonds had come across the medical and sexological arguments he would address in *Modern Ethics*.[69] Accordingly it is possible that he would have erased an insistence on insanity in the *Memoirs* after having written *Modern Ethics* in order to dispel negative understandings of inversion. However, while he did occasionally indicate in the *Memoirs* where he would possibly have changed text after encountering sexology, it seems odd that that he did not actually rewrite those sections if he felt they needed significant revising.[70] It is thus possible that Symonds continued to believe in his own insanity even after

[63] Symonds also seemed to take up an argument of sexologists such as Casper, Krafft-Ebing and Ulrichs that exposure to sexual wantonness in childhood could intensify and eternalise lustful appetites, before consciousness had sufficiently developed to rationally and logically abhor such phenomena. Indeed, he saw his years as a pupil at Harrow, where he was disgusted by unisex sexual wantonness he observed, as illustrative of this determinative process in himself. Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 19-22, 35, 73; Symonds, *Memoirs*, 94-5, 221; Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 10

[64] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55

[65] Huffer contends that in order to truly appreciate Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, it is essential to consider his ideas on the history of madness also, and to see sexuality and madness as historically interlinked. One can use this idea in analysing Symonds. L. Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York, 2010), 78. Foucault observed that inverts were often seen as madmen. See Foucault, *History*, 40

[66] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 12-13; L. Huffer and E. Wilson, 'Mad for Foucault: A Conversation', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 7-8 (2010), 328.

[67] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 277

[68] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 52; Brickell, 'Sexology', 427-8

[69] Grosskurth, 'Introduction', 18-19

[70] Grosskurth, 'Introduction', 18; Symonds, *Memoirs*, 182. It is equally odd that he did not do this even though his years spent living in Switzerland seemed to have more or less cured the consumption from which he suffered. Consumption was generally seen as degenerative and characteristic of the insane. Likewise,

he wrote *Modern Ethics*. It was a means of begrudgingly accepting inverted instincts as inseparable from his nature, but as ones which did not truly reflect his conscious sense of morality.[71] In arguably trying to divorce sensual longing from the essence of his individuality, he admitted an inability to be truly content with his sexual desires, because he saw in himself a corruption of *paiderastia*. Instead he attempted to find some comfort in the fact that he could not help this and so was morally blameless, but in such rationalising implied that he still felt guilty.[72]

Finally, Symonds employed similar techniques of exoneration in terms of physical health. Although he criticised sexologists for identifying morbidity as an often pre-determining factor for the occurrence of inversion, he maintained that the study of embryology was potentially useful in accounting for a deterministic model of inversion which emphasised healthiness rather than diathesis and disease.[73] For he recognised that explanations of inversion based on disease theories removed a criminal aspect, but retained a negative, pitying association as with madness.[74] It is interesting, therefore, that he often referred to himself as congenitally diseased with inversion in the *Memoirs*.[75] Arguably it was another way of excusing his instincts as incurable and so as blameless, whilst simultaneously implying that his inversion *was* in fact pitiable and so somehow wrong. He also argued that pathological symptoms in inverts were normally a result of social pressures instead of indicating a congenitally diseased predisposition to inversion.[76] Indeed, once he moved to Switzerland away from social pressure, and once he could indulge in sexual practices with other men more freely, his own health, afflicted at least in part by neurosis, improved remarkably.[77] But, given his continued fears about the virtue of sexual behaviour outlined earlier, this meant that health came at a cost. Only by engaging in morally 'diseased' acts which were fundamental to his being could he overcome a physical disease which was not. Sexual, immoral disease was thus inherent in him, and so by using the same sexological

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sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and criminologists such as Lombroso identified inherent rather than acquired sexual inversion as 'moral insanity', a form of madness founded in the belief that inversion was a form of atavism which illustrated a primitive, insufficiently developed consciousness. Thanks to his consumption and his innate inversion, therefore, Symonds was diagnosable as incurably insane. See Pemble, 'Art', 1-3, 14. The fact that Symonds failed to correct the insistence on insanity in the *Memoirs* perhaps suggests that he never really felt that he had overcome a form of sexual insanity. Pemble, 'Art', 18.

[71] Huffer and Wilson, 'Mad for Foucault', 328

[72] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8

[73] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 58; J. Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 89

[74] Brickell, 'Sexology', 427-8

[75] Kemp, 'Problem', 46. Again, it is possible that he would have changed this conclusion after having written *Modern Ethics*, but again, the fact that he did not suggests a continued belief in his sexuality as diseased.

[76] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 9-10

[77] Pemble, 'Art', 14

arguments which he sought to refute, he accepted his inversion as morally and congenitally pitiable and incurable.[78] It must also be pointed out that the confessional tone of the *Memoirs*, as well as the psychological study of cases of inversion (including his own) which he undertook with the British sexologist Havelock Ellis in 1892 after *Modern Ethics*, betrayed a perhaps unconscious but strongly felt urge to root out and cure a problem; his sexual immorality needed to be rectified because it was bad.[79]

Therefore in all these ways, Symonds medicalised morality as biologically and culturally predetermined in psychology. This was an attempt to remove a sense of immorality from his sexuality, which not only proved ineffective, but the very fact that he needed such excuses to justify himself betrayed an inexorable internalisation of moral discourse against which he felt compelled to explain and pardon his moral shortcomings.[80]

[78] Kemp, 'Problem', 49
[79] Foucault, *History*, 59-62; Garton, *Histories*, 174; C. Roman, 'Review: Lynne Huffer, *Mad For Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory*', *Foucault Studies*, no. 9 (2010), 210
[80] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8

## Chapter Two: Manly Virtue and Gender Inversion

> Greek love was, in its origin and essence, military. Fire and valour, rather than tenderness or tears, were the external outcome of this passion; nor had Malachia, effeminacy, a place in its vocabulary.[81]

Before investigating Symonds's own views on masculinity and its connection to his sexuality, it is first necessary to give the idea of masculinity itself some theoretical and historical context. Whilst acknowledging the importance of Foucault's contribution to historical and discursive understandings of sexuality, gender and feminist theorists have criticised him for "gender-blindness", for ignoring the importance of how relationships between men and women and masculinity and femininity were conceived in the nineteenth-century and related to ideas about sex and sexuality.[82] It is therefore helpful to think of masculinity, femininity and gender more generally as socially, culturally and historically constructed in a similar way to sexuality.[83] For most of the nineteenth century in Europe, the idealised form of masculinity known as "manliness" was not thought to be an inherent quality in men; rather, it had to be proved.[84] This entailed a renunciation of feminine associations and femininity, and had a moral aspect to it.[85] Thus, manliness was a relationship of power, articulating masculine qualities in opposition to feminine ones upon which it consequently depended for its definition.[86] Moreover, the continuous need to assert and reaffirm manliness rendered it an unstable concept in its lack of guaranteed certainty.[87] As shall be discussed, a number of factors in the nineteenth century exacerbated this sense of vulnerability by undermining concepts central to the upholding of Victorian manliness, including debates on the relationship between sexuality, gender and virtue.[88] Symonds was aware of these debates,

[81] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 15
[82] Garton, *Histories*, 24; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, xv; Kaplan, *Sodom*, 265. Gender is understood as 'the perceived differences between and ideas about men and women, male and female'; masculinity is one specific manifestation of gender perceptions. See S. O. Rose, *What is Gender History?* (Cambridge, 2010), 2-3
[83] Brady, *Masculinity*, 19-20; Rose, *What is Gender History?*, 2; J. Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow, 2005), 14
[84] Tosh, *Manliness*, 2, 14, 24. There was thus an at least implicit acknowledgment that manliness was a constructed identity. See A. McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries 1870-1930* (Chicago, 1997), 34
[85] Tosh, *Manliness*, 2, 92
[86] McLaren, *Trials*, 1, 3-4
[87] Rose, *What is Gender History?*, 68
[88] This also made masculinity a visible, gendered form of power where usually it was not so. This visible identification therefore opened up the opportunity for the questioning of masculine power. Tosh, *Manliness*, 30

which he used, along with *paiderastic* ideas of masculinity, in his problematic conceptualisation of his sexuality.

In many ways, Britain witnessed fears of moral corruption and decay in the mid-late nineteenth century which threatened manliness and masculinity.[89] To an extent this was predicated on Britain's imperial designs, which invigorated an image of Britain as a virile conqueror.[90] However, this emphasis on the masculine nature of imperial Britain was accompanied by fears of threats to it. One such fear related to the jeopardised ideal of domesticity and family life as a fundamental guarantee of manliness for the middle classes.[91] For the population appeared to be in decline.[92] Various lifestyles, including prostitution, bachelorhood and sodomitical practices, were targeted as endangering family life and procreation in their sterility.[93] Indeed, the increasing recognition accorded to Darwin's ideas on evolution and the threat posed to it by non-procreative forms of sex exacerbated this concern, which was given imperial dimensions.[94] For the success of imperialism depended on a healthy, morally sound and expanding population, and so the sexual practices of the people needed scrutinising.[95] At the same time, and since the eighteenth century, a 'classical republican discourse' in Britain defined effeminacy, a lack of virility which had become associated with same-sex, non-procreative sodomy, as a neglect of civic duties.[96] This discourse identified the health of the whole polity with the virility of the ancient warrior ideal, a conceptualisation which was arguably sharpened by nineteenth-century martial imperialism.[97] Effeminacy, perceived as corrupt and self-interested, therefore undermined the moral endeavour of collective imperialism and was contextualised within same-sex sexual practices.[98]

Symonds, consequently, had to contend with arguments which associated inversion with fertile, moral, imperial and ideological decay. He found the opportunity to do so during his studies at Oxford University. Here, reformers such as Benjamin Jowett elevated the study

[89] Garton, *Histories*, 177
[90] Tosh, *Manliness*, 6
[91] Brady, *Masculinity*, 1. It is to be noted that Symonds married Catherine North in 1864. Arguably this enabled him to assert social conformity by denying his sexuality. Symonds, *Memoirs*, 156; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 246
[92] Tosh, *Manliness*, 114
[93] Brady, *Masculinity*, 23; Tosh, *Manliness*, 36
[94] Tosh, *Manliness*, 114
[95] Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, xv, 54; Tosh, *Manliness*, 114
[96] L. Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, New York, 1994), xv, 5, 8-12
[97] Brady, *Masculinity*, 24; Dowling, *Hellenism*, xv
[98] Dowling, *Hellenism*, 6-8, 11-12; Tosh, *Manliness*, 6

of ancient Greece as an alternative to Christian theology, in an attempt to regenerate Victorian liberalism.[99] However, some students, including Symonds in this chapter's opening quotation, found in these reforms a means of countering the classical republican discourse.[100] For study of ancient Greece supported a theory that *paiderastia*, modernised as sexual inversion, was martial in origin and as such encouraged an awareness of communal interest and protection.[101] It was therefore unfair to associate inversion generally as effeminate in a sense of moral corruption; rather, inversion could be morally pure and therefore manly.[102] However, as already outlined in Chapter One, Symonds felt that he failed to live up to this moral standard, loving beauty over virtue.[103] He did, on the other hand, justify *paiderastia's* freedom from reproductive concerns as virtuous because it channelled attention into mental activity, production and enlightenment; it was thus highly elitist.[104] Symonds therefore used this sense of superiority to justify his sexuality and to counter identifications of inversion with moral effeminacy and social decay. Yet by needing to rationalise in this way he seemed to express an underlying doubt.[105] Indeed, as suggested in Chapter One, an insistence on the inherent nature of his sexual desires had also made it hard for Symonds to separate immorality – in a sense, moral effeminacy – from himself anyway.

Nineteenth-century debates about the biological differences and similarities between men and women also raised the possibility of inherent femininity in men – in effect, a biological, medicalised effeminacy. Generally speaking, in the nineteenth century there was an insistence on a biological separation between men and women. Until about 1750, Galen's idea of a 'one-sex body' was commonly utilised, which claimed that men and women shared one body type and that women were essentially men who had not fully developed as embryos.[106] From the eighteenth century onwards, however, this was replaced with a two-sex model of anatomy which insisted on a total, primordial, embryonic difference between men and women.[107] Moreover, this complete biological and anatomical separation also

[99] Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 85; Dowling, *Hellenism*, xiii
[100] Dowling, *Hellenism*, xiv-xv
[101] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 29; Dowling, *Hellenism*, xv
[102] Symonds even supported the decision of Victorian society to punish sexual behaviour which undermined communal welfare, though taking care to imply that his own behaviour should not be seen as included in this category of social immorality. Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 79-80
[103] Symonds, 'In the Key of Blue', 83, 86, quoted in Pemble, 'Art', 12.
[104] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 60-1, 83; Dowling, *Hellenism*, 28-9
[105] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8
[106] Galen was a Greek physician of the second century CE. See Garton, *Histories*, 38
[107] Tosh, *Manliness*, 69

dichotomised differences in mind and temperament between men and women.[108] In male-articulated discourses, men were perceived as rational, energetic, active rather than passive, resolute and controlled, in complete opposition to women.[109] Thus there was a discursive shift from emphasising the superiority of men over women as one in degree to one in essence; women were a direct negation of all the moral virtues in men.[110] In theory, masculine power was relatively protected by biological determinism from the infiltration of feminine influences.[111]

Sexologists, however, undermined such a division by often insisting on inherent effeminacy in sexual inverts.[112] Ulrichs's ideas represented the most fundamental challenge, for he asserted that 'There remains a female soul in a male body'.[113] Inverts, or *Urnings*, as he called them, were thus characterised by a gendered inversion of sexual instincts, a cross-gender identity in which male inverts conceived of themselves as desiring men with the same instinctive passivity and emotionality of a woman.[114] Symonds found Ulrichs useful because he argued that inversion was healthy, inborn and so deserved to be treated without reprobation.[115] However, just as he criticised other sexologists for associating all forms of inversion with effeminacy, he absolutely disagreed with Ulrich's idea of a feminine soul in a male body because it indicated an inherent femininity which would betray innate, ineradicable moral failings and also compromise his identity as a true, masculine man.[116] For Ulrichs, there was no moral guilt in being an Urning; for Symonds, there was potential moral, effeminised

[108] Tosh, *Manliness*, 69
[109] Tosh, *Manliness*, 69
[110] Tosh, *Manliness*, 69.
[111] McLaren, *Trials*, 2. Paradoxically, this protected separation could be threatened by the very means used to justify it. For example, by the 1890s in Britain, increasing numbers of women campaigners such as Josephine Butler also insisted on being fundamentally different to men, though without the implications of superiority and inferiority. They did this to argue for direct involvement of women in politics, contending that men could not fairly represent them on the basis of these essential differences. See Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 205
[112] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 31, 33. In continental Europe and especially in Britain, recordings of male hysteria also tended to be suppressed because of hysteria's primary association with women. Evidence of male hysteria undermined the theory that men were inherently rational and so jeopardised the separations between men and women based on biological morality which had been used to justify male power. See M. S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008), 6, 195-6; McLaren, *Trials*, 2. I have only found one explicit reference made by Symonds to the hysterical nature of sexual inversion, but he attributes this to neurosis induced by social oppression, rather than to a congenital factor pre-determining inversion. See Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 9-10. Arguably, however, his implication in the *Memoirs* that he suffered from insanity was comparable to an idea of congenital hysteria. Perhaps, therefore, it is possible to regard insanity through a lens of gender; inherent effeminacy was morally reprehensible to Symonds's conception of his sexuality, but he could have perhaps removed blame from it by arguing for a lack of rationality and consciousness in the form of either madness or hysteria.
[113] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 71
[114] Kemp, 'Problem', 58; J. Prosser, 'Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity', in Bland and Doan, *Sexology*, 119
[115] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 67, 90; Sullivan, *Critical Introduction*, 4
[116] Kemp, 'Problem', 49-50; Sullivan, *Critical Introduction*, 6

culpability in being an invert because of the standards of the masculine *paiderastia* he attempted to follow.[117] He therefore repeatedly insisted on the masculine character of his sexual feelings, but arguably he did so because he felt his manliness was in fact jeopardised.[118]

Moreover, his own physique arguably betrayed an inherent femininity. He admired the toned, defined male form, no doubt as an erotic object in itself, but also as enshrouded in moral justifications based on *paiderastic* ideas of the body representing the virtues of the soul.[119] His own body, however, was relatively frail, consumed with sickness, and he said in the *Memoirs* that he never liked sports; sports were important for fostering proper *paiderastia* in ancient Greece.[120] Given that he had said in *Greek Ethics* that the more impressive the body, the more virtuous the soul it reflected, it is thus highly likely that in imbibing the *paiderastic* discourse he saw his own body as representing his state of moral, sexual depravity.[121] He was thus incapable of escaping his moral effeminacy because it was part of his very flesh. Furthermore, he often described lust as womanly against *paiderastic* manliness, but then in engaging in such lust himself he confirmed his own effeminate, sexual immorality.[122]

Thus it is possible, in a way, to reach a gendered perspective of the arguments set out in Chapter One, which deepens an understanding of the way in which Symonds characterised his sexuality. The usage of *paiderastic* discourse as a moral standard led Symonds into complications with his sexuality tied up with doubts about his moral and biological manliness. This made it all the more difficult for him to come to terms with his sexuality.

[117] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 78-9
[118] Kemp, 'Problem', 49-50
[119] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 86-7
[120] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 78, 85; Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 62
[121] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 86-7
[122] Symonds, *Greek Ethics*, 76

## Chapter 3: The Public Expression of Private Experience

> ...under the prevalent laws and hostilities of modern society, the inverted passion has to be indulged furtively, spasmodically, hysterically.[123]

One highly effective means of ascertaining the extent to which Symonds found happiness in his sexuality is to examine how far he was willing to publicise his thoughts and arguments. It must be acknowledged in light of the above quotation that it was impossible to openly proclaim inverted sexuality in the nineteenth century without risk of severe legal repercussions, which arguably rendered it difficult for Symonds to be very open and public about his sexuality. The Labouchère Amendment of 1885, for example, threatened to punish acts of gross indecency between males in public or private with two years hard labour.[124] Moreover, the fact that manliness required public affirming for its validation meant that men's lives were matters of public openness; the discourse of manliness required the public demonstration of manliness at home, the workplace and in all-male associations.[125] Here it is useful to consider Hellbeck, a historian specialising in the Soviet period. Hellbeck has observed that in the Soviet Union, the emphasis placed on the collective interests of society engendered an utterly public form of life. Where individuals felt that their own private interests did not meet the more pressing requirements of the community, they could undergo a process of self-marginalisation as a result of an inability to reconcile their private interests to their public ones, and an incapacity to even speak of this conflict.[126] Symonds found himself in a similar position; he was unable to openly and explicitly express his sexuality, having instead to try and repress it. He thereby internalised a sense of shame in the process, which he acknowledged in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Even in Switzerland it seems that he continued to internalise repression, as shown by an extract from the *Memoirs* which he wrote there and which shall be addressed shortly.[127]

Even if Symonds could not openly admit his sexual inversion in public, especially in Britain, it is arguable that he should have been able to be candid in the *Ethics* essays and particularly in the autobiographical *Memoirs* because they were intentionally kept to a

[123] Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 9
[124] Although Symonds was living in Switzerland at the time, he lamented the existence of this amendment to Havelock Ellis in 1891. Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 91
[125] Brady, *Masculinity*, 1; Tosh, *Manliness*, 35
[126] Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out', 90.
[127] Dowling, *Hellenism*, 127

restricted audience, thus removing a degree of social pressure for conformity.[128] Moreover, he entrusted the decision of whether or not the *Memoirs* should be published after his death to his literary executor Horatio Brown.[129] This should have ensured a guarantee of privacy for at least the remaining duration of his life. It is particularly fruitful to examine the *Memoirs*, as these provided the most explicit articulation of Symonds's personal reflections and so perhaps represent his greatest opportunity to be open about the struggles related to his sexuality. As has been observed throughout, there was indeed a great deal of candidness in the *Memoirs*. However, it is particularly instructive to compare one passage from the *Memoirs* with the anonymous case study he submitted for *Sexual Inversion*, a project which he undertook with the British sexologist Havelock Ellis in 1892.[130] Both describe the same incident in Symonds's early life: an erotic dream in which he found himself in the presence of naked sailors. However, the narrative tone in each text is very different. In the *Memoirs*, the account reads as follows:

> I used to fancy myself crouched upon the floor amid a company of naked adult men: sailors...The contact of their bodies afforded me a vivid and mysterious pleasure.[131]

In *Sexual Inversion*, however, the story was presented in far more explicit detail:

> He fancied himself seated on the floor among several adult and naked sailors, whose genitals and buttocks he contemplated and handled with relish. He called himself the 'dirty pig' of these men, and felt that they were in some way his masters, ordering him to do uncleanly services to their bodies.[132]

Several observations must be made about this. Firstly, the *Memoirs* offer a rather vague description, and most of the language is rather neutral in tone. Conversely, the story in *Sexual Inversion* exhibits pleasure which Symonds experienced not only in indulging in depraved,

[128] Only ten copies of *Greek Ethics* were printed in 1883, and 50 of *Modern Ethics* in 1891. This is interesting when one considers that he intended the essays to precipitate attitudes of reform; perhaps, after all, he felt more comfortable in keeping his sexuality more hidden. Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 83-4; Brady, *Masculinity*, 161, 187; Kaplan, *Sodom*, 13; Symonds, *Modern Ethics*, 105-9

[129] Extract of letter from Symonds to Brown, December 29th 1891, in Grosskurth, *Memoirs*, 289

[130] Bristol, The Special Collections at the University of Bristol Arts and Social Sciences Library: DM109/30, letter from Symonds to Ellis, December 1st, 1892, p. 1. Symonds died before the completion of *Sexual Inversion*, which was first published in 1897. One must therefore consider the possibility that Ellis edited some of the details in the case study being scrutinised here. Bristow, 'Symonds's History', 83.

[131] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 62

[132] H. Ellis, 'Case XVII', *Sexual Inversion* (1897), in P. Grosskurth (ed.), *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* (London, 1984), 284; Kemp, 'Problem', 51-2

bodily acts of sexual gratification, but also in imagining himself in an emasculated, passive role of sexual submission.[133] This therefore countered *paiderastia's* idealism of sexual restraint and manliness. The fact that Symonds could only fully express this fantasy in a private state of anonymity, and not even do so in the *Memoirs* which he wrote in Switzerland, illustrates continued feelings of shame which he had internalised from *paiderastia* and conventional discourses and yet which he needed to confess as a process of catharsis.[134] His inability to be open even with himself in the relative privacy of the *Memoirs* meant that he had indeed succumbed to self-marginalisation, even in his self-imposed exile.[135]

[133] Kemp, 'Problem', 51, 60; Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 9
[134] Kemp, 'Problem', 51; Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out', 90
[135] Brady, *Masculinity*, 161, 187; Hellbeck, 'Speaking Out', 90. It should also be remembered that in stressing the fact that this incident was a dream, Symonds undoubtedly tried to remove a sense of moral blame from himself by insisting on unconsciousness and a lack of rationality. Huffer and Wilson, 'Mad for Foucault', 328

## Conclusion: 'The Soul is the Prison of the Body'[136]

It therefore seems that John Addington Symonds was unable to ever find true happiness in his sexuality. In seeking to overturn the feelings of shame which he had to an extent imbibed from a background of Christian-based morality, he turned to the equally morally-demanding discourse of *paiderastia* as a means of validation. Indeed, his relentless effort to assert the *paiderastic* character of his sexuality in itself suggested a sustained dissatisfaction. This unhappiness was only exacerbated by the fact that his sexual desires and practices comprehensively failed to meet the standards expected by the *paiderastic* ideal. His attempts to free himself from one constraining discourse led him into the trap of another.[137] Not only was his 'misdoing' perceptible in the 'mirror of convention'; it was also reflected by the mirror of *paiderastia*. Moreover, this reflection could not be escaped because Symonds had, by his own reasoning of psychological conditioning and impossibly idealised standards, rendered his sexual sins as inseparable from himself. Such an inescapable conclusion was only reinforced by his apparent inherent lack of physical and moral manliness. Unable even to accept his sexuality as healthy albeit innate, he employed the sexological arguments of disease and insanity which he had refuted in an effort to exonerate himself from the shame of sexual responsibility.[138] He had, therefore, formulated a manner of what Foucault termed the 'reverse discourse', of creating a means of self-explanation out of prevailing, repressive discourses, but it was imperfectly realised because it led him no closer to finding happiness.[139] By feeling the need to purge himself of guilt through explanations of determinism, disease and insanity, Symonds subconsciously admitted that he was ultimately incapable of divorcing his perception of his sexuality from frameworks of morality.[140] His soul had thus become the prison of his body; his moral outlook fostered a means of self-disciplining self-surveillance in an attempt to control his bodily behaviour.[141] The fact that such efforts repeatedly failed only ensured their endlessly continued attempt. This incompatibility between the sexual idealism of

[136] M. Foucault, 'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison', 30, quoted in G. Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), 81
[137] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55
[138] Foucault notes that this is an effect of discursive restraint; it is difficult to conceptualise an idea totally outside the normal discursive parameters one is used to. Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55
[139] Foucault, *History*, 101; Kemp, 'Problem', 48.
[140] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 55
[141] Gutting, *Foucault*, 96-8; Roman, 'Review', 210; Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 43

the soul and the baser needs of the body ultimately entailed a failure for Symonds to ever be truly happy in his sexuality.[142]

[142] Robinson, *Gay Lives*, 8

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