

John Addington Symonds and the Misrecognition of Antinous

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I would like to begin on a personal note. Over the years, and particularly over the past five or six years, I've got into the habit, whenever I visit Rome, which luckily turns out to be fairly frequent, of visiting two museums of antique sculpture that are very different in character, and in each case noting a particular sculpture of Antinous. The first one is that extraordinary monolithic modern palazzo, the Palazzo Massimo Alle Terme, built by a Jesuit, last in the line of the princes Massimo, and effective as a Jesuit college until 1960.

One goes into a little corner which is a kind of asylum to see the image which greeted you when you came in, the image of the monolith of Antinous which is simple and rustic, unpretentious – he is represented as a farmer, Sylvanus, preparing to cut bunches of grapes with a bill hook. Now I'm taking this Antinous as being in complete opposition to the other one I will mention, so I'll say something which I would not want to justify before the historians in the audience. Everything about this relief seems reassuringly unique as a kind of vestige of presence, including the kind of corroborative evidence that supposedly dates it as appearing not long after the death of the historical Antinous which we all know now was around 138 AD. In fact, the corroborative evidence I speak of relates to the finding near Anzio, in the Ager of Lanuvio, of a so-called 'Collegium salutare' for the cult of Diana and Antinous which is, I believe, the only one. Again, I stand to be corrected, but I understand it's the only one in the Western world, as opposed to the Oriental world, and this connection between the Collegium, the relief and the Ager of Lanuvio, which is believed to have been laid out by Hadrian, makes one believe that this might be as conceivably close to the historical Antinous as we could get. Few other similar versions of the rustic Antinous exist, though there is a fine example of him as Aristaeus – the legendary beekeeper – that belonged to Cardinal de Richelieu. It was originally placed in his garden in the Loire Valley and is now in the Louvre.

At the very other end of the scale, I often go – and I clearly share this habit with Caroline Vout – to the Palazzo Altemps, near the Piazza Navona, and the Palazzo Altemps (named this time not after a Jesuit but a Cardinal from northernmost Italy) now contains the extraordinary Ludovisi collection. The wonderful thing about

that museum and what differentiates it from any other museum of antiquities that I know is that it is essentially about classical sculpture that has been rehabilitated and given new meaning by the sculptors of the Baroque period. The remarkable example that I always home in on is Alessandro Algardi's so-called 'Torch Bearer', where, from a simple figure of a satyr with merely a torso, he's produced this extraordinary sculpture with a hand outstretched and a torch, and a wonderful head of hair. The splendid thing about it is that there's no attempt to disguise that particular transition; there's a different kind of marble, it's done with panache instead of subterfuge. It's within this collection that one also sees, at the centre of a lower room in the same palace, the wonderful Antinous, that is here in the exhibition – actually next door to the bust from Patras which is, to put no finer point upon it, a face transplant. We now know how to do face transplants; and this is indeed a face transplant, but again one which works with such immense panache that one accepts it, whatever period one attributes the face to (I believe it may well be after Winckelmann, it may well be eighteenth century). Certainly, this ranks as an Antinous, but one which pays attention to, and records, the *reception* of Antinous. It is, as it were, a demonstration of the reception of Antinous. And like all the Ludovisi works which are in the Palazzo Altemps, you have this delightful little diagram beside it, which shows just what is an addition to the original antique part.

Now I've taken those two straight off because what I'm suggesting is not necessarily giving total credence to the authenticity of the Lazio relief, nor saying that all great Antinous sculptures have to be an example of Antinous reception rather than an original Antinous, but proposing that that kind of dialectic – or that spread between types of example – is something which you already find in the reception of Antinous by John Addington Symonds in the nineteenth century. This figure of English letters, who was born in 1840 and died in 1893 – was relatively young at the age of 53 – was one who considered Antinous not just from one point of view, but in three quite different discursive contexts. It's very interesting, I think, to put those in relation to one another, as I shall try to do this evening.

Just another point, though, before I launch into Symonds's reception of Antinous, or the Antinous sculpture, and it's a point about Antinous in general, a question which, in a way, came up implicitly and explicitly this afternoon. Why should this exhibition turn out to be so different from one that showed a row, a line, a collection of sculptures, busts of Apollo or Dionysius or say the huntsman Meleager,

one of the figures so often confused with Antinous? The reason is, of course, that there was a historical Antinous, there was also a historical Hadrian and, as we learned again this afternoon, there are many, many busts of Hadrian we can reasonably take as being in some approximate way a representation of his original features. But in Antinous's case there is both a particularity of features that we would associate with a portrait bust, and also a generalisation of features that we might associate with a type. And that is a consequence, in a sense, of his historical position, of that fact that he died, as we know, in 130 AD. This also leads me to link him in a certain way with another figure from the period of the cusp between late antiquity and the Christian era – a figure whom Julia Kristeva mentions in her wonderful series of essays, *Histoires d'Amour*, when she draws attention to the uniqueness, in her terms, of the figure of Narcissus. Narcissus does not occur in the Greek mythology of the earlier period, and the first full account of his death and metamorphosis occurs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which in her view lends him the kind of increased, accentuated self-consciousness that is characteristic on another level of the beginning of the Christian era.

There is something significant about Antinous also being on that cusp between classical and Christian cultures... I was thinking this afternoon – we were talking about the role of the representation of the dead Antinous in Symonds and in other nineteenth-century contexts – that it's not absolutely unusual to make some connection between Antinous and the figure of Christ. But, at the same time, another point about Narcissus and Antinous, comparing and contrasting them, which is very interesting really, is the almost total absence of Antinous from the literary tradition, until you get to the later nineteenth century. In the case of Narcissus, the fact that he was a major actor in the *Metamorphoses* means that he recurs in a regular fashion. He recurs in the Middle Ages, recurs of course in a pictorial tradition which is virtually uninterrupted throughout the course of modern Western culture. In the case of Antinous it's very curious that, as far as I can see, there are virtually no references to Antinous that one can find in literary gazetteers and dictionaries. There is actually an Antinous in Browning, but that Antinous turns out to be one of the suitors of Penelope, so a completely different figure altogether. And there is just one key reference for Symonds, and as it turns out also for Marguerite Yourcenar, which is in a fragment by Shelley. I won't speak very much about that, because I obviously want to move on to speaking about Symonds, but it's interesting because it's also a kind of

face transplant. Shelley, in his little piece of writing called 'The Colosseum. A Fragment', imagines meeting somebody in the ruins of the Colosseum who's a kind of image of the new age, and the lower part of this person's face is like Antinous', the other part is quite different. Shelley describes him as a type of strange composite – he's built up, in other words. This composite figure, one ingredient of whom is Antinous, obviously relates to Shelley's knowledge of the various Antinous figures in the Vatican collection and so on, but otherwise there is virtually nothing, until we start to get the writing in the English literary tradition of people like Symonds who have themselves read the German writers in the wake of Winckelmann.

So what I'm going to be suggesting, therefore, is that we have with Symonds not just one but several Antinouses functioning within different discourses. Another thing that I want to say in general first of all about Symonds is that, of course, Symonds never saw anything remotely like the exhibition we've seen here. There's an enormous difference between the culture of images which he took for granted, and the one we inhabit, although it's hardly more than a century ago. The figure describing the practice of contemporary museums and galleries – the rhetorical figure which I would suggest is the dominant one – is that of *transumption*: 'far-fetching', in the sense of bringing things from afar to come together on a scale that was never done at all until the past quarter century or so. Symonds, by contrast, belonged to that generation of people – you might call them late Romantics – for whom travel was not just a kind of pleasant occupation, but almost a duty, because you actually *had* to see things in their locations, and you built up a view of Europe which was an extraordinarily varied and rich one; one in which the antitheses between the North and the South structured an imaginative world in which you knew some things directly, but you never saw them together. Symonds is remarkable in that context because he had a very severely weak chest, which led him to live in Switzerland for much of his later life. From Switzerland, he would make these forays down into Italy, which were dangerous to his health. In fact, he finally died in the considerable heat of a Roman summer, a result of his weak chest, and at the relatively early age of 53.

But while in Southern Europe he has the North in his imagination – I was thinking about that in relation to Leeds. He imagines, for example. the English celebration of Christmas, he makes a wonderful contrast between what he calls a Northern cathedral, an industrial town where Christmas is taking place, when previously, that same day, he's been to St. Peter's, and he's seen the Pope celebrating

Christmas. You have to go and see the Pope celebrating Christmas in full evening dress and white tie, and so on (as a distinguished foreigner you're admitted), and he thinks how different it is from this Northern cathedral town. And this is the great point: he says that we have angels in the North, but we have to borrow from the Orient these angelic beings who create the spirit of bonhomie that surrounds our Christmas.

Now one could say therefore that the imaginative world of Symonds has built up this store of images, and although he knew a good deal of original representations of Antinous, he certainly didn't know as many as we have in this exhibition, and some of the ones that he thought most of, he had never seen at all. For example, he did know as it happens – and we probably would have been surprised if he hadn't – the great Mondragone head, what he called 'the colossal head of the Louvre'. But he dismissed it straight away, so we need no longer talk about it this evening. He said that it must be criticised for a certain vacancy and lifelessness, full stop. But he had never seen the San Ildefonso Group, the main subject of his essay on Antinous, since it was located in Madrid. As far as I can see, he never speaks of the version of it by Joseph Nollekens, and I suppose there's absolutely no reason why he should have seen it in its country house setting. But he did think he knew how to judge the Ildefonso piece, because (as he said) we can examine it through photographs, and he actually insisted that an engraving of it be made specially for the travel book in which his essay on Antinous of 1879 occurs.

As far as I know, it's the only illustration of any sort in his travel writings, and in that sense, there might be a rather conscious parallel to the case of Walter Pater, who inserts as the frontispiece to his *Renaissance*, that 'face of doubtful sex' – a drawing attributed to Leonardo – and that's it, that's the only illustration in Pater. Similarly, I believe this is the only illustration, the only image appearing in Symonds's works, or at least in his essay collections (I'm putting aside his book on Michaelangelo which is a rather different case).

So what I'm going to be talking about are these three different discursive settings for Antinous, one of which is very short, but nonetheless important. The first is a poem which he probably wrote around 1868. It was only published in 1878 in a collection called *Many Moods*, but it was indeed very probably written quite a few years before. The second is the essay, which is published in his *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece*, which comes out in 1879, the year after the poem is finally

published. The third is really just a historical note in a pamphlet. Note that these three instances refer to perceptions which involve quite different views of Antinous and in the last one at any rate, the question of sculptures of Antinous is virtually irrelevant. What we have instead is a concentration on Antinous the historical figure and on his relationship to Hadrian.

Now the first instance therefore is the poem, written in 1868, in John Addington Symonds's youth. It's called 'The Lotus Garland of Antinous', and you could say that it's really three things at once, and a lot of its interest derives from that particular fact. It's a narrative, it's a poem supposedly on the last days of Antinous, and – what makes it more interesting from our point of view – it draws very specifically on two antique poetic modes, or literary modes, in general. It begins as an ekphrasis in my view, that's to say as a description couched in the way that classical descriptions of paintings and sculptures were managed by Greek and Roman Sophists, and it ends as a metamorphosis, in the very precise sense that Ovid gives to metamorphosis in his great book – the eternal classic of classical mythology for Western culture.

Just to begin with, however, here is the note that Symonds places in his edition of the poem, which very clearly shows the diversity of the sources that he's looked at, and the fact that he's not by any means simply looking at any one particular sculpture or a set of sculptures. He writes:

This poem was suggested by the colossal statue of Antinous with the attributes of Dionysus in the Rotondo of the Vatican, his portrait in relief in the Villa Albani, a passage relating to his death in the *Augustan Histories*, and a passage in Athenaeus on the crowns of Lotos worn in Egypt at his festival. I have attempted no decided solution of the problem offered by his mysterious death. Although I incline, for artistic purposes [note that this is, as we shall see later, something of a cop-out!], to the tradition of self-sacrifice, rather than to the opposite hypothesis of immolation at the hands of Hadrian, I am aware that his subsequent deification and the extraordinary respect paid to his memory in many parts of the Roman world, may have been prompted by the emperor's remorse no less than by his gratitude or his affection.

And then he concludes the note by saying that ‘the history of the empire, rich as it is in motifs of romance and mystery, offers nothing stranger or more striking than the obscure life, the doubt-environed doom, and the immediate apotheosis of this court-favourite’.

Now I said it begins as an ekphrasis, and I suppose the ekphrasis I take as being closest to it is from Callistratus’ *Descriptions*, quite a late body of ekphrases, and all of them descriptions of sculpture in this case, written in the late third century. This is an ekphrasis on the statue of Narcissus. First of all the geographical placing. Callistratus: ‘There was a grove, and in it an exceedingly beautiful spring of very pure clear water, and by this stood a Narcissus made of marble. He was a boy, or rather a youth of the same age as the Erotes; and he gave out as it were a radiance of lightning from the very beauty of his body.’ This is the typical beginning of an ekphrasis on a sculpture, which places the sculpture as being within an imaginary background, but also immediately starts to talk about the light given out by the body; this being a play with the notion that the marble is giving out radiance, and that the marble is equated with the attractiveness and image of real flesh. So later on, a few lines down, the ‘garb which adorned him’ is as follows: ‘a white mantle, of the same colour as the marble of which he was made, encircled him: it was held by a clasp on the right shoulder and reached down nearly to the knees, where it ended, leaving free, from the clasp down, only the hand. Moreover, it was so delicate and imitated a mantle so closely that the colour of the body shone through, the whiteness of the drapery permitting the gleam of the limbs to come out.’

Now I think we can start to see in the Symonds poem, which I’ll read from, first of all the geographical placing, this imagining that he derives from his knowledge and his sculptures, but also from historically placing the context in which what will become a narrative is already set:

Behold, a vision of the world-old Nile
Of porch and palace-tower and peristyle
Glazed in the oily current smooth and calm,
With many a fringed mile of sultry palm
Shimmering in noon-day sunlight!...

We move effectively to the introduction of Antinous, and notice how Symonds works towards representing this figure in the dual role of the boy, the favourite of the emperor, but also of a statue:

And none but Adrian heard – save one who stayed
Beside him; one in whose quick pulses played
Fire of free life imperious; a boy
Of nineteenth summers, framed for power and joy.
Crisp on his temples curled the coal-black hair;
White myrtle flowers and leaves were woven there:
His eyes had solemn lights in them and shone
Flame-like neath cloudy brows: his cheeks were wan
With passion; and the soul upon his lips
Smouldering like some fierce plane in eclipse,
Breathed fascination terrible and strong,
As though quick pride strove with remembered wrong.
But oh! What tongue shall tell the orient glow
Of those orbed breasts, smooth dawn-smitten snow,
The regal gait, processional and grand,
As of a god; the sunny marble hand,
Grasping a silk-enwoven cedar-wand?

This sort of duality, this kind of equivocation between the lustre of the marble, and the glint of light on flesh, is persistent throughout the poem. As for ‘Those orbed breasts, smooth as dawn-smitten snow’ – it’s interesting that the use of that word ‘orbed’ is quite unusual poetically. I mean ‘orbed’ has a dual sense both of a roundel but also of a full globe, and the only previous poetic use of the word ‘orbed’ I can find was actually in Shelley, the person to whom Symonds is most in debt as a poet, and on whom he had written a significant study. But Shelley, in his poem ‘The Cloud’, is describing the Moon in these terms: ‘that orbed maiden with white fire laden /Whom mortals call the Moon’. So he is very definitely talking about a disk, whereas Symonds clearly used the term to emphasise the particular swelling effect of the breast of Antinous, an element in Antinous sculptures which I think only this afternoon was described as being very particular.

Now the narrative of 'The Lotus Garland of Antinous' proceeds to develop over about three or four hundred lines. It proceeds in a chronological sequence, starting off in the morning, then going on to 'noon day' – 'noon day' when obviously in Egypt all people do is to have a siesta, so both Antinous and Hadrian are flat out during that period. Then you come to the evening, and at that point again, not surprisingly, Antinous is acting as cup-bearer to Hadrian. There's a further passage there which I think is particularly delightful, and which I will read out. What one should note here is the significance of the passage that I read earlier about Symonds choosing to emphasise – as he says for artistic reasons – the point that Antinous should elect to take his own life. You can see the point. If, as it were, he is simply put to death by Hadrian – if he is immolated for the sake of the emperor as in one possibility raised by antique authors – it would produce a much flatter poem – probably a poem not worth writing. So, as a result, Antinous has to elect to die, and obviously he has to speak out, to no one in particular but to us, his reasons for doing so.

Thus spoke Antinous: 'My hour is nigh!
Night cometh, and the guardians of the sky
Illumine their cressets! So he rose and spread
The panther skin and thyrsus and the red
Wreath of dead lotos laid upon the ground:
Next in his hand the bowl of beryl, crowned
With roses, from a gleaming golden jar
He filled; and gazing at the level star,
Thrice made libation, crying: 'Father Nile,
And Isis and Osiris! ye who smile
On mortal births and burials! Lo, I give
My life for Adrian's! Wherefore should I live?
Have I not learned to trail my manhood's pride
In the world's golden gutters? – Like a bride,
Sumptuous with sacrifice and pomp and choir,
Forth from the doors I issued; and the fire
Of Flamens shone to light me: now, alone,
With saffron veil unbound and broken zone,

My blossom withered, lo, a wanton's doom
Awaits me, or the purifying tomb!

And that is the decisive moment. I will omit quite a lot of elaboration of that particular decision, but emphasise specifically what I described as the moment of metamorphosis at the end. It's interesting because, in the course of the poem, Antinous has been Bacchus but he's also been Ganymede, the cup-bearer. So he is given first of all, as it were, a hypothetical ending as a Ganymede arranged by Jupiter in his aquiline guise, and then something which one can take as being a wholly Ovidian ending, a kind of metamorphosis by assimilation into a beautiful flower:

Speechless from the bark

He dropped, she onward glided o'er the dark
Breast of the glimmering Nile with lamp and light:
He through the mirrors of the cool black night
Unruffled, dying drifted; and his death
Was seen by no man. Nay, there lingereth
Old legend in the town Antinoë,
Called by his name, a fair town and a free,
How that a flight of eagles from the sky,
Down swooping, bore him, rosy breast and thigh
Lustrous like lightening on their sable plumes,
Up to the zenith, where, a star, he blooms
In that bright garden of the grace of Jove,
The martyr and the miracle of love. –
Of this, the truth we know not; but we know
That in the town of Besa, where the flow
Of Nile is stayed upon the eastern bank
With wattles and with osiers, for a tank
That draws therefrom through sluices deep and wide
The living waters of the sacred tide,
There in the morn was found as though asleep,
The perfect body of the boy; and deep
Around him, known not till that day, there grew

Great store of lotos flowers, red, white and blue,
But mostly rose-red, flaming in his hair,
And o'er his breast and shoulders floating fair,
And with his arms enwoven pure and cool,
Screening his flesh from sunrise. Thus the pool
Burned with a miracle of flowers, but he
Raised on their petals, pillowed tenderly,
And curtained with fresh leaves innumerable,
Smiled like a god whom errands amorous
Lure from Olympus and coy Naiads find
Sleeping and in their rosy love-wreaths bind.

It's interesting again that he dies by water, and that Symonds, with his cult of Shelley, had in the same book of essays, incidentally described his own extraordinary dash from the Alps to celebrate and to commemorate the death of Shelley on the shores of the Mediterranean. Well, the poem ends, in a way, syncretising all of these different embodiments of Antinous, and when he writes here: 'Of this the truth we know not; but we know...', and then ends on that note, one can see it's not surprising that Symonds should have later tried to find out what we can know about Antinous quite apart from the accretions and the myths: of a clearer way that we might think of him, in relation to all his diverse representations.

So we come to the essay of 1879, a serious work of scholarship in which he benefited enormously from the help of his disciple Horatio Brown, who evidently did all the research in Florence and sent the results back to Davos. It's a learned essay, but an essay which once again opts for a particular point of view, and that point of view is illustrated pre-eminently, one might say almost solely, by the so-called Ildefonso Group, the image that he uses to preface *Sketches and Studies* – that is, the sculpture that we now know in the Nollekens version as a *Castor and Pollux*. The essay begins with quite a striking comparison nonetheless. It's a comparison between the figure of Antinous and that of St. Sebastian. 'Both were saints': writes Symonds, 'the one of decadent paganism, the other of mythologising Christianity'. But again, the crucial point, we know nothing worth knowing, or we can discover nothing worth knowing about St. Sebastian in historical terms. But Antinous is, Symonds says, 'a true historic personage, no phantom of myth but a man as real as Hadrian, his master'. That is a

kind of metonymy: if Hadrian is real, therefore Antinous is real. It carries conviction for Symonds, and having dismissed St. Sebastian for that reason – as being not capable of being treated in the same terms – he immediately then brings up the three possible hypotheses about the death of Antinous, as he sees it, and as the current German scholarship that he's been reading portrays it. First of all, that Antinous died an accidental death by drowning, secondly that Antinous in some way or another gave his life willingly for Hadrian's, and thirdly that Hadrian ordered his immolation in the performance of magic rites.

Now, of course, it's alright to put those alternatives. But how are we to resolve the issue even though we have an absolute conviction that Antinous is a historical figure! Ultimately of course, Symonds has to find his solution in the representations of Antinous. There's nowhere else to look, and in that particular context he can't find anything but will satisfy him in (let's say) the most authentic or so regarded representations. The Villa Albani bas-relief, for example, he discusses – but then he says he does not know 'whether the restoration was wisely made' – that 'may be doubted'. So the conclusion must be the Ildefonso Group is 'far the most interesting of all'. But it does not altogether resolve the question:

Yet could we but understand its meaning clearly, the mystery of Antinous would be solved. The key to the whole matter probably lies here but, alas, we know not how to use it.

Now, of course, as I said, he's not by any means breaking entirely new ground here when he seizes upon the writings of the German art historian and critic, Bötticher, who had already spoken of the Ildefonso Group in these quite categorical terms. Bötticher wrote, only in 1871 and so quite recently for Symonds, that '[The Ildefonso Group] represents not a sacrifice of death, but a sacrifice of fidelity on the part of the two friends, Hadrian and Antinous, who have met together before Persephone to ratify a vow of love until death'. But Symonds can't fully accept that. He's accepted already that the key to the secret lies in this particular sculptural group, but he can't see that this particular way of articulating the relationship between the two figures is satisfactory at all. He claims that: 'It throws no light on the melancholy and solemnity of the two figures, which irresistibly suggests a funereal rather than a joyous rite.' For him, as a result, it therefore 'remains a mystery'.

I think it's very interesting to read the last passage of this long essay, where – having presented initially the impression that we were going to resolve the mystery with the aid of German scholarship, but perhaps modifying it or reinterpreting it – Symonds seems in the end to be very willing to settle for the mystery remaining a mystery. I quote this last paragraph:

Over all these questions, over all that concerns Antinous, there rests a cloud of darkness, an impenetrable doubt. To pierce that cloud is now impossible. The utmost we can do is to indulge our fancy in dreams of greater or less probability, and to mark out clearly the limitations of the subject. It is indeed something to have shown that the stigma of slavery and disgrace attaching to his name has no solid historical justification, and something to have suggested plausible reasons for conjecturing that his worship had genuine spiritual basis. Yet the sincere critic, at the end of the whole enquiry, will confess that he is only cast a plummet into the unfathomable sea of ignorance. What remains immortal, indestructible, victorious is Antinous in art. Against the gloomy background of doubt, calumny, contention, terrible surmise, his statues are illuminated with the dying glory of the classic genius – even as the towers and domes of a marble city shine forth from the purple banks of a thunder-cloud in sunset light. Here and there only does reality emerge from the chaos of conflicting phantoms. Front to front with them, it is allowed us to get all else but the beauty of one who died young because the gods loved him. But when we question those wonderful mute features and beg them for their secret, they return no answer. There is not even a smile upon the parted lips. So profound is the mystery, so insoluble the enigma, that from its most importunate interrogation we derive nothing but an attitude of deeper reverence. This, in itself however, is worth the pains of study.

So that's how he concludes the investigation of the essay, and you might well say that could be a reasonable conclusion to his investigation into Antinous, full stop. What he has done, in a way, is just what Gautier and Pater had done before him with the Mona Lisa. He's turned a historical portrait into an unfathomable mystery. But obviously neither Pater nor Gautier were specially interested, or interested on any level, in the historical circumstances of the wife of the Florentine merchant Francesco del

Giocondo. Nor do they see it incumbent upon them to try and resolve the circumstances of the sitter's death, whatever they may have been. Symonds, however, having written his poem, and having written his essay, still continues to seek for a way of integrating the historical Antinous. But it has to be in a totally different kind of discourse, and one which is selective in the extreme - not written for the tourist or the connoisseur, or whoever he wrote his poems for, but written very specifically for 'medical psychologists and jurists'.

You may consult it under very select conditions in the British Library on the table reserved for people consulting obscene literature. It is indeed a historical discussion of same sex relationships in the Greco-Roman world. It's something which has however had an influence despite its extreme rarity: on (for example) Marguerite Yourcenar, who sought it out and described it as 'remarkable'. It returns parenthetically to the Villa Albani relief – and Symonds is particularly keen to dismiss Winckelmann's hypothesis, when he writes – at least as Symonds interprets it – 'that the boy himself presumably adopted this pose to attract his lover's regard'.

In other words this notion of the submissive Antinous is represented in that particular relief, so that what Symonds is trying to do at this particular stage is look very precisely through the representations, and through what has been made of the representations, to approach the question of the motivation no longer just of Antinous but of Hadrian – and indeed of Hadrian's predecessors going back to Alexander the Great. This is all he writes about Antinous in the final essay. First of all comes a sentence, which then leads him to insert a note. The sentence reads: 'A kind of spiritual atavism moved the Macedonian conqueror to assume on the vast Bactrian plain the outward trappings of Achilles Agonistes.'

Now, of course, this is a theme that we were discussing this afternoon: the notion of mimetism or imitation: Alexander the Great imitating Achilles and all that Achilles had done, his loves as well as his military actions. Then the note comes in this form: 'Hadrian in Rome, at a later period, revived the Greek tradition with ever more of caricature. His military ardour, patronage of art and love for Antinous seem to hang together'. What has happened here, therefore, is that Symonds has quite dramatically shifted the 'mystery' from a rather imponderable issue of existential motivation to one of the cultural tradition, and in that process, questions of free will and coercion seem to disappear, since cultural transmission is viewed as being

essentially repetitive and imitative, conquerors and emperors imitating earlier conquerors and emperors in all respects.

There is actually a very striking coincidence between this particular view and what I take to be the most recent view of the Ildefonso Group: a recent number of *Art History* in effect discusses the Ildefonso relief essentially in terms of Hadrian's awareness of earlier Greek models. The Ildefonso Group becomes, in other words, a kind of composite of bits taken from this or that Greek model: this or that figure, this or that particular sculpture, and the question whether it's Castor and Pollux or whatever particular characters may be embodied in it, dissolves entirely. It seems to me to be extraordinarily interesting that Symonds had already in a sense reached that point. Having first placed so much emphasis on the Ildefonso Group, as being what would incarnate the mystery and perhaps allow the solution of the mystery, he has in effect, concluded in 'A problem in Greek ethics' that that Hadrian's love 'hangs together' with his interest in previous Greek art, his mimetism of previous Greek conquerors. This, as it were, offers the final solution.

One might say that we've lost almost everything of Winckelmann and subsequent German scholarship in this image of a philhellenic and eclectic emperor, and we've also lost any sense of the issues that had plagued Symonds at least up to the point where he wrote his 'Problem in Greek ethics'. But, of course, we remain free to revisit the stages of his reception of the Antinous type, and we are all the more rewarding for doing that when we see the rich assortment of works which are presented in the present exhibition.