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"NOT-SO-IMAGINARY PORTRAITS":

AN ANALYSIS OF ARTHUR SYMONS' *SPIRITUAL ADVENTURES*

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Abstract

This dissertation tackles various facets of *Spiritual Adventures*, a collection of short stories published by Arthur Symons in 1905. Symons himself was one of the most important advocates of the Decadent avant-garde in late nineteenth century Britain. Art provides a common thread, tying back to almost all topics which are handled here. The survey begins with the most important dichotomy of them all, namely art and life. In this regard the connections between these two concepts and the all-encompassing power of the former show the mentality of the various protagonists (who could be perceived as alter-egos of the author) as artists, who dedicated their entire existence to their craft. Subsequently, the mischievously alluring and imprisoning power of the artist's love is explored in all its fallacies; it is shown that, generally, such a powerful feeling, normally perceived as positive, takes on a much more negative form, thus becoming an obstacle and a hindrance for the artists' creative endeavours. Considering the author's stance on romance, love, and women in general, various misogynistic elements noticeable in these stories are highlighted. Lastly a parallel is drawn between the author himself and his characters to show the myriad autobiographical elements that the author inserted in this attempt at fiction writing. It becomes apparent how Symons disguises himself in most of the protagonists, for in their creation he pours a great deal both of himself and of other artists he respected, while managing to refashion events of his life into a work of art. The utilisation of other established artists (with whom he shared his artistic vision) for the portraits of *Spiritual Adventures* participates in conveying his decadent and symbolist message to the readers: the ultimate goal in life is to seek art, for only then will their lives truly become beautiful.

1. Arthur Symons: Portrait of an Artist

1.1 Introduction[1]

Born in 1865, Arthur Symons grew up during a period known as the Victorian Age; a period known for its astounding advancements in technology and industry, but all the while characterised by strict and non-negotiable norms of morality, which encircled all classes and defined one's social status. The Victorian Age encompasses a sizeable number of decades, from 1837 to 1901, and, therefore, presents a plethora of peculiarities in government form, economics, scientific advancements, and societal rules, which are worth going over.

Concerning government, Britain was governed by queen Victoria, although there existed a parliament comprised of the two so-called House of Lords and House of Commons, with the latter being the biggest in size (600 members). Moreover, it is in these decades that serious electoral reforms were put in place, thus giving the right to vote to a wider number of citizens (with some women included in 1918).

The new technological inventions and discoveries enabled the rampant growth of the country, catapulting it into its second Industrial Revolution. This new phase of Britain's history enabled, without doubt, the growth of the middle classes of self-made men, albeit at the unfortunate cost of the living conditions of the lower strata of society.

The middle classes practically dictated the social norms and vogues, which all morally upstanding members of the public had to abide by. Such examples could be seen in the total refusal to even mention sex in social circles and situations, for a proper level of decency and modesty was always to be kept. Women became idolised as pure and innocent, with no interest in sex outside of reproductive purposes and solely dedicated to taking care of the household and offspring, whereas men could indulge in sex interests, for it was essential to them. Such an ideology is naturally riddled with paradoxes and double standards, as it is possible to infer when considering that prostitution, promiscuous women and even sodomy (as it was called back then) were not uncommon.

Even with all these societal restrictions, great steps forward were achieved in the realm of science. New evolutionary theories became the topic of discussion among the public

[1] For a concise survey of the Victorian Age to serve as introductory background to this chapter I have relied on: https://www.britannica.com/event/Victorian-era

and were even applied to men at a societal level. At the same time, some men of letters explored the realm of subconsciousness and attempted to find medical solutions to a widespread problem labelled as: Degeneracy. In fact, expanding on Morel's Degeneration theory, Nordau saw the equivalent problem in new men of letters, who he deemed "degenerate". This illness was characterised by symptoms such as ego mania and interests in mysticism (which curiously Arthur Symons appears to share).

In this complex period, rich in contradictions, it seems only natural that many artists, for the sake of a new art without limits and constrictions, concerned only with beauty, bravely stood up against a hostile environment which sought to destroy and censor their dangerously perverse artistic conception.

Arthur Symons was one of them, and it is not surprising that his work was always received with conflicting opinions. After all, one of his main objectives was precisely to overthrow the dominant societal rules imposed by the Philistines, whom he hated intensely. This notwithstanding, the entire and prolific production of Symons was not always seen under a bad light. In fact, his critical essays, which have mainly made his career during the first phases, were praised for the most part by his peers and even by other critics who were not as ready to speak in his favour. A constant source of praise in his work was his style, a search for a perfection in form, for which Symons cared immensely. Many of the critics who did not hesitate to reprimand him or chastise him because of the degeneracy of his subject matters, could only praise his prose style.

Another important element which differentiates Symons from other writers is not only his abundantly prolific production as a critic, but also the fact that he wrote essays tackling all art forms, ranging from literature to music, dance, architecture, sculpture, painting, acting. However, whereas his work and influence as a critic was largely unquestioned, the same cannot be said about his verse production. From the initial small achievement with *Days and Nights* to the later failures of *London Nights* and *Silhouettes* his poems were chiefly dismissed by the public and ruthlessly attacked by the critics. This cyclical process of dismissal and attacks seems to always be the case in Symons' publications, especially after he wrote his famous manifesto *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, so that most of the public took him for the champion and representative of the movement. In fact, as we can see in the letter to Rhoda, quoted in the biographical section of this work (pag 15), Symons went through moments of joy and satisfaction in his art which

were constantly interrupted by periods of complete disillusionment and fear of failure; these are signs of a man who, regardless of his courage to stand up against a morally pressuring society, wanted, deep down, some recognition and validation for his efforts. In any case, such a catastrophic view of his production does not do justice to his accomplishments, for it must be reminded that Symons was a writer who was well known by most big names in the literary world of the time, with some of them being very close friends and acquaintances. His poetry was well received by none other than Walter Pater, he worked with Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley and was beloved by a group of peers such as: Yeats, Ellis, Rhys, Symonds, and many others who only had good things to say about him. Moreover, he not only introduced the British public to French Symbolist writers, but also had a great deal of influence on the following Modernist generation, especially on James Joyce, whom he helped in the first steps of his career.

After his notorious nervous breakdown of 1908, Arthur Symons, in the minds of many, became a shell of his former self, an artist perpetually stuck in 1890s, when the spirit of Decadence and Symbolism was at its peak. To this day his production, following that tragedy in Venice, is still seen by many only as a shadow of what Arthur Symons would have been capable of. This, however, does not mean that Symons is destined to fade away from history, far from it. As was remarked by Beckson, the critics' interest in this writer, throughout the years, has naturally experienced some ups and down but showed its highest peak in the last decade of the twentieth century.

As far as the reception of *Spiritual Adventures* is concerned, it seems that Symons' work mainly went unnoticed by most critics when it was published in 1905, so that the number of critical reviews on it is fairly scarce (Freeman, *Introduction* 20). More in detail, in his edited and annotated version of the book Freeman mentions the reviews of: *The Manchester Guardian* (27 October 1905), *The Sunday Times* (1 October 1905), *The Academy* (1906), *The Dial* (1906) and *The Athenaeum* (1906). Even though they acknowledged Symons' talent and skills, many of these reviews deemed *Spiritual Adventures* as either too focused on a specific type of melancholic character or even too skilfully written for the public (*The Manchester Guardian* and *The Sunday Times* respectively). Moreover, the Decadent label was once again attached to Symons, so that *The Academy* and *The Athenaeum* focused respectively on his excessive elucidations and his inclination to write "studies of decadence" (Freeman, *Introduction* 21). However, amidst this type of criticism there were also reviews which praised Symons' work,

especially in the United States. Whereas *The Dial* lamented the lack of a proper ending to the stories, suggesting that it might have been done on purpose, Symons' style was praised by both Gibbons Hueneker in *The New York Times* and Elia W. Peattle in *The Chicago Daily Tribute*. The main praise was that Symons had managed to explore and expand on Pater's ideas, while successfully creating a study on the souls of people and their unusual situations. These reviews make it clear that *Spiritual Adventures* was received with mixed opinion, being both praised and heavily criticised at the same time. The word "Decadent" was still being used in some of these reviews, a label which Symons tried to abandon but always came back to him with all its negative connotations, providing critics with a good pretext to brush off his works as the mere result of a degenerate generation.

1.2 Arthur Symons' life

In the preface to his book *Plays, Acting and Music*, when referring to the short stories collected as *Spiritual Adventures*, Arthur Symons used the noun phrase "Imaginary Portraits" to define them, thus making Walter Pater's influence on his own collection abundantly clear[2]. After all, Symons' *Spiritual Adventures* were not just simple attempts at fiction writing, but also "studies of people" (Symons, *Plays* VIII), and, since life too is a work of art, they must be simply consumed and enjoyed as any other creation.

However, when further analysed, the stories showcase a myriad of autobiographical elements, while many of the protagonists seem to be incarnations of their author. This being the case, it is apparent that contextual background information on the author himself will be needed in order to understand not only the stories and the characters, but also Symons' own perspective on art and literature.

- *Childhood and Adolescent years*

Arthur Symons was born in Milford Haven on February 21st, 1865, in a family of zealous religious background. His father, Mark Symons, being a Methodist minister, was forced to move to new towns every three years due to the rules and nature of his work, thus shaping Symons' highly individualist and reserved temperament; a temperament which led him to make only few acquaintances, as Lhombreaud remarks in his biography: "He was not popular at any of his schools, though he maintained he was not disliked […] What

[2] For a comparison between Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* and *Spiritual Adventures* see, chapter 4, pp. 60.

Arthur did love, on the other hand, was the long solitary walk" (Lhombreaud 8). Indeed, notwithstanding the isolation he felt, at a very young age, Symons was not so keen on reading books, an activity which he found tedious. Instead, he loved taking long solitary walks, perhaps to escape the restrictive religious lifestyle of his family.

However, constantly changing schools and stuck in the loop of religious activities, he gradually found solace and a new interest in reading books of poetry and in writing his own poems. He even became infatuated with music and playing the piano, to the point of being constantly on the lookout for every new exercise and theory book he could get his hands on.

These formative years are of extreme importance, for they cemented, in the young writer's mind, those artistic tastes and interests which would stay with him for the rest of his life. A good example of this is to be found in the candid and copious correspondence with his childhood tutor, Churchill Osborne, who: "by his steady encouragement […] confirmed the young Symons in his vocation and made easy the first steps" (Lhombreaud 14).

As a matter of fact, Symons would constantly send his verses and critical analyses to his friendly senior, who was later to become a journalist and literary critic, always ready to lend a helping hand to his young talented protégé. This exchange of ideals and impressions lasted throughout the entirety of his teenage years, during which Symons honed his writing skills through critical articles, and an astoundingly prolific output of verse.

- *Adulthood, the first steps of a professional writer*

In 1883-1884, thanks to a letter of introduction, he made his first trip to London to visit Richard Garnett[3], a visit which definitively ignited his spark of passion for literature and a career in this field. Moreover, Frederick James Furnivall, English philologist and founder of the *Browning Society*, saw potential in the young writer and requested various articles from Symons, thus leading to the publication of a study on Browning which would be praised by none other than Walter Pater, who would later become a supporter of Symons' literary endeavours. Consequently, he started preparing by reading incessantly and writing articles, all of which, to his displeasure, were rejected. However, with new

[3] Richard Garnett was a scholar, men of letters and the Assistant-Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum and Superintendent of the Reading Room, see Lhombreaud, *Arthur Symons, A Critical Biography*, pp. 29.

introductions and friendships the likes of Garnett, Furnivall, Pater and Havelock Ellis, Symons prepared for another visit to London in 1886.

Here he enlarged his knowledge and culture, visited museums, did research, and encountered other artists[4], while deciding to settle permanently in the city. Symons' articles started to be published and although the reception, much like the rest of his work, was mixed, he even managed to attract the attention of Oscar Wilde, who, as the editor of *Woman's World*, was anxious to have his article on Villers de l'Isle-Adam (Lhombreaud 46).

During this period between 1886 and 1888, Symons was a young man ready to make a name for himself and his time in London helped him tremendously in consolidating and crystallising his ideals and thoughts regarding art. This is to be expected since the ripe atmosphere of the metropolis and his incessant work led to his first collection of poems *Days and Nights* to be published in 1889. It was praised, once again, by Walter Pater, who became one of his biggest sources of inspiration together with Browning.

The year 1889 holds a fair deal of importance in the life of Arthur Symons, in that not only does it mark the date of his first official collection of poems, but it is also the year of his first visit to Paris. At the fin-de-siècle, Paris was a brewing cauldron filled to the brim with new ideas and avant-garde artists. It was also the home of many of Symons' favourite writers such as Mallarmé, Huysmans and most importantly Verlaine.

During his second visit in 1890, Symons had finally the chance to immerse himself in this atmosphere and met some of his heroes. The experience was without doubt the best that Symons could have ever had, for he became acquainted with the movement known as Symbolism for which he became a strenuous advocate. However, it must be reminded that, at the time, this was no unified literary movement under whose banner artists followed consistent theories and methods; each artist aimed to achieve his own style and ideals (Lhombreaud 68). This individualist and heterogenous conception of art and artistic movements would always be supported by Symons, regardless of his attempts at defining it.

[4] Such as Ernest Rhys

A quick note must be made concerning these artists: while it is true that they embodied the typical lifestyle of the bohémien artist, Symons never fully lead his life in such a way but would much rather witness these bohemians from afar out of interest and curiosity.

One thing remains certain, his life in Paris shaped the man and the artist he was about to become, whose life had to be filled with sensations and beauty. In fact, these tendencies remained with him when he came back to London and probably never left him. The experience in Paris also lead to a series of travels. Symons took a great deal of pleasure and delight in travelling, not just for experience and sensations but also for writing (his essays on the places he visited remain an incredible example of impressionistic artistry).

The following year Symons returned to London to further his literary career. There he encountered other likeminded artists who were also in search of publishers willing to take the risk of associating with them. As a result, the renowned *Rhymers' Club* came into being. An ensemble of men of letters, under the example of their French counterparts, gathered together in an effort to create fertile ground for exchange of ideas and impressions on their poetry. Although their attempts at forming a unified group and creating art were still met with criticism by readers and reviewers, this was a clear sign that the new avant-garde was developing within the British literary landscape, and Symons' contribution to its evolution is not to be underestimated. In fact, he even landed a job position as a Music Hall ballet critic for none other than the *Star* magazine. In 1892 he embarked on yet another journey to France and met, once again, with his idols; he then returned to London the next year, during which his very famous article *The Decadent Movement in Literature* was published.

Yet again we arrive at a crucial year in the life of this author, i.e. 1894. During this period, he went for the first time to Venice, a city which would inspire countless compositions of verse. Moreover, this year consolidated in the minds of the public and critics the writer's association with Decadence and degenerate ideals, for he became a member of the working staff and one of the main contributors in the founding of the famously controversial magazine *The Yellow Book*, joined by the young and talented Aubrey Beardsley. Unfortunately, in a society characterised by extreme decency and distaste for the "corrupted", this endeavour did not bear much fruit and ended abruptly due to Beardsley's resignation and Oscar Wilde's trials, which became the talk of the entire country, thus making "the year 1895 [...] the "black year" of the movement […] There

can be detected a group of artists and writers who shared in the same revolt on the same grounds of understanding, and who were attacked, discredited, and ridiculed" (Lhombreaud 113).

Presumably in 1893 or 1894 Symons fell in love with an unidentified ballet dancer, who he would name as Lydia in a little book entitled *Amoris Victima* (1940), and quickly became obsessed with her (Lhombreaud 115-116). As we shall see, this unrequited love is of undisputable importance for the analysis of *Spiritual Adventures*, especially as concerns Symons' representation of love.

It was in 1895 that Symons got acquainted with the publisher by the name of Smithers. Unfortunately for him, Smithers was not seen under a good light both by the public and the literary world on the grounds of his shady activities which dealt with erotica and pornography; yet he still chose him out of necessity to publish his new collection of poems: *London Nights*. This new collection was the subject of heavy criticism and, yet again, Symons, although praised for his technique and style, was being associated with dangerous degenerate aesthetic theories when it came to the subjects of his works.

The nature of a strenuous hard worker, which Symons always possessed, prevented him from giving up and he set on a new literary adventure in the form of the contentious quarterly (later monthly) magazine: *The Savoy*. The magazine featured a plethora of different artists and was to be published by the same Smithers, who seemed the only one brave enough to run the risk of dealing with such artists. Much like the experience with *The Yellow Book*, it seemed that this ship was not meant to set sail. *The Savoy* was first envisioned as a competitor of *The Yellow Book* and featured even more artists from the Decadent movement. It could be argued that the backlash from the trials of Oscar Wilde was so severe that the need for a new magazine, for the artists who were socially or indirectly involved with Wilde and needed work, was intensely felt. However, the main aim of the magazine remained that of fighting against the Victorian morality of the Philistines for the sake of beauty and art, which of course led to problems with censorship and, later, to a much heavier blow when "the powerful firm of W. H. Smith & Son which controlled the distribution of books and magazines at so many bookstalls, refused to circulate *The Savoy*, thus depriving it of the main means of subsistence" (Lhombreaud 128).

At this moment in time, Symons became more pessimistic, less confident in his own work; at the dusk of what was known as the Decadent Movement he needed physical and mental refuge which he found, just like always, in travelling.

Italy proved to be a good source of distraction, whilst additional journeys to Germany and Moscow provided material for his writings and quenched his thirst for sensations and impressions, good or bad as they might be (he apparently had a bad impression of Moscow). Probably due to his disillusionment he began working on essays and critical material, while dabbling in his other interests: translation and music.

In 1898 Symons had to mourn the death of his father, after which he departed for France on yet another journey which led him to Spain. In 1899 his new book *The Symbolist Movement* was published. When reading both the *Symbolist Movement* and *The Decadent Movement in Literature,* it is interesting to witness the considerable change in the author's tone and arguments when analysing the various artists he was interested in. In *The Symbolist Movement* the author seems to be more adamant on accepting and utilising this more precise label as opposed to the more generic one of Decadence. Even in his views on art, although a stark curiosity for the perverse, abnormal, and decadent remains, everything in life (even the most mundane and inconsequential details) presents itself as a symbol with a more mysterious and alluring higher meaning, a complex code or language which could decipher the truth of aestheticism and art. This could represent a tell-tale sign of a more refined and elaborate art theory or, in other words, thoughtful changes in Symons' mind, but it could also be an attempt on his part to relinquish that detrimental label so closely attached to the scandalous figure of Oscar Wilde.

- *The turn of the century*

The first years of the twentieth century were essentially dedicated to securing a stable financial situation in order to marry Rhoda Bowser, whom he had met in 1897. Symons worked relentlessly and manically, focusing more on journalistic work rather than his career as a poet. These years seemed to be very harsh on the writer, who managed to scrape along by accepting all the work he could find and overworking himself; all this took a great toll on Symons' mental state, which was only to worsen with the passing of time.

To secure jobs and create valuable connections, Symons had to deal with everything he hated most, mainly in the form of social gatherings with lesser-known artists and the

bourgeoisie he so adamantly abhorred; still, for a prospect of a lifetime with Rhoda, this was only a small bump in the road. As a matter of fact, Rhoda meant a lot to him, in her he found the strength to push forward as we can see in these excerpts of a letter sent to her in 1900, where Symons conveys not only his struggles but also the positive influence that Rhoda had on him:

> I *am* content, Rhoda, *now*. You give me strength, patience, the desire and the power to work. […] every time I have thought of you it has been a spur to me, not a distraction […] you don't know what you do for me when you write to me like that; or, yes, I think by now you *do* know. I have been living and working for so many years, without a single day passing […] in which I have not felt, some time in the day, a sense of utter futility of all I was doing […] I now *always* think of you, all the time, without being able to help it, during music (Symons to Rhoda, 12 February 1900) (Symons, *Collected Letters* 134).

On a poor and unstable salary and borrowed money, he finally married Rhoda in 1901. During this time, he kept on expanding his "aesthetic theory of all the arts", writing books on those art forms which he loved the most, even without possessing formal training in them, all the while trying to write theatrical plays. He also tried his hand at fiction writing with his collection of short stories titled *Spiritual Adventures*, which was published in 1905.

In 1906, after some years of relative calm, the couple bought a cottage in Kent, whose payment proved to be far more difficult than anticipated, thus causing added stress on the mind of an already troubled and dissatisfied writer such as Symons. Debts became harder and harder to pay and remained unpaid for several years.

In 1908 Symons and Rhoda went on a trip to Italy. Even in his correspondence and general temperament, traces of his frail mental state were to be witnessed; Symons was nonetheless in high spirits and didn't lose focus on his literary production, but, alas, his stay in Venice became the straw that broke the camel's back. Constantly irritable, set off by even the most mundane and inconsequential matters, Symons broke down and in a manic episode went from Venice to Bologna. However, this daring escape did not simply stop there. Once his wife joined him in Bologna, he was adamant on not returning to London and, once again, he wandered aimlessly through the countryside, fled from a couple of locals, and finally found refuge at a farmer's house. Later, he was apprehended by local law enforcers who shoved him into a cell; this only worsened his already highly unstable condition, thus leading to a subsequent escape attempt during which he was injured by the law enforcers. Once the prison in which he was hold was found by the authorities, who were contacted by Rhoda, he was finally liberated and brought back to

London, where a long arduous process of recovery and medical examinations awaited him. Here is Symons' own brief recollection of the event in his correspondence with Edward Hutton:

> I must tell you of my awful adventure in Italy. I will never go there again. I was imprison[ed] in a deep dungeon with manacles on hands and feet and no food and a wooden bed. They got me out and took me to a stable [?] next to an asylum [?] where I was clean out of all recognition (Symons to Edward Hutton November 1908) (Symons, *Collected Letters* 199).

Arthur Symons was shortly after diagnosed with "general paralysis", a mental impairment often associated with syphilis; his physical condition was not changing, nor was he showing any sign of improvement, so much so that the doctors thought of the possibility of continued confinement with Symons' chances of surviving being incredibly slim (Lhombreaud 246).

Even in his critical condition he never renounced reading and writing and in the two years following his mental breakdown he resumed his writings, mainly handling the topic of madness (which had always interested him even before his sickness).

Slowly but surely, against all odds, his condition was improving. He was allowed to go out more and enjoyed the countless visits of all his friends, while Rhoda was trying her best to financially support her husband by working as an actress. Although he was still active as a writer, the years following the breakdown saw him indulging in the common habit of "cannibalising" his own work with constant rewriting. Moreover, Symons never seemed to have abandoned the spirit of the 1890s, that aesthetic or decadent style he described in his essay, due to which the public considered him the *de facto* leader of the movement.

In the face of the new generations of artists and the Modernist movement, Symons' style and artistic conception quickly became a thing of the past, which seems to be what perpetually haunted the author, an individualist who pursued his own idea and vision of art and beauty till the very end.

Arthur Symons passed away in 1945 and although his poetry never had the success he expected, his personality and skills as a writer were always remembered fondly by his peers who had the chance of meeting and associate themselves with the true Paterian definition of a decadent artist, an aesthete who burned intensely for sensations and beauty.

1.3 An aesthetic theory of all the arts

As seen in the biographical section, Arthur Symons' artistic conception developed in parallel with his personal growth both as a man and as an artist; and since the life of this man of letters is so inseparable from his art, his works (critical essays, prose, and verse) completely reflect this growth. Because his literary production is so prolific, it might seem an almost daunting task to try and compile a complete theory of art as envisioned by Symons. Luckily, in a letter to Warner Taylor, at the time American professor at the University of Wisconsin, Arthur Symons briefly details some of his artistic views in a concise and yet precise manner. In the letter, we see how Pater was a fundamental influence on him, the necessary foundation to support all the theorisations on art he was to make in the future:

> I read Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which opened a new world to me, or rather, gave me the key or the secret of the world in which I was living. It taught me that life (which had seemed to me then of so little moment) could be made a work of art, and I caught from it an unlimited curiosity. From that moment the question of style resolved itself into a certainty of mine, on the whole, would never vary (Symons to Warner Taylor late 1931) (Symons, *Collected Letters* 255-256).

From this extract much of Symons' artistic views can be extrapolated, in that "the secret of the world" of which he speaks is the one thing that Symons always strived towards in all his artworks. It could be even argued, using Immanuel Kant's terminology, that the aim in art, from Symons' perspective, was to get to the *noumenon*, the true essence and secret of reality, something which remains mysterious and almost unachievable if not through the employment of art. Life to Symons was essentially the *phenomenon*, a symbol which stands for something far greater and enlightening and so, on this basis, "life could be made a work of art" simply because life is art itself, a representation which cannot be detached from the thing it embodies. Following this line of argument, if beauty is most surely to be found in art, then, consequentially, life too must bear beauty, for it symbolises art which is the pinnacle of beauty, hence why life can be made into an artwork. And even further, life must be lived intensely, in search of sensations and impressions which fill the artist and become the source of his creations. Life and nature are not merely objects of contemplation which need to be perfectly mimicked in art to showcase their beauty, they represent means to an end; they ignite those emotions or, as he calls them "impressions and sensations", which make the artist see things "not as they are" but as one sees them (Symons, *Plays* I). So, the artist must look at things, as Pater preached, through his own perception and senses and understand how that work of art or even nature makes *him* feel;

he must then turn to Symbolism under whose wing "art returns to the one pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty" (Symons, *Symbolist* 9).

Symons was always well acquainted with the idea of Symbolism, but prior to his acceptance of this label for a new literary avant-garde, he adopted a much broader notion, that of Decadence; Symons uses this label generously to describe common qualities possessed by other movements such as Symbolism and Impressionism, which are taken as two separate branches of this movement. In *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, Decadence is seen as a "new and beautiful and interesting disease" which characterises most ends of centuries, a malady and a literature which is:

> For its very disease of form […] typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion or in conduct. It reflects all the moods, all the manners, of a sophisticated society; its very artificiality is a way of being true to nature: simplicity, sanity, proportion- the classic qualities- how much do we possess them in our life, our surroundings, that we should look to find them in our literature- so evidently the literature of a decadence? (Symons, *Decadent* 859)

So, Decadence presents itself as the natural result of a society which turns on itself, thus becoming self-conscious. And in its self-consciousness Decadent literature steps back from the typical qualities of the Classics in favour of "a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity" (Symons, *Decadent* 858-859). These elements encapsulate the ultimate goal of both branches of the Decadent movement, in that they both aspire to uncover "la verité vraie" or, in other words, "the very essence of truth" which lies in the perception of the senses and the way they make us see the world subjectively (Symons, *Decadent* 859).

In this regard, the similarities between Symons' descriptions of Decadence and Symbolism are evident, so that it becomes interesting to notice the abrupt switch from his previous stance on Decadence, seen in *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, to his absolute assuredness in taking Symbolism as the more appropriate label for a new type of avant-garde. It is unclear whether Symons abandoned it due to the scandals and turmoil surrounding that notion, or whether this was just Symons making up his mind and coming up with a more profound and well thought-out theory; in any case, what he was an adamant advocate for, in the beginning of his artistic theories, is now brushed off as a mere "half a mock-interlude" in *the Symbolist Movement*.

Naturally, if such cryptic means of symbolisation are to be used to reach beauty in art, then style and purity of form must be present and nurtured. However, as Symons sees it,

form is not the quintessential solution to Symbolism and the artist must reach a point of "perfecting form so that form be annihilated" (Symons, *Symbolist* 9). To Symons there is such a thing as over possession of form and artists, who exploit impeccable form for the sake of flaunting it, would be missing the point. Form, like life, is a means to an end which must be used "to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority" so that the artist "can evoke beautiful things magically" (Symons, *Symbolist* 9), a sentiment which we also see in the afore mentioned letter to Warner Taylor:

> When I read Shakespeare, I never think of his incomparable style, but of his immortal Genius. The rhythm of one of his plays speaks to the blood like wine or music: it is with exultation, with intoxication, that I see or read *Anthony and Cleopatra*; it gives me exactly the same intoxication as when I heard Valdimir the Pachmann play the piano. As when I heard Wagner's *Tristan*. (Symons, *Collected Letters* 257)

Another facet of this ideal of Symbolism in form we find in his analysis of Villers de l'Isle-Adam, where Symons theorises that form, and therefore speech, is often degraded in "realistic" fiction to what the characters might be able to convey through the words available to them. On the contrary, he admires de l'Isle-Adam for his daring and symbolic use of language, a form which does not convey naturally what the characters would say, but rather "the speech of their thought, of their dreams" (Symons, *Symbolist* 50), thus turning those words into symbols which represent the characters.

In terms of subjects and topics, it is clear, as we have seen, that Symons cares intensely for beauty and art for art's sake; it was also pointed out that beauty is to be found in all things concerning art and that life, being an artwork itself, is beautiful. Symons does not see limitation in what can be considered beautiful, for everything can be beautiful in the eyes of the beholder and, therefore, his conception of beauty encompasses a variety of controversial topics. His curiosity delves deep into the obscure, the perverse, the wicked and the degenerate, he tries to see beauty where people cannot find it. As a matter of fact, Symons even criticised other authors such as de l'Isle-Adam for only handling grandiose and magnificent characters by saying that:

> he does not realise, as the great novelists have realised, that stupidity can be pathetic, and that there is not a peasant, nor even a self-satisfied bourgeois, in whom the soul has not its part, in whose existence it is not possible to be interested. (Symons, *Symbolist* 55-56)

And this interest in every soul, no matter how small, pathetic or pitiful, is a recurring theme in Symons' artistic views. Repeatedly, in *Spiritual Adventures*, we are presented with fallen characters from humble beginnings who are yet to discover the beauty of their

lives and the secret that lies in their art. And although one of Symons' main objectives with his art was to go against the Victorian philistinism, in which morality has the utmost importance so that even art must be silenced by it, this does not necessarily mean that Symons relishes the crude display of perversion. To Symons, perversion and degeneracy are just intrinsic elements of life and he attempts to depict them in his works in the way he sees them, in the way they make him feel, he utilises them as symbols to convey a higher message and not for meagre shock effect, for "the desire to 'bewilder the middle-classes' is itself middle-class" (Symons, *Symbolist* 8).

What Symons claimed about poetry when he stated that "poetry should be a miracle; not a hymn to beauty, nor the description of beauty, nor beauty's mirror; but beauty itself" (Symons, *Symbolist* 36), can be extended to every single art form (of which he envisioned seven); art is beauty itself and for this reason it "cannot be a statement, it's evocation" (Symons, *Studies* 147) or more specifically the evocation of the beauty it holds. In conclusion, there is no better explanation to all these ideals than the last sentence which ends this letter to Warner Taylor, that art can only begin "when a man wishes to immortalize the most vivid moment he has ever lived". The artist needs to live through art or, to be more precise, he must turn his life into art; and since love is the beginning of art (Symons, *Studies* 48) but not the end of art, perhaps he should experience it and then offer it like a sacrificial lamb to his artworks; or, maybe, he will have to gaze "at light until it has blinded him" and lose his sanity for our sake, for us to know that indeed "he has seen something" (Symons, *Symbolist* 44) and that what he saw was truly beautiful. What Symons (like his character Christian Trevalga) saw was that "there is but one art, but many languages through which men speak it" and Symons was eager to learn all these languages, to achieve his grand project of a "system of aesthetics, of all the arts" (Symons, *Plays* I).

2. The merging of Art, Life and Beauty

As an aesthete, a symbolist, a decadent artist to whom, in the same way as D'Annunzio, as he himself stated: "life is but a segment of art, and aesthetic living the most important thing for the artist who is not merely an artist in words, or canvas or marble, but an artist in life itself" (qtd. in Evangelista 58), Arthur Symons sees no differentiation between the realms of art and life, for the latter ought to be seen only as a by-product, or a constitutive element of the former.

Symons' statement, with the main key words being "life is but a segment of art", perfectly encapsulates the driving force and spirit behind the composition of *Spiritual Adventures*, in which Symons masterfully showcased his artistic belief and vast knowledge of various art forms. With his description of these stories as "Imaginary Portraits" (Symons, *Plays* VII), the inevitable connection between art and life is solidly consolidated, for, in the true sense of these words, the stories narrated in this volume represent various portraits, depictions of the protagonists' lives which wittingly become the work of art itself. Prose stops being a means to communicate or merely describe action and situations, it turns into a shovel which digs deep in the mentality of the protagonists and their inner struggle in finding the perfect balance between their lives and their dedication to art; so much so that the plot itself gets reduced to its essential and most minimalistic elements, purely for the sake of driving the plot forward.

On these premises, when the subject matter of the stories is known to the reader, it could also be argued that the fusion between art and life becomes twofold: not only we, as readers, are able to read these life stories in the art form of literature, but even the characters themselves have to go through a process of artistic growth and, as a result, reach a point where the boundaries between their lives and their art become indiscernible.

These protagonists embody the main characteristics of the Paterian aesthete, who "lives burning with a hard, gem-like flame"; not concerned with societal moral obligations and sometimes even love, once they discover their vocation for art and grasp the beauty it holds, they never let it go. They are artists in the true sense of the word, and much like the characters created by D'Annunzio, who Symons held in greatest regard, these stories tend to tackle topics of degeneration and decadence, with a morbid taste for the perverse and the wicked, to showcase, in the depiction of the inner struggles of their characters,

that beauty is also to be found in what Victorian society labelled as amoral (Evangelista 55).

However, the journey of inner discovery and realisation of the strong connection between art and life comes, usually, at a price and appears to be filled with various forms of struggle. The inner struggles of the characters require them to turn their gaze into the innermost parts of their consciousness, they must fight their way through the intricacies of the differentiation between life and the intimate vision they have of it, with the only possible solution to this problem being a reconciliation of the two through either self-abnegation or a complete dedication to art (Gordon 106). Be it an obsessive love, an unshakable faith, devastating life circumstances, an unwavering artistic conviction or even betrayal, the characters in these stories fight the same battle in their own ways, which leads inevitably to the only possible solution: a merging of art and life.

The first clear and linear example as to how this process of self-abnegation in favour of art and beauty unfolds is to be found in the story of the pianist Christian Trevalga. In the beginning of the story, we are given a plethora of subtle hints which indicate that Christian, as a child, already showed signs of a deeper understanding of art in its purest form: music. A parallel is drawn between the young artist and his mother, who, like him, appears to be gifted in the art of creation with remarkable sensitiveness to form:

> She would take a large slice of bread and mould it into little figures exquisitely proportioned, with all the modelling of the limb and shoulder-blades. […] She loved the little figures, and talked about them very seriously, criticising their defects, not content with the lines she had got, seeing them with subtler curves. (Symons, *Spiritual* 94)

Considering that Trevalga "stared at her when her fingers were busy; he was puzzled, not exactly happy" (Symons, *Spiritual* 94*),* it is possible to infer that the young upcoming artist could not understand his mother's preoccupation with form and her own vision of how she wanted those figures to be; consequentially, the figures end up becoming dry and falling apart. Symbolically, her art has died, unable to reach the perfection she wanted. Trevalga seems to also criticise his mother's reaction to his playing of Chopin's ballad, since his mother's interpretation is based on visions she has while he plays it; music is, to her, just acting as a means to interpret the emotions of the characters she sees, thus reducing art to a mere instrument to describe life: "She saw two lovers, sheltering under trees in a wood, out of the rain which was falling around them, and she followed their emotions as the music interpreted them to her" (Symons, *Spiritual* 96).

In complete opposition, for Trevalga:

> It was the music itself that cried and wept, and tore one; the passions of abstract sound. […] He knew from the beginning, the soul of music is something more than the soul of humanity expressing itself in melody, and the life of music something more than an audible dramatization of human life. (Symons, *Spiritual* 96)

and although his stance might be different from that of his mother, the young pianist still admires her and her sensitiveness towards art, since both seem to have taken the first steps required to see art through their own impressions: to finally be able to see art for art's sake. In fact, Trevalga ends up losing all inspiration, for music speaks a language of its own and, to use his words, "will have its own message*",* making it unable to translate the personal feelings of the pianist himself, which become irrelevant even to him.

It has been underlined by Jan B. Gordon that a commonly found theme in *Spiritual Adventures* is that of martyrdom, of sacrifice in the face of art and that many characters attempt to "keep their souls in a healthy state" by keeping a clear distinction between life and art, only to later accept their fate and kneel before the power and beauty of art (Gordon 107). While this is most surely the case in many of the stories, in *Christian Trevalga*, however, the bigger picture and the intentions of Symons become even clearer when we consider his analysis of Gerard de Nerval's madness in *The Symbolist Movement*:

> Every artist lives a double life, in which he is for the most part conscious of the illusions of the imagination. He is conscious also of the illusions of the nerves, which he shares with every man of imaginative mind. [...] Yet is there not some danger that he may come to confuse one with the other, that he may "lose the thread" which conducts him through the intricacies of the inner world? […] The supreme artist, certainly, is the furthest of all men from this danger; for he is the supreme intelligence. (Symons, *Symbolist* 26-27)

And, in stating so, he also makes a personal evaluation by assuming that de Nerval's madness might have been caused not by excess of "visionary quality" but by "weakness" or "lack of spiritual discipline" (Symons, *Symbolist* 27).

This is a crucial statement for the understanding of Christian Trevalga both as a character and as an artist. In the finale of the story (and from the beginning too), we, as readers, are conditioned by the narrator into thinking that Trevalga must be insane; but when reading the few scraps left by him and written in a hurry, what we find are conclusive and comprehensive aesthetic theorisations of art, something which would not have been missed by intelligent readers who aligned themselves with Symons' ideals. This could be seen as a statement or even a joke made by Symons who, perhaps projecting his own mental illness onto his character, cleverly uses Trevalga's madness as a symbol to

represent what is, to him, the ultimate truth in art when he states that: "it has been revealed to me that there is but one art, but many languages through which men speak it" (Symons, *Spiritual* 117). Moreover, the similarities do not end here. Christian Trevalga is also afraid of "hurting sounds" because they are living beings, a statement which Symons also made, yet again, about Verlaine in *The Symbolist Movement*: "He knows that words are living things, which we have not created, and which go their way without demanding of us the right to live" (Symons, *Symbolist* 89-90).

Regardless of whether Trevalga is insane or perhaps just an incredible artist, it goes without saying that such a state of connection with one's art cannot be reached if not by an act of self-abnegation in favour of it. This is accomplished by Christian Trevalga during a concert, when he finally starts seeing sounds as if they had a physical manifestation. At last, in this moment, life has fully merged with his music, it has returned to its rightful place, i.e. being a segment of art itself. So, the fact that Trevalga can see sounds, as much as Verlaine could hear words to write "romances sans paroles", does not necessarily make him insane in Symons' eyes, it just turns Trevalga into a full-fledged artist.

Whereas in Christian Trevalga's short story it is art (or maybe madness) that acts as the spark igniting the epiphany in the protagonist's mind, the same process of self-abnegation is noticeable in another story which has little to do with artistic creation. In *Seaward Lackland* it is a Methodist priest who, I argue, reaches almost the same conclusions as Christian Trevalga.

As a man of unbreakable faith, Seaward Lackland starts thinking about the sayings of the Bible, specifically, he ponders upon his sins and how God forgives them through conversion. However, an ominous suspicion creeps into his mind, as he reads that the one unforgivable sin is the one towards the Holy Ghost, which even God cannot forgive; however, the fact that God will forgive such a sin if committed in total ignorance is something that Lackland cannot accept, for that would lower God in his eyes. After all, God is supposed to be benevolent but, most importantly, just.

So, for these reasons, Seaward Lackland decides to completely forego his ego, he abandons his life and commits the most atrocious sin of all: the one against the Holy Ghost. Just like Christian Trevalga, who descended into madness and destroyed his own ego for the sake of art and artistic creation, Seaward Lackland, in a very similar way, uses

himself as a scapegoat just to confute the apparent paradox that he found in the Bible for the glory of the Holy Father. So, it is arguable that what Trevalga did in his pursuit of art and beauty, Seward Lackland imitated in his unshakable devotion. Regardless of these conclusions, it must be reminded that Symons himself came from a Methodist background which he later abandoned; so, to this extent, Seaward Lackland might be setting the example that all life, and consequently faith, must be seen and lived through one's own impressions and sensations and that even dogmatic creed, which is supposed to be taken as a postulate, cannot escape subjectivity.

Aesthetic beauty lies not exclusively in artistic creation, it resides in every aspect of our existence and there is no better story in this collection to illustrate this facet of art than *An Autumn City*. Here, Daniel Roserra shares his impressions and sensations when visiting his most beloved city of Arles with his wife, while trying to share and prompt those emotions in her, for "he must do as he had always wanted to do: introduce the most intimate of his cities to a woman. […] He must share Arles with Livia" (Symons, *Spiritual* 192).

The crucial aspect of aesthetic vision is the way Roserra goes about visiting this city; he does not judge, he does not compare or merely appreciates the natural beauty which surrounds him, instead, he lives it and experiences it with his own perception and taste, he sees it through the lenses of his own eyes and even warns his wife against doing otherwise: '"Do not judge too quickly", said Roserra to her;" you must judge neither the place nor the people until you have lived yourself into their midst. The first time I came here I was disappointed."' (Symons, *Spiritual* 195)

As a matter of fact, it is neither what Arles represents, nor its history that fascinates our aesthete, but rather its timelessness, its ability to have:

> No order, or division of time; one seems shut off equally from the present and from any appreciable moment of the past; shut in with the same vague and timeless Autumn that has moulded Arles in its own image. (Symons, *Spiritual* 204-205)

and, based on that, Arles is perfect to him in all its degraded and decadent splendour, in that it does not rely on history or any other external element to showcase beauty, for "the city itself has surrendered its life to a stylized existence as art, and it is that tension so implicit in the process of life becoming art that Roserra finds so fascinating" (Gordon 111), thus making its existence and life alone the true work of art. In other words, it can

be said that Arles constitutes the one place where art, life, and beauty merge into one single entity, a true work of art worthy of admiration.

In this short story, Arthur Symons also managed to illustrate the inevitable conflict of minds and perspectives between those who have reached a state of total aesthetic contemplation of life, art and beauty and those who could be called the "uninitiated". Daniel Roserra's wife, Livia, always shows a remarkable distaste and reluctancy towards the city of Arles; she is not able to reach the same conclusions as her husband, no matter how much he attempts to guide her. Too concerned with the social and frivolous nature of metropolitan luxurious nightlife, Livia basically expects her husband to comply with her wishes and let his desires succumb to them, just as much as he wanted to "initiate" his wife to the beauty of Arles by imposing his own conviction.

In any case, disregarding the underlying hypocrisy or benevolent intentions of the man, it appears clear that Roserra, as an alter-ego of his author, is treated as a chosen one, someone who sees more than others and imparts his knowledge to his own discretion even on a selfish whim created by his desire to experiment:

> The immediate antecedent of Symons's dependence on individual responses to beauty can be identified in Walter Pater, whose famous Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873) both praised "the elect" for possessing a superior aesthetic understanding and urged them to depend on ephemeral sensations, not analytical practises, in their perception of reality. (Bizzotto, "Symons on Italy" 132)

This naturally leads to a misunderstanding from those who fail to see what the true aesthete can marvel at with negative consequences for the artist. In fact, Roserra gives in and in no time the couple departs for Marseilles, leaving the aesthete feeling defeated and maintaining his ego, unlike Trevalga and Lackland for whom the convergence of art and life even led to insanity.

Perhaps preoccupied and yet fascinated with his own deteriorating mental condition, Arthur Symons focuses intensely on the concept of madness and illness as a result of the merging of art and life; yet another example of self-sacrifice for the sake of art is embodied in the painter Peter Waydelin. Art is even more at the forefront in this short story, for it includes a number of theoretical discussions between the painter and the narrator who can barely wrap his head around Waydelin's conception of what art is and means to him. Again, just like in *An Autumn City* we are presented with a clash of ideas, a stand-off between an elite, a chosen one and an uninitiated. Whereas one sees the beauty of nature unfolding in front of him and admires it, the other abhors it and despises it, for

it clashes with his own vision and interpretation of beauty. This vision mimics that of Arthur Symons, who in his *Studies in Seven Arts* praised the painter Monticelli for his ability to express:

> A personal vision, a way of feeling colour, and […] a protest against that vague sort of seeing everything in general and feeling nothing at all, which is supposed to be seeing things as they really are. […] Monticelli creates with his eyes, putting his own symbols frankly in the place of nature's; for that, perhaps, is what it means to see nature in a personal way. (Symons, *Studies* 68)

while also going as far as to berate a generalised and imitative view of nature as "that paradox for fools" in which the public refuses to acknowledge their individuality, making them, in turn, unable to "see things for themselves". Following this assumption, artists like Waydelin are the necessary ailment to the disease of staleness in art, a disease which must be cured by relinquishing the standardised academic preconceptions of art in favour of an atomised vision of nature which is the only possible solution to humanize beauty, a personalised view of reality which follows only one's own impressions and feelings that erupt from it (Gordon 108). As Waydelin himself puts it: "All art, of course, is a way of seeing, and I have my own way".

Waydelin does not depict perfectly faithful pictures of objects, landscapes, or people, he instead paints what he sees in his subjects and morphs them into his decadent decaying vision of sickly beauty rich in pale ailing green tints. This notwithstanding, he is not bothered by the judgment of the public in the slightest, for he is assured that: "I have done nothing, believe me, without being sure that I was doing a beautiful thing" (Symons, *Spiritual* 162).

So, with this unwavering self-assurance, he strives forward, pursuing his sensations of what he deems beauty to be, while lamenting that if people cannot see it, the reason might be because of academic rules of beauty which art should not be subjected to.

Nonetheless, this self-assurance would spell the end of this true artist when the narrator comes to visit him due to his apparent illness. By reading the rest of the story it becomes explicit that in order to elevate his art to new heights, Waydelin went to the drastic measures of living like the subjects he was depicting and thus the merging of art and life reaches its final stage. It is at this point that we return to the previously stated concept of martyrdom proposed by Jan B. Gordon, in that the artist must voluntarily sacrifice his life and his ego, if he wishes to free himself from the constraints of life and nature. In fact, Waydelin's decision is entirely conscious, and his new lifestyle is by no means one of

pursued debauchery and decadence merely for a shocking effect, it is symbolical, it embodies the conviction of an artist who is ready to go to the most extreme of lengths for the sake of his craft.

In his final moments, succumbing to his illness, Peter Waydelin attempts to depict the horrific expression of despair on his wife's visage; a fitting end and a true pinnacle of aesthetic and decadent artistic creation where not only life has become fused with art, but also death and horror become a part of it in a twisted, yet alluring, display of dedication and self-abnegation.

As previously stated, it is interesting to witness the lengths to which the artists in these stories are willing to go just to establish their vision in a world which repels it, for these artists became one and the same with their creations; they rejected life, or rather, they embraced it under a new light, seeing it in its true form: art.

Tragedy in one's life can naturally have an impact on one's state of mind and subsequently change a person. It is also true, however, that tragedy in *Spiritual Adventures* shapes the characters and makes them, in a sense, stronger; it acts as a catalyst in the total absorption and metamorphosis of that person's life into a pure work of art, thus elevating their existence. Like the sacrifice of Waydelin, living life in the Paterian sense and experiencing it through one's senses brings the necessary epiphany. These nuances vividly come to life in the pages of the story of Esther Kahn.

Still a child living in the suburbs and surrounded by squalor, this symbolic representation of a Victorian child shows, at the first stages of the plot, signs of apathy to her environment. Without any interest towards the people around her, including her family, Esther Kahn lives, much like the young Symons, in her own world of loneliness, while being consumed by doubts and fears caused by her living situation:

> Nothing mattered to her; she had no interest in their interests; she was not sure that she cared for them more than she would care for other people; they were what she supposed real life was and that was a thing in which she had only a disinterested curiosity. (Symons, *Spiritual* 60)

Taking this into account, this apathy should not be confused with a sense of superiority, for Esther could be considered one of those "uninitiated people" who has yet to experience true beauty in art and find their personal vision of reality, for "she had no definite consciousness of what her own way was to be; she was only conscious, as yet, of the ways that would certainly not be hers" (Symons, *Spiritual* 62) and this uncertainty was the main determining factor to her "inertness".

The beauty in the story of Esther Kahn lies in the fact that the reader experiences Esther's gradual transformation into an artist, as opposed to the clash of two differing opinions like in *An Autumn City* and *The Death of Peter Waydelin.* In fact, it is without doubt art which changes Esther forever and initiates the merging of her life with her newly found artistic interest as "gradually, her own real purpose in life had become clear. She was to be an actress" (Symons, *Spiritual* 65-66).

Naturally, the first phases of this initiation are anything but easy and Esther is missing something in her acting, as remarked by one of her seniors. Worthy of interest is that the senior actor gives her the advice of taking a lover, as if love could be the end-all-be-all solution to her growth as an actress; the young actress refuses to accept such advice, in that she wants to pursue her own way of acting. Of course, as will become apparent in the final stages of the story, it was not love that she needed, it was not a connection to reality and life that would elevate her art, but the complete opposite. The feelings of betrayal and abandonment, after being left by the only man she truly loved, finally cause the merging of art and life, as Esther flawlessly plays the role of a betrayed woman, while pouring all the real sadness and sorrow she felt in her performance. In this instance, Esther, who previously only acted to fuel her ego and used acting as a form of escapism from her less than favourable living conditions, now fully understands what acting truly means. She sees that it was useless to keep real life and the stage as two separate entities, for her own life was the true work of art all along. Therefore, she does the only thing possible and fuses the two together, reaching a new pinnacle of perfection in her performance and so, in a peculiar way, she renounces her feelings and her ego, showcasing them, laying them bare for the entire audience to see, almost in a twisted but artistically beautiful display of masochism (Gordon 107).

Art, madness, life, struggle, beauty, and anxiety: in Arthur Symons' stories everything blends in a degenerated decadent way and acquires a symbolic meaning, thus turning into an allegory for the purpose of detailing the writer's impressions and maybe his fears. The characters do not just speak for their author, they fuse with him and take his place. Viewed in this way, no character assumes this role of coalescence between author, life, and art better than Henry Luxulyan.

Henry Luxulyan is, again, a man of letters with vast knowledge of history and a keen interest in literature. For these reasons, he finds work at the house of a Baroness in hopes

of forgetting his unrequited love for Clare, a woman who the reader knows nothing about, and to also recover from a bad investment which has left him in poverty. He attempts to immerse himself fully into his new job and, in the meantime, develops an almost perverse interest in the Baroness despite being repulsed by her scarred visage: "I may come to find a sort of perverse pleasure in looking at her, the pleasure which is part horror, and which comes from affronting and half encouraging disgust" (Symons, *Spiritual* 278). As he spends more time with her, "the Baroness interests [him] a little more every day, and this interest is oddly balanced by [his] equal difficulty in looking or in not looking at her" (Symons, *Spiritual* 283-284). Furthermore, this interest is only to increase even more as he discovers that the Baroness was scarred by her jealous husband after an affair of hers, which sparks conflictual feelings in Luxulyan, almost turning them into a perverse and degenerate saviour complex. It could be argued that Luxulyan, regardless of his self-absorption, is struggling in dealing with his inner conflict between the unaesthetic perception of what we have labelled an "uninitiated" person and the decadent perverse sensations that the Baroness arouses within him. Luxulyan is still unsure what feelings he should listen to and, therefore, still needs to take the first steps to become a true aesthete, but the process of conversion has nonetheless been initiated and:

> Caught between the demands of a necessarily furtive liaison and his desire to help Claire […] Luxulyan's nerves begin to get the better of him. He holidays with the von Eckenstein […], growing increasingly fond of the Baroness, but finding her friendship and then love stifling in their intensity. (Freeman, "They Keep" 124)

Luxulyan's mental state snaps and, consequently, he must recover in Italy. This is the crucial turning point of the entire story; Henry, who has been keeping a journal as a cathartic means of escape from his life's preoccupations, turns to literature again to find solace. The cathartic process of writing about his life, his worries, and his fear for the potency of the Baroness' love becomes useless, for Luxulyan, in using literature as a means of escapism, has initiated the inevitable fusion of his life and his art and rapidly loses control over the entire process. What was born as a persona, a cathartic expression of his own insecurities and preoccupations, now overpowers him and the loss of his own sense of self is the price he must pay, thus thrusting him into insanity (Gordon 113).

As previously seen, Trevalga's madness might show more elements of clarity than insanity and if we go back to Symons' stance on madness in the act of creation, as clarified in *The Symbolist Movement*, in *Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan* it becomes clear that the cause of Luxulyan's insanity is his weakness, his inability to distinguish

"between the illusions of imagination" and "the illusions of the nerves", with the latter getting the better of him. For these reasons, with his final attempt at self-salvation, Luxulyan initiates a process over which he has no control and the merging of life into art takes place, thus exposing Luxulyan's weakness and lack of spiritual fortitude, so that we find another character succumbing to the all-encompassing power of art.

In this case, however, the fusion of life and art in *Henry Luxulyan* acquires a double meaning, in that this character, as we have previously stated, is nothing more than a persona put on by the author himself. So, not only does Henry Luxulyan achieve a unison state with his art, but, indirectly, even Arthur Symons himself who "is rarely so candid" imbues his own life with artistic value and "the obvious similarity between himself and Luxulyan implies that the librarian's tactics were those he himself deployed" (Freeman, "They Keep" 125).

As a conclusion to this analysis, the last two stories that will be considered will tackle two major points in the process highlighted above. In *A Prelude to Life* the author symbolically portraits himself and the events of his childhood to showcase his own initiation to art, whereas in *The Childhood of Lucy Newcome*, he shows us the consequences of abandoning oneself to the whims of life and its responsibilities without taking the necessary steps to shield oneself from its power through the merging with art.

A Prelude to Life holds a fair deal of significance and importance in the composition of this work. First of all, as was noticed by J. B. Gordon, *A Prelude to Life* is the only story in which the personal pronoun "I" is used by the narrator, thus suggesting the use of a metatext technique in order to speak about himself and directly intervening in the unfolding and narration of the events, which are seen through the lenses of his own eyes. Moreover, the positioning of this story as the first one in the collection and its title are the main key of interpretation of the entire book; it is apparent that Symons is narrating his prelude to life, i.e. the events of his childhood. However, Symons is not merely talking aseptically about his childhood, but also highlighting his own process of initiation into art, his sensations and impressions which lead to that moment. Seen in this way, *A Prelude to Life* turns into the exemplary foundation which all the following stories must and will follow.

The young Arthur Symons closely resembles the other characters, both in temperament and in his attitude towards art and the outside world. Much like Esther Kahn, Symons

was inert, with no interest in things that did not concern him, thus causing his isolation, misunderstood personality, and alienation from his religious background. Everything, with the sole exclusion of what he wanted, was irrelevant to him:

> And yet, for the most part, the other world meant nothing to me. […] From as early as I can remember, I had no very clear consciousness of anything external to myself. […] I existed, others also existed; but between us there was an impassable gulf, and I rarely had any desire to cross it. (Symons, *Spiritual* 19,31)

and yet, in this bleak state of apathy, there was only one person who gave him light, whom he cared for dearly and whose outlook on life he felt close to: his mother. Symons appreciated her way of living, for she was living every moment of her existence intensely in a Paterian way and, in this sense, she might have been the main example he followed from a very young age to turn his life into a true work of art and beauty:

> With my mother, it was quite different. She had the joy of life, she was sensitive to every aspect of the world […] I think she was never indifferent to any moment that ever passed her by without being seized in all the eagerness of acceptance. […] To her the past, the present, and the future were but moments of one's existence; life was everything to her, and life was indestructible. (Symons, *Spiritual* 23-24)

It is interesting to notice the mentioning of how present, past, and future seemed only to be part of a bigger picture to her, resembling Roserra's conception of the city of Arles in *An Autumn City*; this consolidates the fact that Symons' mother might have been to him the perfect example to follow, i.e. that of a true aesthete.

A Prelude to Life is nothing more than Symons' own way of reaching that state of enlightenment, that epiphany which leads to fusing one's life into art and achieving an aesthetic view of the world; so, by writing about the events of his childhood:

> Symons has refashioned the events of his growth into art. By calling it a "prelude," the author has caused life to approach the condition of music, that state which Symons, like Pater, felt to be the highest manifestation of art. (Gordon 106)

and has effectively rendered them immortal and timeless, something which stands on its own purely based on its right to exist for art's sake.

Together with *An Autumn City*, only one other story of this work seems to completely break this pattern, leading to a vacuous and sad end for its main character. In *The Childhood of Lucy Newcome*, none of the favourable outcomes for the aesthetes of the other stories come to fruition and the only thing left for the main character is the impotent acceptance of the worries and responsibilities of one's life.

Lucy Newcome is, in the beginning of the story, a mere child, secluded in her house with a clever father who teaches her literature, and a very pious mother. The typical behavioural pattern of the other characters presents itself once again, for Lucy is a visionary. Locked in an environment she perceives as suffocating, despite her love for her father, Lucy finds a form of escapism into a fantastical realm of her own imagination:

> She knew what she was dreaming about; and first of all she was dreaming about herself. […] She would explain […] she did not belong to her parents at all; she belonged to the fairies; she was a princess; there was another, a great mother, who would come some day and claim her. And this consciousness of being really a princess was one of the joys of her imagination. (Symons, *Spiritual* 130)

And so, as a child, it seems obvious that she would find such ways to keep herself entertained and get away from her life and responsibilities. Lucy does not live in the reality of her household, far from it, she develops her own whimsical reality where even a girl like her can be royalty and, in this way, she lives life as she sees it, through her own imagination, taste and emotions.

But the worst is yet to come. With her mother's death Lucy's life of pure innocence begins to crumble and this is only worsened by the possibility of her father's death since "a great terror came over Lucy, lest he, too, should die; and now there was no money in the house, and the duns still knocked at the door" (Symons, *Spiritual* 144); with this realisation the brutal reality of life comes crushing down on Lucy causing a drastic change in her outlook.

And indeed, in all subsequent passages it is often remarked that Lucy's innocence and thirst for life and imagination have disappeared entirely, and those idyllic passages of pure childhood wonder are slowly replaced by worries and fear of their financial situation. The true consequence of the events becomes apparent in the last passage of the story where Lucy, after her father's death, completely renounces her childhood and dons the mask of an adult:

> She seemed to herself to be doing the right thing, and what her father would have wished; and she saw them go out with relief, not giving a thought to the future, only knowing that she had buried her childhood, on that day of the funeral, in the grave with her father. (Symons, *Spiritual* 153)

This marks one of the two failures of convergence between life and art in the book (coupled with *An Autumn City*); Lucy, having bid farewell to her childhood and her fantasies, has renounced her view on reality, influenced by the sheer amount of tragedy happening in her life. She did not manage to turn her existence into the dreamlike work

of art and beauty she envisioned it to be. Instead, she scorned life and the grievances it brought her and now she has to submit to it.

With its tragic ending, this story presents itself as the worst possible outcome for the aesthete: life has won over the artist. Here the aesthete has no control over his own life, it just crushes him like a powerful tidal wave with no possibility of escape. This contrast in comparison to stories such as *The Death of Peter Waydelin* or even *Christian Trevalga* is truly striking, for the artists in the stories just mentioned were able to use their own life as an expedient for the purposes of creation and even discarded it.

In conclusion, Lucy Newcome could be interpreted as a way of the author to express one of his worst fears: losing his aesthetic artistic vision. Since "the story ends with […] Lucy's realization that childhood - that state where one can artistically rearrange life - cannot be maintained in the face of natural mutability" (Gordon 110), it could be inferred that this is a fate worse than death itself, the beginning of a downward spiral out of which no escape route is to be found.

This element of hopelessness is further reinforced if one reads the two short stories which were supposed to be continuations of the story of Lucy Newcome: *Pages from the Life of Lucy Newcome* and *The Life and Adventures of Lucy Newcome*[5]. Briefly explained, in these two stories respectively Lucy gives birth to a baby whose father had abandoned her; alone in the world and in complete poverty, she looks for a job which does not pay enough to feed herself and her new-born, who later passes away. At the end of the second story, Lucy Newcome ends up becoming a prostitute. As we have seen, there is no happy ending for this young woman; from the moment she renounced her inner childish happiness she was destined to be crushed under the weight of life.

Arthur Symons was frequently plagued by such worries caused by life responsibilities, which regularly prevented him from pursuing his career as a poet. To this extent, Lucy Newcome could be seen as perhaps one of the most important stories of the entire volume, in that her tragic surrender implies the death of her aesthetic vision and, subsequently, of art at the hands of life itself. Naturally, according to Symons, this should never happen,

[5] *Pages from the Life of Lucy Newcome* appeared in *the Savoy* in 1896, whereas *The Life and Adventures of Lucy Newcome* remained unpublished until 1985. It was published by Alan Johnson in *English Literature in Translation*. See *Spiritual Adventures Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Nicholas Freeman* pp. 57,59.

for life should just remain a part of art and, therefore, should be subjected to its power and beauty for eternity.

3. An amoral view of love: fin-de-siècle misogyny in the aesthetic view of Arthur Symons[6]

In the previous chapter, various mentions have been made regarding the role that love plays in *Spiritual Adventures*, albeit only briefly and without going into detail. Love, a topic that inspired numerous writers and storytellers alike with its power to bring joy and inspiration, is never seen under a positive light in this collection of short stories. What perhaps strikes one as even surprising is that a man such as Arthur Symons, who was in constant search for strong sensations and feelings, could possibly even perceive love in such a negative manner as he does in most of his literary production. After all, it is the figure of a decadent aesthete which stands at the centre of our attention and so, one would assume, love should normally be conceived as something beautiful in all its facets, even perversion. However, even when sick perversion kicks in, Arthur Symons never ceases to fall back on an ideology which paints love as a loss or even a grievance for the protagonists. Love is not only a catastrophe for the characters, but, upon closer inspection, it is possible to underscore how a multitude of stereotypical notions are perpetuated by the author. And what the trail of these stereotypes leads us to is an approach to love and women which reflects the mainstream misogynistic ideals of his time, riddled with strict gender norms and characterised by a perception of women as femmes-fatales, diabolical temptresses with an almost animalistic desire for love, which crushes the artist.

Many of the fin-de-siècle misogynistic ideals can be traced back to the influence that the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer exerted on late Victorian intellectuals and artists. In the case of Arthur Symons, it is possible to connect various instances of misogyny in his stories with theories which could be found in Schopenhauer's infamous essay *On Women*. The main objective of this essay is to bring light to the truths that lie between the sexes, in an attempt to demonstrate how women are essentially inferior due to a plethora of natural reasons. According to Schopenhauer women are "the patient and cheering companion" of their husband, someone who is not apt for "labour of mind and body" (Schopenhauer 10) and therefore should submissively subject themselves to their partner. This closely resembles the Victorian perspective that women should mainly be caretakers "by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted […] big children

[6] https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century
https://www.ool.co.uk/blog/the-role-of-women-in-victorian-england/
https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/daughters-of-decadence-the-new-woman-in-the-victorian-fin-de-siecle

all their life long" (Schopenhauer 10) and consequently constitute the best candidates for this role; they must take care of the household and offspring and have a proper moral compass so that they can set a good example, even for their husbands. The main argument with which Schopenhauer explains his disdain for women stems from his theory that they are the means by which Nature's will is enacted (Schopenhauer 19). This, of course, entails that "the only business that claims their attention is love, making conquests" (Schopenhauer 12), conquests whose sole purpose is to simply attract the right kind of man to propagate the species. And for these reasons women do not live, like men, in the past or future, but rather chiefly in the present which they are able to enjoy in greater measure (Schopenhauer 14). However, living more in the present to ensure the "ensnaring" of a good husband gives women decidedly wicked and perverse personalities. In other words, women "are dependent, not upon strength, but upon craft", a feat which underlines their innate capability of being cunning and avoiding stating the truth if it benefits them (Schopenhauer 17). This temptress-like behaviour, which aims at taking everything away from men for the sake of Nature's will, makes women naturally suited for taking the lead in social interactions. Especially in the western world, according to Schopenhauer, society is riddled with Philistines precisely because of the notions of gallantry and that of the so-called "lady", which has made women "arrogant and overbearing […] thorough-going Philistines and quite uncurable" (Schopenhauer 26-28). The possessiveness of women is ultimately a product of their own purpose in life of bearing children, so that the trade-jealousy that they are inherently born with encompasses their entire sex, in complete opposition to men (Schopenhauer 21). And the peak of this jealous nature shines through in their interactions with other women, specifically those of lower rank. Ultimately, "the weakness of their mental faculties" highlights their inability to have "any sense of susceptibility" for art and the abstract; this implies that women are not able to master something directly through experience, rather, they acquire such mastery indirectly through a man (Schopenhauer 15,23). This was a common thought process during the Victorian Era, as we will see later in a similar quote by Ruskin. These types of comments are made by many of the male characters in *Spiritual Adventures* and Symons' conception of love appears to be strikingly similar to what Schopenhauer firmly believed.

In this misogynistic environment of fin-de-siècle Britain, a new figure of woman was emerging and becoming ever more popular: the New Woman. This term was coined

apparently by Ouida, who used it within the title of her article "The Question of the New Woman". The New Woman presents herself as a rebellious figure for Victorian standards, a woman who rejects the societal restrictions that have been placed upon her, thus she:

> Represented a certain kind of woman who embraced a desire to be educated, to pursue employment, to explore artistic and sexual freedoms, and to choose whether to marry or to have children. (Tilley 1)

The concept of a free spirited, independent, educated, and assertive woman was not well received by the status quo; so, the general press took it upon itself to berate and belittle this new kind of woman, mainly on the grounds that this new label quickly "became synonymous with political and social rebellion" (Tiller 2). The New Woman, therefore, was mainly used in literature and in the press as a source of laughter; her masculinity and brutish behaviour were employed with parodic effect so that many of her main representations were those of "a woman with gross physical features and lustful desires, or at the other end of the spectrum she was characterized as overtly masculine and drawn as an 'old maid' past her sexual prime" (Tilley 2).

Nonetheless the New Woman was not alone, for another figurehead of the fin-de-siècle was her male counterpart, namely the New Man. New Men, like New Women, often challenged the standard gender norms of their time; they were seen as more effeminate in temperament and were exploited by the press as another means to mock New Women. In fact, they were "always portrayed as either a lover or a husband to the New Woman", described as physically weak, sickly and, most importantly, as extremely submissive, so that a strong New Woman with a weak and eccentric New Man "when paired together as lovers or as wife and husband […] appear as idiotic and clownish" (Tilley 3,4).

During the years of the reign of queen Victoria, British society was plagued by many of these stereotypes at a societal level, most of which were results of the Victorian ideology itself. Women especially were in a precarious situation, being considered morally superior to men and, therefore, the most suitable solution to take care of household work and raising offspring. This was the so-called "separate spheres" ideology which consisted in a clear distinction: on the one hand there were men, the provider and breadwinner of the family, and on the other women, simple caretakers who were to set a good example of conduct for the entire family by acting according to rules of morality. For these purposes, women were taught from a young age all manners of proper etiquette and education, so that they would be suitable for marriage and able to attract the right husband.

Whereas chastity was not a concern for men, for women it was a different story. Women needed to be bearers of children and pre-marital sex or, even worse, an unwanted pregnancy were severely frowned upon. This of course meant that while women needed to be chaste at all costs, men could indulge their sexual desires. What followed was, naturally, a drastic rise of prostitution due to the high demand by men and because of disadvantageous economic factors for working class women.

As we will see these views will be far removed from Symons' conception of women and their temperament as presented in *Spiritual Adventures*. When reading these short stories, it seems that Symons distances himself from standardised rules of Victorian morality, while also managing to retain many of them. Chris Snodgrass, in his in-depth analysis of Symons' *Studies in Strange Sins (After Beardsley's Designs)* comments on how Symons' poems manage to alter the intended meaning of Beardsley's drawings of Salome by imposing a highly dualistic and categorical world view, in which an indisputable stark morality reigns supreme (Snodgrass 61-71). Moreover, he details how this dichotomic view even spreads to the perception of men and women. This is demonstrated by Symons' constant misgendering of the characters and portrayal of women as evil temptresses, clearly misinterpreting Beardsley's intentions of keeping the characters' gender vague. His misgendering of Beardsley's characters shows a clear interpretation which is highly influenced by standardised Victorian and Schopenhauerian notions of gender roles; however, as we will see by taking his depictions of women into account, it becomes harder than it seems to ascribe a purely moralist Victorian outlook on gender to Arthur Symons. This notwithstanding, it is still possible to see, even in *Spiritual Adventures*, those Puritan notions which were summarised by John Ruskin:

> 'The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation, and invention; his energy for adventure war, and for conquest… but the woman's power is for rule, not for battle – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision… she must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise, wise not for self development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side.' (John Ruskin 84-85)

and, as far as Symons is concerned, the first part of this quote, handling the supposed creative power of the male in opposition to that of interpretation and acumen of women, seems to be what he connects with the most.

As a matter of fact, in true decadent fashion, what piques Symons' interest is not the conception of women as perfect wives, ready to dedicate themselves fully to their

husbands. This makes perfect sense if one considers the type of establishments he used to frequent. In his essay *At the Alhambra: Impressions and Sensations*, Symons spends a few words to describe what it is that makes the dancers' make up incredibly alluring:

> It has, to the remnant of Puritan conscience or consciousness that is the heritage of us all, a certain sense of dangerous wickedness, the delight of a forbidden fruit. The very phrase, painted women, has come to have an association of sin; and to have put paint on her cheeks, though for the innocent necessities of her profession, gives to a woman a sort of symbolic corruption. At once she seems to typify the sorceries and entanglements of what is most deliberately exciting in her sex- 'Femina dulce malum, partier favus atque venenium'-. (Symons, *At the Alhambra* 91)

It is precisely this duality of being a sweet evil, both honey and venom, the confusing benign façade coupled with the dangerous true wicked nature that, in his eyes, makes women a source of enigmatic and inevitable interest. So, as it will be outlined later in this chapter, underneath Symons' views on women lies a more complex perspective, one which is the necessary result of a fusion between his own Schopenhauerian decadent impressions and blatant Victorian stereotypes which persist in his mind.

3.1 The power of love in Spiritual Adventures: negative form of escapism or positive awakening?

Dealing with the concept of love in *Spiritual Adventures* means walking inevitably on a thin line between its apparent negative aspects envisioned by the author and the hidden positive result which said love might yield. When analysing the stories, it appears that there is a common scheme utilised by Symons to depict the turmoil initiated by love, a formula, so to speak, that every single character follows, which leads them either to defeat at the hands of life or triumph in their art. If, as Symons states, love is the beginning of art, then this process must be initiated by the discovery of love and, without doubt, such is the case for all the protagonists. From Christian Trevalga to Esther Kahn, Henry Luxulyan and Peter Waydelin love is a meaningful stage which puts the artistic "spiritual adventures" of the protagonists to the test; successively, the very nature of love is put into question and a sneaking suspicion penetrates the minds of the artists, is their love holding back their art? Is there a reason to keep on loving and to subject oneself to the caprices and whims of a love which is much too obsessive, which aims at taking hold of them and their art? In the midst of this dilemma, only two answers seem to be possible: on the one hand, if they refuse to let go of their love, they are destined to fail and submit to life using love as an escape route to flee from the vagaries of life; on the other hand, if they are willing to valiantly face their love and cast it away, only then can they truly start living as artists, only then will they reach the beauty in life they need to elevate their art. In other

words, only through the experience of love can the protagonists come to the realisation that love itself is just a key to unlock the secrets of art and that this positive awakening must come at the price of said love.

Interestingly, a perfect example of this is to be found in an unpublished short story written by Symons which was not included in *Spiritual Adventures*: *An Episode in the Life of Jenny Lane.* Here, a poet by the name of Travers comes to visit a small village and meets a young boy who appears to be a fan of his works. Meeting the boy's family, he indulges in the sensations that these simple and down-to-earth people can provide him and gets to know the boy's sister, Jenny, who promptly falls in love with him. At the end of the story, the girl cannot hold her feelings back anymore and looks at the poet putting "her soul, all of her soul, naked of disguise" (Symons, "An Episode" 50) into that gaze. Nevertheless, this was in vain. Travers cannot see her as a potential love interest, the only thing that interests him is "the rhythm that would render her charm in verse" (Symons, "An Episode" 50) or, in simpler terms, what she was able to evoke in him with her pure display of feelings. Travers shows himself to be already a full-fledged artist; he does not care for love insofar as his feelings are concerned, he only wishes to experience and admire such a display of unadulterated passion, so that his verse can capture that moment and make it eternal. And even more striking is Jenny's reaction to this brutal rejection. Having kept most of the poems he gave her, she was about to burn them, which would have meant destroying her love for him and erase those memories, but, in a turn of events, she does not, thus symbolically keeping intact that "ideal" of love, a sentiment which "it seemed useless living up to it any longer" and which is evoked in the beauty of his poems.

With this example, we are not just presented with the final stage of the formula used by Symons to tackle love in his stories, but we also see what that process leads to, and how a true artist must conduct himself when faced with love.

If the short example of Jenny Lane provides us with the clear final objective to pursue on the side of the artist, then, perhaps, the best example of the first indecisive phases of the cycle of love in *Spiritual Adventures* is to be highlighted in someone who has not found love yet. In this sense, *A Prelude to Life* is precisely that, a prelude, the beginning of what Symons was to become and, although clearly romanticised or expressed through hyperboles, it can be a decently faithful retelling of how Symons "the author" subjectively sees and feels about those early formative years.

Particularly compelling for the subject of this section are certain passages in chapter III of this short story. In them, we witness an incredibly inexperienced and yet curious young Symons, who attempts to deal with a subjectively rationalised idea of love contrasted by his own sensations and feelings of curiosity evoked by simply reading about sex. In this internal struggle, Symons must decide between his impressions and morality, something which we see when he defines "the relationship between a man and a woman as something essentially wicked" (Symons, *Spiritual* 36). Here the influences of a typical Victorian mindset could not be clearer; Symons, in his youth, almost idolises women and love as something to be kept pure, to a point where he "endeavoured to banish the slightest consciousness of sex" when it came to women, due to it being "an inexcusable disrespect" (Symons, *Spiritual* 36).

Subsequently, young Symons begins to be plagued by his thoughts so much so that he has dreams about them, dreams which haunt him night after night with the new addition of a "disturbing element of sex" (Symons, *Spiritual* 38). The internal struggle depicted in this story is not merely the cause of a moralising Victorian ideal, for even his Methodist upbringing tells him that he should be more concerned with matters of the soul (even though he finds them of little interest) as opposed to indulging in perverse pleasures:

> I was restless and ignorant, physically innocent, but with a sort of naïve corruption of mind. All the interest which I had never been able to find in the soul, I found in what I only vaguely apprehended of the body. To me it was something remote, evil, mainly inexplicable; but nothing I had ever felt meant so much for me. (Symons, *Spiritual* 38)

So, like the young inexperienced teenager he is, puzzled by the conflict happening in his consciousness, Symons decides to take the road of idolisation; he romanticises the idea of love and of sex, with his feelings "towards the […] women who at one time or another had a certain attraction for [him]" turning into nothing "but a purely romantic admiration" (Symons, *Spiritual* 38). This platonic idealisation is created by Symons on the basis that it is purely wicked and perverse, a "forbidden thing" worth pursuing because of what it stirs within him. This is reiterated by the fact that the notion of love plays no part in the fantasies that Symons experiences, for, as he says:

> Love I never associated with the senses, it was not even passion that I wanted; it was a conscious, subtle, elaborate sensuality, which I knew not how to procure. And there was an infinite curiosity which was like a fever. (Symons, *Spiritual* 38-39)

And to keep this distinction he would go to the extreme lengths of giving up on opportunities of intimacy if they were ever offered to him, so that he could keep on

fantasizing and evoking those sensations without the risk of spoiling them. However, as the older Symons would come to learn, love is but the beginning of art and one must experience it, for that is the beginning of the journey of the artist. Young Symons, therefore, presents himself not as someone who has taken the first steps in the cycle of love, but as an artist who hasn't even begun to walk; in *A Prelude to Life*, Symons lives for the ideal he glorifies when, instead, he should turn to the beauty of love and life and experience it, so that he could eventually reach the ideal of love he was envisioning and chasing all along.

One of the stories in *Spiritual Adventures*, in which the concept of love in relation to artistic creation is dealt with and described in thorough detail, is *Christian Trevalga*. In the middle of the story, as Trevalga tries to find ways to develop his skills and "find himself, to become real" (Symons, *Spiritual* 103), he assumes that finding love could be a solution to achieve that goal. He does not understand why he cannot be like the people who admire him and genuinely demonstrate an interest both in him and his music; he wishes to attain what, in his eyes, distinguishes them and therefore asks himself: "why was it that he could not be as they were, respond to them in their own language, which was that of humanity itself, admire, like, love them back?" (Symons, *Spiritual* 103).

In his countless romantic adventures, the narrator portrays Trevalga as a man with the enigmatic characteristics of a passionate lover, but upon closer inspection, Trevalga comes across as an artist who stumbles his way through countless sexual encounters just to find himself and his art, as seen in the following passage:

> Women had not found it difficult to fall in love with him; his reticence, his enigmatical reluctance to speak out, the sympathetic sullenness of his face […] He had no morals, and was too indifferent to refuse much that was offered him. When it was a simple adventure of the flesh he accepted it simply, and, without knowing it, won the reputation of being both sensual and hard-hearted, a sort of coldly passionate creature. (Symons, *Spiritual* 103-104)

Trevalga cannot seem to understand why he comes across this way, especially since, some pages later, we come to learn that "he feared women", thus solidifying this child-like ineptitude which mimics that of the narrator in *A Prelude to Life*. Moreover, Trevalga is most surely looking for love, it is his wish to grasp it and we find out that, in his ineptitude, "when he mistook what was, perhaps, real love, for something else, all he wanted, he was genuinely sorry". And with that awareness comes a realisation: if that truly was real love, perhaps, he could "answer in key at last" (Symons, *Spiritual* 104). In this last sentence it is possible to underscore a particular detail of immense importance, for the utilisation of

music terminology, in the form of answering *in key*, is entirely deliberate and becomes a symbolic representation of what Trevalga's ultimate objective is. For the sake of example, for a singer to be off-key means that the notes sung by the artist are slightly more flat or sharp than they are supposed to be; this, in turn, creates a complete lack of harmony. So, for Trevalga to state that he wants to answer *in key*, means that he wishes to reciprocate those feelings, he wants to experience them and reach a state of melodic harmony through this newly found love, something which will most surely also be transposed in his music.

It is at this point that Trevalga meets the woman who would spark those feelings for the first time: Rana Vaughan. She, much like Trevalga, has "the artist's soul" (Symons, *Spiritual* 104) but is not as gifted as him and for this reason adores him because he possesses that which she lacks. Her love, as noticed by the narrator, is more akin to a "vicarious ecstasy", a way to live her own dream through the skills of Trevalga and although for a time the experience was a positive one, to Christian, her love was destined to become too obsessive. It is at this point in the story that Christian goes through the second stage of love as described in the beginning of this section; he reflects upon it and starts to question it. He realises that the love he once wanted is now becoming a hindrance and sees Rana's affection as something that will rob him of "all the flesh and all the soul, one's nerves, one's attention, pleasure, duty, art itself!". Thus, since he does not want to let his art be taken away from him, he leaves her in an act of refusal against the slavery of love, for, as he says, he is already "caged […] for another type of slavery, the prisoner of his own fingers" (Symons, *Spiritual* 107-108).

The slavery of his fingers keeps Trevalga locked in a sort of solitary confinement, he retreats within himself and loses "his last hold on the world" with the departure of Rana. So, with his last hold on the world gone, art comes back to be his exclusive focus again and, as we have seen in chapter 2, takes a total hold on him, thus leading him to the pinnacle of artistic creation but taking his sanity as a price.

This story also provides a great example to understand how the interpretation of men, as a force of creation, and women as interpreters fuses with a conception of wickedness and perversity in the true nature of women. In *Christian Trevalga* Rana Vaughan is, perhaps, even in her brief appearance, the figure of a woman who almost perfectly encapsulates Symons' views on women. From the very beginning she is described as a woman of ambition and her desire is to play the piano; however, "the piano never responded to her"

as if there was something stopping her (Symons, *Spiritual* 104). It could be argued that the one thing stopping her was her gender, for she was never destined to have the necessary creative skills to make that piano respond to her; she could only just know how it should have responded. Moreover, the weakness of her nature would show its true face in the "vicarious ecstasy" we have already dealt with previously. Although both characters seem to use each other to gain something out of the relationship, the lack of creative power tied to her gender makes Rana inevitably cling to Trevalga, or so he believes. So, Rana Vaughan, in Christian's eyes, is envisioned as a temptress and her possessiveness and obsession for him is shown in the final moments of the relationship as Christian:

> Tried honestly to explain himself to Rana, but the girl would not understand him. She cared for his art as much as he did; she would never come between him and his art; she would hate him if he preferred her to his art. (Symons, *Spiritual* 107)

Rana needs Christian and this possessive feeling is showcased through Rana's conviction that she would never come between Christian and his art, while at the same time being able to be with him. Since Christian, in his opinion, explained to her his reasons for ending the relationship, Rana should be aware that both her desire to be with him and her hatred, if he "preferred her to his art", are entirely paradoxical. After all, Christian's decision was precisely made for the sake of his art. In this way, Arthur Symons depicts Rana through Trevalga's pathological views on women by saying that she "is a beast of pray" constantly in need of affection, who will devour everything he has including his art (Symons, *Spiritual* 107).

Looking at the imagery used by Trevalga to describe the wickedness and temptation exerted by women, one will find a plethora of less than favourable comparisons with beasts. From being kept in the "beast's cage", to being caressed by the soft padding covering which hide the claws that could strike at any moment, Trevalga uses a clearly demeaning language to showcase an element of dangerous unpredictability which he sees in women. In this story in particular, women seem to be depicted as being capable of acting as both the "enslaver" and the "slave"; at one moment men are ready to "continually amuse one's dangerous slave", only to succumb to the alluring force of women immediately after and become the enslaved, thus "wearing out their lives in the exciting companionship" (Symons, *Spiritual* 106). Rana, no matter how she made him feel, is ultimately perceived by this pianist as a bittersweet temptress who will lead him to his downfall, and he must distance himself from her.

From what was seen so far, it is already possible to understand why Victorian stereotypes are not so prevalent in these stories, in that it is the animalistic carnal desires and obsessive nature of women the thing which attracts Symons to them as subject matters for his works. This fear of women is a sentiment that closely connects Trevalga with Henry Luxulyan. Whereas Trevalga could not understand women, and in turn love, because of his focus on his music, Luxulyan's feelings are closer to a stubborn and misguided theorisation of how love and women must function. In fact, countless entries of his journal are entirely, or largely, dedicated to such rationalisations, which show how much these thoughts preoccupied him. It will become apparent that the source of Luxulyan's confusion is not just a clear misconception of love and women, but instead his complete ineptitude in understanding his own feelings.

When it comes to love, Luxulyan immediately shows the reader that his notion of it is essentially skewed and paradoxical; his statement that "what attracts [him] in a woman, revolts [him]: the 'love as strong as death'" (Symons, *Spiritual* 264) paints the picture of a lover who takes, but who is never willing to give back. The following lines, where Luxulyan uses warfare terminology such as "capitulate" and that "it is the enemy who has conquered" (Symons, *Spiritual* 264) (the enemy being women), only exacerbates the fact that Luxulyan sees love as a battle, a fight between two sides of which only one will be victorious. So, in the same way in which war oppresses the conquered, the winning side demands everything from the loser, which Luxulyan interprets as a woman devouring all the attention and devotion from the man she loves.

Being left by his previous partner Clare, Luxulyan frantically goes off on disdainful tirades directed at women as a category, but also seems to show signs of self-awareness, something which he will have to confront when he starts working as a librarian for the Baroness von Eckenstein. It is precisely in the unfolding of the love between the Baroness and Luxulyan that we see how indecisive and ultimately confusing Luxulyan's conception of love truly is.

Interestingly, at the beginning of the interactions between the two future lovers, Luxulyan makes a passing comment, almost nonchalantly, about the Baroness's age and what it would mean for her to love again:

> Suppose this woman […] were to fall in love again: she is at the age of lasting passions, and what could be more natural in her? That would be a tragedy which I hardly like to think of; the more

so, as I can easily conceive how powerful must have been her attraction before the time of this accident. (Symons, *Spiritual* 284)

so that his first assumption is that the love of a woman like the Baroness would be powerful, perhaps just as powerful as her beauty before she was disfigured by her husband. Putting the obvious foreshadowing aside, this remark highlights once again how Luxulyan is afraid, how even the thought of hypothetically being the subject of such a love terrifies him. Luxulyan wants love but refuses to let go of anything for a type of love which would deprive him of everything, much like the other artists in this collection of short stories.

With time passing and them getting closer to each other, that type of affection "begins to become fatiguing" for Henry (Symons, *Spiritual* 295), he starts feeling the shackles of what Trevalga named "slavery" clutching his feet, leaving him with the need for "more liberty". In these passages Luxulyan is clearly guided by his misconception that a man and a woman cannot be friends (Symons, *Spiritual* 299) and, although the Baroness might have already fallen in love with him, mistakes simple acts of kindness for something more; for this reason, as usual, he begins to rationalise his feelings, in case he mistook generosity for actual love:

And, even if it is not love, the heaviest of all burdens when it comes unmasked, there is still a fatiguing weight in that affectionate vigilance which is one long appeal for gratitude, in that solicitude which 'prevents', in both senses of the word, all one's going. I am beginning to find this with the Baroness, who would replace Providence for me, but with a more continual intervention. (Symons, *Spiritual* 296)

It is at this moment that Luxulyan wants to create a barrier, and this is represented symbolically by his nightmare in which Clare comes back to him, only to reveal that her face bears the same scar as the Baroness. Once again, we witness the internal struggle that Henry feels; the love of the Baroness which threatened to "make [his] mind her possession" is becoming too much for him to withstand, so, his mind goes back to Clare and his indecision creates a grotesque fusion of the two women. Being the one woman who left him, Clare is seen by Luxulyan as the only woman whose love showed no sign of obsession, thus representing a chance for him to escape his situation. Another possible explanation could be that the power of the Baroness' love is so strong that even the image of his previous lover is slowly turning into that of the Baroness, so that even Luxulyan's dreams are "conquered" by her.

Another interesting event is the entry of Luxulyan's journal in which he feels uncomfortable because of the sudden change in attitude of the Baroness towards him. His internal bewilderment is shown, as he laments the fact that a sudden barrier has formed between them, which is ironic since he was the one who "used to wish for such a barrier. And it now annoyed [him] to find it there" (Symons, *Spiritual* 303). Here, Luxulyan fails to see that she might have acted that way for his sake, since, a couple of entries before this one, he is the one who noticed the very stoic and apathetic Baron now looking at them from the newspaper he always pretended to read with a disconcerting, suspicious interest. On another note, since Luxulyan, like Trevalga, sees women as voracious temptresses, it could be argued that in his mind the Baroness is tempting him by creating distance through her detached demeanour.

The conclusion of the cycle of indecisiveness in his love is initiated by the return of Clare who requires help. Luxulyan would like to see her in person to lend her a helping hand, something which could be interpreted as an attempt to escape from the clutches of the Baroness. Being told by Henry about the situation, she shows her true colours and emotions, erupting in a fit of jealousy that leaves the protagonist completely baffled and compels him to "put [himself] into her hands". And when he states:

> I have given her the right to arrange my life as she pleases; I have shown her my weakness, I have let her see her own strength. […] These agitations, these restrictions, this sentimental ceremony, are too much for me. How is it that I did not realise the way things were tending, and set a barrier, not only against this passionate foe without, but against this weakness, this kindness, that turns traitors within and run so readily to the closed gates to open them? (Symons, *Spiritual* 308)

we come back to the indecisive Luxulyan, a man who wishes to escape immediately after he showed a sign of dedication to the woman who so passionately loves him.

With the impotence he feels, he realises that "love may be life itself, carrying away all the props of the world in its overflow" (Symons, *Spiritual* 310) and faced with the prospect of being washed away by the overflow of love, Luxulyan escapes to Venice years later to cure himself from the illness that this intense love has caused him. Curiously enough, in the absence of the Baroness he seems to get better, only to relapse again when she finally comes to visit him. It is at this point, when a bedridden Luxulyan is descending into madness and dying, that he accepts her love, finally finding the resolve to completely give what little was left of him to the love and the life he constantly tried to evade.

In the context of how Symons handles love in *Spiritual Adventures*, this conclusion seems to be a positive one, however, it must be reminded that Luxulyan dies shortly after, and

that the aftermath of their affair spells the end of the Baroness due to an illness that could have been caused by her love for Luxulyan; this notwithstanding, the truth can be more ominous than it seems, for, as was noticed by Freeman, there is an allusion that the Baroness was actually killed by her jealous husband. In the end, the acceptance of love spells the demise of both lovers who, as previously stated, are washed away by its overflow. Although it is arguable that most of the digressions on women are made by Henry in the tragic aftermath of his previous affair, therefore implying that these are the visceral feelings of a man with a broken heart, the fact that Symons himself, in the *Genesis of Spiritual Adventures*, stated that he put a lot of his temperament in this story could lead one to make a direct connection between Luxulyan's and Symons' opinions (Freeman, *Introduction* 231).

In this story the "dangerous duality" of women is once again described in various ways by the protagonist, he sees in them a "kind of hidden anger or treachery" (Symons, *Spiritual* 264) which they use to deceive and hide their true colours. The dichotomy of women is further displayed in his description of Clare, to him she was "vain, selfish, sensual" but to others she seemed "gentle and modest", almost as if he is implying that once she felt comfortable enough with him, she dropped the façade and showed her true nature. Henry even utilises the habit of dressing and undressing to highlight women's fickle and treacherous nature, so much so that "with each new gown a woman puts on a new self, made to match it" (Symons, *Spiritual* 269).

Not even the highly educated Baroness von Eckenstein is safe from Luxulyan's categorical judgment. Although he has nothing to say about her character and demeanour, if anything he truly loves them, he still witnesses a severe change in attitude the moment she falls in love with him and from the calm, collected, intelligent and perceptive woman he thought she was, she turns into what he fears the most: an obsessed lover, greedy for all his attention and devotion:

> Shall I never understand women? Will nothing ever teach me wisdom? I was foolish enough to think that the Baroness would help me, that I could be open with her, as I have been till now. […] I showed her the letter. She read it in silence, with her hand over her eyes. 'You will go and see her?' 'I think it would be best', I said. She lifted her head suddenly, clenched the paper in her hand, and flung it on the carpet at my feet. […] Her face was convulsed with rage; her face was terrible, more terrible than I have ever seen it. (Symons, *Spiritual* 305-306)

In the aftermath of their heated argument about Clare, Luxulyan gives in to his lover's demands and reflects on his choice; for once, he believes, he wanted truly to be nice to a

woman for the sake of it, with nothing in return, but again, he concludes that "it is for another woman, always, that one is unjust to a woman". With this conclusion, Henry Luxulyan is clearly hiding his own indecisiveness under the guise of a rationalisation; he ultimately tries to pin the blame for his situation on the very nature of women, when instead it was his own indecisiveness which put him in that situation in the first place. As a sidenote, it is also interesting to notice how, in the end of the story, Luxulyan fully accepts the Baroness' love only in a state of feverish stupor, as if that is what the love of a woman will lead to, as if it will lead to his inevitable demise.

The most striking short story in the collection, where love plays an even more important role compared to Luxulyan's episode, is the narration of the career of the actress Esther Kahn. We already touched upon her upbringing and what finding art meant for her in chapter 2, and now we will go into more detail as to how her love story with the playwright Haygarth conveys a mixed view of love (both positive and negative), which could be summarised by Tennyson's famous quote: "Tis better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all".

Unlike most characters in *Spiritual Adventures*, Esther Kahn shows an initial reluctance to love, her stance on love is one of scepticism; Esther is by no means a stranger to sexual affairs and since she has never cared for love, she bases her impression of it on her less than pleasurable encounters, in which other men "tried to drive a hard bargain, to get the better of her in a matter of business" (Symons, *Spiritual* 71). Esther understands that this view of love is one where she must give herself to the other person, and, being a hard-driven resolute woman, she is not willing to; if she wants to go to those lengths, that would be on her own terms.

Nevertheless, the situation is soon to change and her reluctance to disappear, for in Haygarth she finally finds a man who truly understands her and her desires. This is shown by the shrewd manner in which Haygarth truly cares for her as an artist, but also manages to conceal "even the extent to which he was really disturbed by her presence" (Symons, *Spiritual* 73) and, although Esther clearly realises his actual intentions, she accepts him, for no other man has treated her like him. It is at this point that Esther starts pondering upon her choice and, consequently, doubts start filling her mind:

> This bargain, this infinitely important bargain, had been concluded, with open eyes, with a full sense of responsibility, for a purpose, the purpose for which she lived. What was the result? She could see no result. The world had in no sense changed for her, as she had been supposing it

would change; a new excitement had come into her life, and that was all. […] How different had been her feeling when she walked across the stage for the first time! That had really been a new life, or the very beginning of life. But this was no more than a delightful episode […] The world remained just the same. (Symons, *Spiritual* 74-75)

From her perspective everything remained the same, her life had never even begun when art was not part of it, and, when it did, love seemed merely superfluous, something of little importance. While it is true that Haygarth seemed different to her, her outlook on love has not changed, she does not need it and probably still does not fully love Haygarth who, to her, is just a means to an end. So, it comes as no shock that her art saw little to no progress, "she had learned nothing" (Symons, *Spiritual* 75) and only the tutoring of Haygarth, coupled with her innate talent, enabled her to properly achieve growth in her abilities. After seeing Haygarth's dedication in moulding her into a true actress, Esther finally comes to realise her feelings for the man and a "more personal feeling began to grow in her heart towards this lover who found his way to her, not through the senses, but through the mind" (Symons, *Spiritual* 78). Interesting to note is that Esther starts developing an intimate passion for Haygarth not out of pure love, but only because he is the catalyst that enables her to improve her craft. For these reasons, her love takes a sinister turn, in that she does not act for the sake of her art anymore, but for the sake of satisfying her love, which begins to take over and hold more importance than art itself:

Love with Esther had come slowly, taking his time on the journey; but he came to take possession. To work at her art was to please Philip Haygarth; she worked now with a double purpose. And she made surprising advances as an actress. People began to speculate: had she genius, or was this only an astonishingly developed talent, which could go so far and no further? (Symons, *Spiritual* 79)

So, naturally, the second option in this quote seems to be the case, for we find ourselves at yet another crossroad in the love formula used by Symons in *Spiritual Adventures*. Esther is forgetting the reason why she started performing in the first place and does not seem to realise that her love, which seemed to be the cause of her improvement, is showing its limitations, something which could only be surpassed by the loss of love and the grief of betrayal.

As a matter of fact, Haygarth himself (like Luxulyan and Trevalga) grows tired of Esther's affection "as her warmth seemed more and more to threaten his liberty" (Symons, *Spiritual* 83) and begins an affair with another woman. Esther, feeling betrayed, has completely renounced her love and her feelings, so that art can come back to replace them. In her last performance, the artistic journey of Esther comes back full circle, for it began with art, it continued with love, and only through the loss of love could it come back to

art. So, while it is true that love was what enabled her to come as far as she did, thus making it seem that love has a positive energy for the artist, love is purely just the beginning of art and its negative element only shows itself once the characters realise that it is necessary to sacrifice it for the sake of art.

On the topic of the male power of creation in opposition to that of female interpretation, Esther Kahn seems to provide a few clear examples. Esther Kahn never puts something of herself into her own acting until the final performance, and even when she does, we are reminded that "the note had been struck" and that "she could repeat the note whenever she wished, now that she had found it". This is a clear example of her innate talent for imitation and interpretation; Esther, now that she has experienced betrayal, has internalised it and will be able to re-enact those exact feelings without fault. Even though Symons firmly believes in the connection between art and life, with the former being a source of impressions to be used in the act of artistic creation, most praises he has for female actresses normally concern their capabilities as performers as opposed to full-fledged creative artists (Freeman, *Introduction* 149).

Moreover, in the story of *Esther Kahn* it is possible to highlight a common thread which connects certain male characters of other stories in their objectification of women, namely Daniel Roserra and Peter Waydelin. For these characters, the women in their lives end up becoming, almost in an objectifying way, simple canvases on which they are free to experiment (a word used by Roserra himself), to test out their artistic vision. More in detail, when analysing Haygarth's opinion of Esther, it becomes clear that Haygarth's interest is that of a man who wishes to solve a riddle, only to then take pride in the fact that he was able to solve it:

> The actress interested Haygarth greatly, but the actress interested him as a problem, as something quite apart from his feelings as a man, as a lover. […] But nothing she could do as an artist made the least difference to his feeling about her as a woman; his pride in her was like his pride in a play that he had written finely, and put aside; to be glanced at from time to time, with cool satisfaction. (Symons, *Spiritual* 81)

This is also reinforced by his reaction to her last performance in the story, during which Haygarth completely disregards his new lover and marvels in delight at Esther's ability, almost basking in his pride for having created such an actress. However, while the objectification is apparent, as Freeman states: "at the same time it is by no means easy to judge the extent to which Haygarth's proprietorial view of Esther is supported by Symons himself" (Freeman, *Introduction* 143).

Most of the characters analysed until now have a great deal of shared qualities, in that they almost seem to stumble across love, or seek it in hopes that it would be the one thing they are missing. However, what happens when an artist, who is already conscious of this problematic cycle of love, decides to seek it with the sole intention of discarding it at the appropriate time? The figure of Peter Waydelin fully answers this question.

In *The Death of Peter Waydelin*, love seems to be almost completely forgotten and is barely mentioned in the entire story, while the portrait of Peter Waydelin is conveyed through countless digressions on art. Waydelin comes across as an individualist with clear ideas that he puts into practice, a man who does not need anything else except for his paintings, let alone love. Only with the narrator's second visit we get a glimpse at the kind of life that Waydelin has been living.

We discover that he has been married for three years and that his life was "systematic", lived "not as a stranger in a foreign country […], but as like a native as [he] could" (Symons, *Spiritual* 170); he wished to experience life in the midst of those who interested him as if he was one of them, to satisfy his need to see things like the subjects he paints. He did not necessarily commit himself to such a life for the sake of his art, but, as he states, because "a profound, low instinct, drew me to these people, to this life, without my will having anything to do with it" (Symons, *Spiritual* 170). So, even though the concept of love is not touched here, it is arguable that the sincerity of his style of painting comes from the attraction he feels towards the life he has chosen; and the narrator is entirely correct in stating that "the obscure martyrdom" that he sees unfolding is not merely for art's sake but for the "necessity of things". In this sense, Peter Waydelin is not merely experiencing the life of his subjects to understand them, he already does. He simply desires to follow his instincts and lead a life which can evoke strong sensations within him; Waydelin loves his life, and in turn his subjects, because they are exactly like him, they lead the same life as he now does, the life he loves:

> I never really chose the music-halls or the public-houses; they chose me. I made the music-halls my clubs; I lived in them, for the mere delight of the thing; I liked the glitter, false, barbarous, intoxicating, the violent animality of the whole spectacle, with its imbecile words, faces, gestures, the very heat and odour, like some concentrated odour of the human crowd the irritant music, the audience! I went there, as I went to public-houses, as I walked about the streets at night, I kept company with vagabonds, because there was a craving in me that I could not quiet. I fitted in theories with my facts; and that is how I came to paint my pictures. (Symons, *Spiritual* 170-171)

This notwithstanding, the love he feels towards his life does not hold him back and he is not afraid to lose it as he conveys, some pages later, when he states: "I never wanted to

be happy […] I wanted to live my own life and do my own work; and if I die tomorrow (as likely I may), I shall have done both things." (Symons, *Spiritual* 172); for these reasons, we witness a man who was a true artist from the very beginning, a painter to whom his life and his art are completely indistinguishable: "My work satisfies me, and, because of that, so does my life" (Symons, *Spiritual* 172).

On these premises, when considering his marriage and the last scene of the story, it could be argued that Waydelin's approach to love acquires a much darker and perverse quality. It seems that Waydelin, perhaps, never truly loved Mrs Waydelin, something which is highlighted, even before Waydelin's final moments, in the negative descriptions of his wife. From the narrator's description of her as a "deplorable person" to her physical appearance highlighted by the artificiality of her make up, Waydelin's true feelings come to light in the narrator's detailing of the first portrait he made for her:

> It was a portrait of the woman before the glass, just as she looked now, one of the most powerful of his drawings, crueller than ever in its insistence on the brutality of facts: the crude contrasts of bone and fat, the vulgar jaw, the brassy eyes, the reckless, conscious attitude. Every line seemed to have been drawn with hatred. (Symons, *Spiritual* 168)

He even states that he "married that woman because [he] couldn't help to, but [he] knew what he was doing" (Symons, *Spiritual* 169); and indeed, this last statement could not be more correct. Waydelin is conscious of his actions, he knows what his "martyrdom" will lead to, for he has, in a way, planned it. To paint the perfect picture, Waydelin essentially nurtured his wife's love, only to brutally kill it, sacrificing it through his own death to capture the perfect moment. This naturally gives an entirely different perspective on Waydelin as a character; of course, he is an accomplished artist, but, at the same time, he ultimately saw his wife as a mere test subject, an objectified canvas on which he would paint his finest work. In Waydelin no hesitations are present, there is no trial and error as he casts away his life to exploit his wife's sorrow for his art. His awareness of what love truly represents for an artist makes him the most cunning protagonist of *Spiritual Adventures,* in other words: the portrait of the perfect artist.

After seeing the example of how the perfect artist tackles love, let's consider a cautionary tale where love captures the protagonist and prevents him from pursuing his vision.

An Autumn City, as we have seen, deals with the clash of two opposite minds: Roserra and his wife Livia. In this story love is dealt with in a more direct way as opposed to the subtleties of *The Death of Peter Waydelin*. As we first get to know Roserra's

temperament, we are immediately thrusted into digressions on love and how it personally affected Roserra. The narrator, in the beginning, presents Roserra as the true aesthete, someone to whom love meant very little and who "armed himself […] against such disturbances of the aesthetic life" (Symons, *Spiritual* 190), for he was "invulnerable". Roserra is portrayed as an individualist who is not willing to share his pleasures with anyone but himself; however, like Haygarth and Waydelin, he would like to try an experiment: introducing a woman to his favourite city. In this description, love still has not taken hold, something which rapidly changed when Roserra fell in love with Livia.

The interesting element of this short story lies in the fact that, in complete opposition to Waydelin, Roserra falls victim to the power of love from the very beginning of the story, thus hinting at the demise of Roserra's aesthetic vision at the end of it. The fact that when Roserra fell in love "all hesitation was taken out of his hands by the mere force of things" conveys that, at this point, he is being fully guided by his love and not by the aesthetic perspective which created the idea of his experiment in the first place. This sentiment of impotence in the face of love is a common theme in *An Autumn City* as we see in the following passage:

> He felt something that he had never felt before, and this something was like a magnetic current flowing subtly from her to him; perhaps, like the magnetic rocks in 'Arabian Nights', ready to draw out all the nails and bolts of his ship, and drown him among the wrecked splinters of his life. (Symons, *Spiritual* 191)

Here, great emphasis is put on the magnetic force of attraction that flows from her to him, so that Roserra's love seems to be completely out of his control, with him being destined to simply be pulled like a magnet by the magnetism of Livia. The magnitude of her attraction is so powerful that Roserra is afraid he will end up like a disassembled ship, deprived of everything that holds him together.

After many attempts, Roserra realises that his experiment is a complete failure and, in seeing his wife filled with such disdain for the city he loves so dearly, "he, too, began to grow restless" (Symons, *Spiritual* 206). In this moment, the clash of the two different perceptions of reality that we have seen in chapter 2 turns into a clash between two different types of love. Roserra, in short, must decide between Arles and Livia, with this decision symbolically implying either the sacrifice of the love for his wife in favour of his aesthetic life, or the sacrifice of his aesthetic life for the sake of his wife. Therefore, witnessing his wife's resentment, and seeing that he too was beginning to be affected by it, Roserra makes his choice.

The triumph of love over art, in this section of the story, is created through imagery of health and life contrasted with images of sickness and death. Arthur Symons beautifully depicts the contrasting demeanour of both consorts: whereas Livia "had plunged back into the warmth of life", for Roserra "it was an effort even to breathe" (Symons, *Spiritual* 209) and the following mentioning of "nausea" and "sweating the fat of life" conveys the fact that the aesthetic life of Roserra has fully left his body, expelled like sweat in a feverish state of impotence which weirdly resembles the final moments of Peter Waydelin. But in this case love has won and, as should be expected, the end of the story is yet another example of a woman seen as a temptress, someone who would use all the alluring and subversive methods at her disposal to get what she wants. Roserra's indignation is abundantly clear in the final passages, and one could even argue that the imagery of sickness could have been employed to symbolically represent not only his parting from his aesthetic way of living, but also his complete resentment against his wife, almost implying that she has no depth of character, that to her the only things that matter are frivolous and superficial (Freeman, "Introduction" 204).

One of the main merits to be credited to Arthur Symons, in creating the short stories of *Spiritual Adventures*, lies in his ability to take topics which have little to do with art and love, and find a way to connect them to his vision, to the lenses through which he sees the world. Although the main subject matter of *Seaward Lackland* seems so distant from the artistic concerns of the author, many of his ideas are put into this spiritual journey of unconditional faith. In more detail, when it comes to love, one could interpret Seaward Lackland's unshakable devotion as the same type of love and obsession seen in certain characters of *Spiritual Adventures*, for faith, symbolically speaking, is nothing more than a reciprocated love and devotion between deity and worshipper. Like Roserra, at first, Lackland lets his love for God completely envelop him, he submits to it and works only to please the God he so adores. However, understanding his love for God was not necessarily easy, since we learn that as he was growing "more despondent; even his love for God seemed to be slackening" (Symons, *Spiritual* 221). In the scene where Lackland partakes in the service at the Chapel of St. Ives, we are presented with something akin to a divine revelation and, as the chants of the preacher become louder and louder, Lackland feels himself "turning hot and cold". Besides, Lackland fails to respond to those musically thunderous chants, fearing that "it was his sin that was keeping him back from completing the harmony". Nonetheless, he comes to the realisation that God loves him just like all

other practitioners and now "he felt as if some bitter thing had been taken out of his soul, and he were free to love God and life at the same time, as he had done till then, with alternate pangs of regret" (Symons, *Spiritual* 225). This is one of the most important passages for our analysis, for it is in this moment that Lackland fully accepts his love, or, perhaps more importantly, the love that God feels towards him, which he was doubting until that very moment. Here, we enter the second phase of the cycle of love, in which the protagonist begins to question it. However, Lackland's doubts are far more complex than a simple matter of advantages for his work. Lackland, as we have seen, is most surely convinced of his love for God, as he is convinced that God loves him back and will forgive him no matter what. So, the complex problem that Lackland is faced with is a more theoretical and metaphysical concern, which might end up undermining the very nature of omnipotence of the Almighty. Can he truly live with the burden of a sin he unknowingly might have committed? Can he shoulder the responsibility of knowing that God will still forgive him? Does his love, or even God's love, stand in the way of his unquestionable justice? Or to use his own words:

> If God was also love. God might forgive him; he would want to forgive him; but would It be right to accept mercy, if that mercy lowered his creator in his own eyes? The thought stung him like poison; he could not escape from it. (Symons, *Spiritual* 236)

So, as we can see, this matter troubles him greatly, and from this passage it looks as if Lackland believes that God's love might be an obstacle in his deliverance of justice. With a newly found resolve, the second phase of the cycle of love is concluded and Lackland begins to concoct his plan to set things on the right path, thus the final decision needs to be made: will he forgo everything out of love for God (including said love) or will he live idly, failing God, until God forgives him? The choice for Lackland was incredibly simple, after all, "did he not love God so much that he would suffer eternal misery, gladly, in order that God might be just?" (Symons, *Spiritual* 236)

The choice made by Lackland makes things abundantly clear for the readers; like other fulfilled artists in these stories, sacrificing himself and his love for the creator is the only possible solution to find solace. Consequently, Lackland will sin "the sin against the Holy Ghost, for the love of God" (Symons, *Spiritual* 243), so that God may be just.

In conclusion, *Seaward Lackland* is not simply a story about religion; it is a story about faith, life, and most importantly love. Arthur Symons cleverly spins religion and faith on their heads and, although the story is rich in metaphysical concerns that could have been

shared by Symons himself, he manages to turn the ordinary figure of a preacher into the portrait of an artist, someone who knows clearly how to navigate the intricacies of love for the greater good of his vision. Therefore, it is no surprise that his self-sacrifice makes him lapse into insanity just like Trevalga, for he has seen the truth, but he was unable to handle it.

To conclude the discussion on love and women, it is worth to briefly go through the episodes of Lucy Newcome, both in the story included in *Spiritual Adventures*, and in the two short stories *Pages from the Life of Lucy Newcome* and *The Life and Adventures of Lucy Newcome*. This saga is a perfect example of prejudice and mistreatment that women in the Victorian Age had to suffer, thus presenting us with a rare case in which Symons shows himself as decently understanding and impartial in describing the typical unfair conditions of a late Victorian woman.

Similarly to what was pointed out in chapter 2 of this work, *The Childhood of Lucy Newcome* tackles the innocent gaze with which a child sees the world and the loss of this idyllic vision due to unforeseen circumstances. In this story Lucy comes across as a visionary, whose love for life could only be rivalled by that for her parents. However, as both pass away, Lucy finds her outlook on the world completely shattered, and her joyous imagination is replaced by a depressive state of sadness and acceptance. A common thread for this character is the constant search for love and the inevitable loss of it. For example, whereas the Lucy of *The Childhood* finds her love for life in her gaiety and imagination, only to lose it, the Lucy in *Pages from* has her spark for life rekindled by the birth of her son and the urgency of having to take care of him. Nonetheless, life would show its brutality to her once again and oppress her, mirroring the events of her childhood.

In *Pages from the Life of Lucy Newcome*, the bleak and detailed description of Lucy's life brings to light the total lack of awareness and understanding of Victorian society towards simple mothers. The two co-workers constantly taunting Lucy, believing that "a woman who had been seduced was exactly the same as a prostitute" (Symons, "Pages" 66) showcase a ruthlessness which, in this case, is so engrained in the minds of many that even other women (albeit from a lower stratum of society) participate in the moral flagellation of a girl who is reaping the consequences of an uncontrollable situation. Having lost her new-born and struggling to survive, Lucy was essentially left alone with no one to turn to, so that the "downward course" towards prostitution mentioned by her

co-workers was bound to happen at some point. So, within the context of all three stories, the fact that Lucy, in *The Life and Adventures of Lucy Newcome*, actually becomes a prostitute should not come as a surprise.

And it is precisely with the Lucy in *The Life and Adventures* that we see a drastic change in her behaviour. The bleak outlook on life at the end of the previous two stories is substituted by an almost child-like behaviour of wonder and nonchalance, as we can see in her specific fixation of wanting "something *aesthetic"* or even how she describes herself as "absurd" or as "Still a child!" (Symons, "The Life and Adventures" 74-75). This element of childishness is to be seen also in the other two stories, especially in *Pages from*, where Lucy "before she knew it, she was asleep, in her old baby-fashion, sucking her thumb" (Symons, "Pages" 54). This could be a sign that the child-like innocence with which she looked at the world may have never left her. In fact, in the last pages of *The Life and Adventures* Lucy (who is now a prostitute) is seen having a tryst with a man who cannot get his way with her, for she starts dressing up and posing continuously in front of her mirror, gazing and admiring her own beauty as if she was playing with a doll. So, it could be said that the love that Lucy found and lost for her life has now returned, albeit with a new focus; the one and only thing she loves now is herself and her playful dressing in front of her mirror reminds the reader of the whimsical daydreaming and fantasies of her childhood. Moreover, the ending of the saga is quite ironic, in that Lucy throughout her tragic life could only find happiness and regain her innocent imagination by becoming one of the most despised figures of Victorian society: "merely a prostitute" as the narrator remarks (Symons, "The Life and Adventures" 87). The events of Lucy Newcome constitute a bittersweet saga of loss and survival. In these three stories, Symons demonstrates how poor life circumstances and utter neglect from society at large caused Lucy to go to such lengths not because of personal choices, but because she was forced to. After witnessing the death of her own child, life demanded such choices from her if she wanted to survive.

4. The "not-so-Imaginary" Portraits

In the previous chapters my focus was on the artists' conception of art and how they tackle it, while also having to deal with the close relationship between life and art and the role that love plays in shaping that connection. It has also been mentioned that Arthur Symons put much of his temperament and outlook on art in these stories, specifically in the characters which represent their author, fusing with him, in subtle manner. In this chapter, the autobiographical elements of *Spiritual Adventures* will be highlighted to further explain this point; in addition, it will be shown how Symons did not simply include elements of his own self and his life in this work, but also how he utilised figures of other artists he respected for the sake of further elevating the characters he created, something which, all things considered, makes this work a collection of "not-so-imaginary" portraits, fundamentally based on real existing people who best encapsulate the same artistic vision as Symons had theorised. This chapter will heavily rely on connections, materials and theories which can be found in Freeman's annotated version of *Spiritual Adventures*, to which I will add my own conclusions and extracts from other essays written by Symons himself to further prove and consolidate such biographical connections.

4.1 Self-Portrayal: fusion between the critic and the analysed

As was briefly mentioned in the sections above, Symons held Walter Pater in the highest of regard, committing faithfully to his ideals and outlook on art. Traces and influences of this master of his are to be found in numerous critical essays and even in his correspondence. For these reasons, it seems obvious that an aesthete like Symons, when trying to analyse and compile a "study of people" (Symons, *Plays* VIII), would turn to the authority of the man who wrote a masterpiece such as *Imaginary Portraits*.

Imaginary Portraits being the work which essentially pioneered imaginary portraiture as an established literary genre, *Spiritual Adventures* takes a great deal of inspiration from it, especially in terms of the main themes which are normally dealt with in this type of aesthetic short fiction. In more detail, both *Imaginary Portraits* and *Spiritual Adventures* deal with talented protagonists who are characterised by a sensitive temperament and highly contemplative minds. In their contemplations on art, nature, and life, they all embark on aesthetic and existential quests (Bizzotto, *Mano* 29) to give meaning to their lives, a search which ultimately will lead them to early deaths or insanity. And in fact, all of Pater's protagonists in *Imaginary Portraits* are destined to die early, while most of

Symons' characters are fated to succumb to illness, insanity, or death. Even the ones who survive (the sole exception being Esther Kahn) are left in a state of utter sadness and impotence. In pure aesthetic fashion, essayistic writing plays a major role in both books, where the lack of plot in a traditional sense (Bizzotto, *Mano* 29) allows the authors to include numerous reflections on art and analyses of the inner stirrings of the protagonists. There are also similarities in certain narrative expedients used by both writers to distance themselves from the characters; great examples of this are the two short stories written in diary form, namely *Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan* and *A Prince of Court Painters*, from which Symons could have taken inspiration if one considers how similar the subtitle that Pater gave to his story (*Extracts from an Old French Journal*) is to the one Symons used.

Similarities are also to be found between the opening short story of *Spiritual Adventures* and the very first imaginary portrait written by Pater. *The Child in the House* and *A Prelude to Life* feature the common theme of epiphanic moments which spark realisations in the protagonists; they both relive and reminisce about the most innocent moments of their lives, namely their childhoods. Both authors handle the timeline of their memories in the same way, in that the memories of the characters' childhoods are filtered through their own impressions and, most importantly, the most salient moments, which are expressed in a much more subjective way rather than chronological (Bizzotto, *Mano* 68).

As previously said, most characters in *Imaginary Portraits* embark on a quest, a journey to find a solid philosophical foundation with which they can give meaning to their existence. In this sense, the figures of Sebastian van Storck and Seaward Lackland almost become one and the same. As noticed by Bizzotto, these two unwavering personalities share a common logic which "non lascia spazio a compromessi conducendo ad un progressivo isolamento" (Bizzotto, *Mano* 146); with no room for compromise they follow their beliefs, so much so that van Storck sacrifices himself to save a kid from drowning and Lackland loses his sanity.

If the main topics, the aims and the styles of these two books appear to be the same, the main difference between the two lies in what Bizzotto has labelled the two main sub-genres of imaginary portraiture: "historic-mythological" and *history of a conscience*. As a matter of fact, it seems that decadent short fiction belonging to the "tragic generation"

prefers to handle the psychological intricacies of the portraits, while Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* fully belongs to the first subcategory of the genre.

On these premises it becomes possible to underscore the final and main difference between both works, in that Symons' stories are much more personal and autobiographic than Pater's. In *Spiritual Adventures*, the protagonists all become alter egos of an artist who is painting a sketch of himself, perhaps in an attempt to send his message to the public and, in turn, enlightening them. The "study of people" he wanted to accomplish becomes a way to delve deep in his own consciousness through the medium of art, thus fully exploiting the main elements of the *history of a conscience* subgenre. In short, subjectivity becomes in *Spiritual Adventures* the main building block for every single story (Bizzotto, *Mano* 143) and it is not surprising that Symons poured all his subjectivity, through the use of autobiographic details, into these stories. By contrast, as Oscar Wilde himself eloquently explained in his essay *Mr. Pater's Imaginary Portraits*:

> these Imaginary or, as we should prefer to call them, Imaginative Portraits of his, form a series of philosophic studies in which the philosophy is tempered by personality, and the thought shown under varying conditions of mood and manner, the very permanence of each principle gaining something through the change and colour of the life through which it finds expression. (Wilde 2)

In an essay dedicated to the way in which Walter Pater analyses works of art and artists as a critic, Jeffrey Wallen has detailed the constant conflict within the aesthetic way of critical analysis of other artists. He argues that the subjectivity which lies in art, in the form of personal impressions, can lead the critic to draw a portrait of the artist to achieve a detailed view of how he envisioned his artwork and what impressions he wanted to convey. However, in an effort to also demonstrate what impressions the artwork sparked in the critic, this process gives rise to a conflict in which the critic has to balance his aim at presenting the artwork, the impressions of its creator, and the critic's own impressions, thus causing the critic's thoughts to replace those of the artist. This is what causes most of aesthetic critical analyses and portraitures to become self-portrayals, in which the critic takes the place of the artist and conveys his own impressions, putting a lot of himself in the critical analysis as a result (Wallen 301-303).

With this characterisation of Pater's art criticism in mind, once again, the influence of this author on Arthur Symons' way of compiling *Spiritual Adventures* could not be more evident. From the humble origins of most of its characters, to the fusion of his artistic

conception in every single one of them, Arthur Symons presents us with a collection of short stories which closely resemble many of his essays on other artists. Consequently, he manages to replace the figures of his fictional creation with his own self and thoughts, creating not a portrait of his artists but a complex portrait of himself. Taken this way, every character in *Spiritual Adventures* becomes a single stroke of the brush which participates in painting the full picture of Arthur Symons as an artist; they are the pieces of his puzzle. The structure of his stories, as said, is astoundingly similar to that of his essays, with Symons showcasing the artwork's strengths or flaws and following those descriptions with personal impressions and theorisations, which, many times, are intertwined with aspects of the artist's life, a method which attempts to highlight the ties between the artist's life and what he includes in his work. In *Spiritual Adventures*, a great deal of time is spent in fleshing out the characters' origins and life, and those same events of the characters' childhoods are used to further demonstrate their outlook on the world, something which also comes to light through various digressions on a plethora of topics which were dear to Symons and his style. The only thing keeping the stories from being a mere description of people is the slight modicum of plot used to drive the stories forward.

Even some of the slightest details included in some of the stories can convey much about both the author's theories but, most importantly, worries. In *Extracts from the Journal of Henry Luxulyan*, for example, we witness the protagonist's recurring preoccupation about money, something which Symons had to always fret about during his literary career. Luxulyan was not poor, but when the company in which he invested fails, he suddenly realises that even though poverty was not a concern of his, "it is now poverty that has come upon [him]" (Symons, *Spiritual* 272). This new source of concern could mimic that of Symons during the first years of the twentieth century, in which he was trying to accumulate money to marry Rhoda Bowser. Moreover, these concerns are also what drove him to overworking himself, a feeling that Luxulyan knows very well. In fact, it is Luxulyan who states: "I have been working hard, going nowhere, and I suppose staying indoors too much. I begin to be restless again" (Symons, *Spiritual* 264). This unwavering willpower to continue working with little to show as a result is an element of dissatisfaction which we also find in Symons' career as a poet who garnered very little following. It is also worth mentioning that even his troubled relationship with Clare hints at his failed affair with the dancer Lydia who left him for another man, practically

replicating real events that happened in his life. Indeed, Luxulyan's tirades on women could be his own cathartic relief mechanism to cope with the failed relationship.

Another interesting detail to underscore in *Henry Luxulyan* comes not from the character himself but from the narrator at the beginning of the story. As a matter of fact, when the narrator describes what he found in Luxulyan's entries he states:

> It seems to me a genuine document; odd, disconcerting, like the man who wrote it; profoundly disconcerting to me, on reading it, as I discovered the real subterranean being whom I had known, during his lifetime, only by a few, scarcely perceptible outlines on the surface. (Symons, *Spiritual* 256)

In this passage it is the narrator who speaks, but the description he gives of Luxulyan seems awfully close and personal; because art and life are inseparable, and because we know that this is the story closest to Symons' temperament, it could be argued that the "man who wrote it" is not just Luxulyan but Symons himself. So, through the use of a narrator, it seems as if "Symons the narrator" is talking about "Symons the author", who used two different personas in an attempt at exploring his own consciousness, to discover that "subterranean being" that has been living with him in his consciousness for a "lifetime" in hopes of finally understanding him.

For these reasons, it is ironic that the fate of Luxulyan is that of falling prey to his nerves and eventually die in Venice, something which could be interpreted as a prophecy of Symons' mental breakdown in 1908. This notwithstanding, I argue that in this story the fate of Luxulyan and the eventual lapse into insanity is not something to be brushed off simply as a prophecy. Many of Symons' concerns, as we have previously highlighted, are included in this story; so, the usage of literature as catharsis by both Luxulyan and Symons makes them practically indistinguishable and this expedient could imply that they used literature to get rid of their inner demons. Making use of literature, they were both fighting against those "illusions of the nerves" (Symons, *Symbolist* 26-27) which are commonly found in men of higher intelligence and creativity, only to later succumb to them. It is precisely this facet which makes the story of Henry Luxulyan truly ironic if one considers Symons' stance on art and madness. To Symons, the artist is the "supreme intelligence", a person who can navigate the "inner world" of his imaginative power and his nerves without "losing the thread" that keeps him sane. Only a "lack of spiritual fortitude" could possibly endanger the artist and drive him insane, something which we see in Symons and, as his alter ego, also in Luxulyan. Most relevantly, it was their inner struggles that put a strain on their spiritual fortitude, thus making them "lose the thread";

this could be a feeling that Symons knew all too well at the time of writing the story and, therefore, wished to convey through Luxulyan to indicate the signs of the madness which was already seizing him.

This concept of madness functions as a means to analyse both *Spiritual Adventures* and Symons himself. Symons, like his characters, considers himself, in all probability, an artist whose perceptions are more refined and intense than those of his readers, so that madness might be considered a result of this superior artistic vision. It is interesting that *Seaward Lackland* has the same ending as *Henry Luxulyan* and *Christian Trevalga*, especially because of the topic it handles. When it comes to this short story, Symons himself stated that it is entirely a product of his imagination, albeit with certain aspects of his own life embedded into it (Freeman, "Introduction" 214). Indeed, Lackland's special type of spiritual adventure is something that the author had decided to abandon early in his youth. However, in its handling of theological and metaphysical concerns, which plagued Symons' childhood and even his adulthood, this short story is more personal and intimate to Symons than he is willing to let on.

With its Cornish setting, the long solitary walks and the maritime atmosphere, this story could be a way for Symons to fantasise and hypothesise how his life would have been, if he had chosen the same career as his father Mark. Not only does Symons use his own religious preoccupations to demonstrate the paradoxes of faith through "an egotistical underestimation of the powers of the Almighty" (Freeman, "Introduction" 214), but he also demonstrates what could have possibly become of him if he had decided to take on that path while maintaining his aesthetic vision of the world. Yet one more time Symons manages to write a story, even though a completely fictional one, in which he inevitably puts a great deal of his own self on full display.

Even in a story which is very distant from the author's experiences like *The Childhood of Lucy Newcome*, we still find that element of financial difficulties. As I mentioned in chapter 2, this story seems to be another way for Symons to exorcise his fears of having to give up on his vision and career because of the unforeseen circumstances of life. Moreover, even the parents of Lucy Newcome still have traces of Symons' own parents; the only exception here is that compared to *A Prelude to Life*, as it will be outlined later, the role that the parents play in *Lucy Newcome* is completely reversed. In this story it is her father who Lucy "worships", being amazed by his constant dealings in painting and

writing, while Lucy's mother, who is severely ill, is a very pious woman with whom Lucy finds it hard to connect. From this story a conclusion could be drawn which ties to the role of Symons' parents in *A Prelude to Life*, in that it is always the most pious of the parents the one who gets the less than favourable treatment from their child. In fact, in *A Prelude to Life* Symons deals extensively with his parents, detailing his love for his mother and demonstrating harsh feelings towards his father. However, it has been noted by Beckson that Symons' father was, in reality, very pleased and interested in his prospects of a literary career (Freeman, "Introduction" 127) and this, yet again, proves how Symons likes to refashion elements of his own life into art to fuse the two together. As a consequence, it is apparent that no clear assertion on Symons' relationship with his parents might be made from *Spiritual Adventures*, for the parents in these stories do not fully represent Symons' own parents, they merely symbolise a specific ideal (artistry or faith) that Symons might or might not have aligned himself with. So, Symons does not tell the reader much about his actual childhood; instead, he discloses much more about the Symons who was writing these stories, he illustrates his feelings and impressions of what he felt his childhood to be.

From the example of *Seaward Lackland*, and also *A Prelude to Life*, it seems that Symons has a keen interest in fantasising and reshaping some of the events of his life, even to the point of making up completely fictional scenarios, with hypotheses about what could have happened, if he had chosen a different path. This same argument can be made for the story *An Autumn City*, in which his alter ego Roserra represents a hypothetical Symons who is not plagued by the financial problems we have seen in other stories. In *An Autumn City* much of Symons' views and temperament can be extrapolated from his impressions on Arles which mimic those he expressed in his own essay on the city (Freeman, "Introduction" 203). From quoting himself verbatim, in stating that in Arles "there is no division of time; one seems shut off equally from the present and from any appreciable moment of the past" (Freeman, "Introduction" 102-103), to him appreciating Arles's submissiveness and the lives of the women of the city being part of its aesthetic beauty, Symons has poured everything that Arles has left him in this short story. Moreover, his telling of the relationship between Roserra and his wife Livia conveys the opinions that Symons might have had in relation to marriage at the time of writing this short story. There is, indeed, a possible connection between the figure of Livia and that of the dancer Lydia; in fact, this story could have been written "in the aftermath of the end of Symons'

affair with Lydia", thus creating another fictional situation in which Symons fantasises about what would have happened if he had been able to live his life with her (Freeman, "Introduction" 203). This, of course, creates a close connection between Roserra and Symons, in that the resentment against Livia at the end of the story could represent the same feelings that Symons arbored towards the young dancer he was obsessed with, but who ended up leaving him. Roserra's mood in the end of the story, coupled with the highly negative impression of marriage, can be seen as Symons' way to almost take revenge on Lydia, by stating that even if they had spent their lives together, her frivolous nature would have caused nothing but harm to him.

If Symons creates close connections between him and some of the protagonists of *Spiritual Adventures* by imbuing his characters with a plethora of shared elements, in other stories of this collection he is more subtle and meticulous in inserting himself as part of the events. This is especially evident in *Esther Kahn* and *The Death of Peter Waydelin*, in which Symons is not represented by the main protagonists. More in detail, in *The Death of Peter Waydelin* Symons takes the role of the narrator who indulges in discussions about art with the much more experienced artist Peter Waydelin. Here, the narrator witnesses Waydelin's self-sacrifice and tries to understand the reasons for his bohemian lifestyle. As was noted in the biographical section, Symons was not so keen on leading the typical life of a bohemian artist, instead, he took a great deal of interest in trying to understand and to analyse such choices. Moreover, if his long stay at Fountain Court and general demeanour paints the picture of an artist who did not live a bad life, the dingy atmosphere and locations in which the final stages of the story take place are most surely environments that Symons knew and studied very well. So, being embodied by the figure of the narrator, Symons unveils the way he approached other artists that he respected, the way he studied them, their lives, and their work, while also demonstrating how an exchange of ideas in his literary circle might have functioned.

In similar fashion, Symons once again disguises himself in the figure of a side character in the story of *Esther Kahn*, where he is embodied by the playwright Haygarth. Haygarth shares, like most characters of *Spiritual Adventures*, many of the views of Symons himself, in that his outlook on life is purely guided by his art. Even if his stance on women resembles the author's, what is most striking, from a biographical standpoint, is the fact that this story was first published in the year 1902. This aspect is especially noteworthy, for the year of publication is one year after his marriage to Rhoda Bowser.

Notwithstanding the connections with other actresses that Esther Kahn symbolises (which will be analysed in the next section of this chapter), Rhoda, apparently, had aspirations of working as an actress, so that a connection could be made between the two if one looks at the way Haygarth tries to nurture her talent. It could be argued that Haygarth's training and his wish to shape Esther into a marvellous true actress, could be the same vision Symons had in mind when it came to Rhoda's possible career in the field. Even Haygarth's views on love and the restriction upon his freedom that such love implies could represent the same worries of a man who, even fifty years later, still kept pictures of the woman (Lydia) who had haunted and obsessed him (Freeman, "Introduction" 203).

To conclude this section, various biographical details that are to be found in the story of *Christian Trevalga* can be highlighted. From the various sexual affairs of his previous years to the infatuation with music and ability to play the piano, Christian Trevalga reflects some of the same types of interests in entertainment that Symons used to practice. Apparently, the story was written in 1902, thus positioning itself in those important years that were mentioned in the previous analysis of Esther Kahn; and, as a matter of fact, it has been noticed by Freeman that Symons completely shares Trevalga's view on loving a woman, something which might imply "that he may already have felt that his marriage to Rhoda was a mistake, a view reinforced by the similarity of Rhoda's name to that of the luckless Rana Vaughan" (Freeman, "Introduction" 158). This statement shines a light on numerous other instances in *Spiritual Adventures* where he might have felt the same type of regret; from the unhappy marriage of Daniel Roserra to the intoxicating affection of the Baroness von Eckenstein and the exploitative relationship of Haygarth and Esther Kahn, Symons might have thought that the happy marriage he envisioned with Rhoda was, in reality, not what he expected.

In addition, as we have seen with Henry Luxulyan, the lapse into insanity of the protagonist might, once again, be Symons' way to cope with his own worries and artistic vision. It is then possible to see the "supposed" madness of Trevalga, as seen in chapter 2 of this work, as a sort of "artist's lament" in which Symons puts his aesthetic theories of art on display under the guise of madness, to demonstrate how truly misunderstood he was by the public and the critics.

4.2 Portraits of fictional artists through their fusion with existing ones

In this section we will again use the connections made by Freeman and expand on them to demonstrate how Symons' portraits of imaginary artists can be seen as "not-so-imaginary", mainly on the basis of the connections they have with real people, artists whom Symons deeply respected and whose ideals on art he definitely shared.

Continuing the analysis of *Christian Trevalga*, the main connection that has been made with other artists is between Christian and a world-renowned pianist for whom Symons had the utmost respect: Valdimir de Pachmann (Freeman, "Introduction" 157). The similarities between the two are striking and abundantly clear; in fact, Trevalga's conception of music closely resembles the descriptions that Symons gave of Pachmann. In "Pachmann and the Piano*"*, Symons dwells on his technique and how he achieves it. One of the first resemblances to be found is the concept of playing the piano "as if it were a living thing on whose nerves one were operating, and as if every touch might mean life and death" (Symons, "Pachmann" 107), something which is replicated by Trevalga himself in his fear of "hurting a sound" and believing that sounds are "living beings" (Symons, *Spiritual* 118). The concept of sounds being living entities which manifest themselves through music is also referred to some pages later in the essay, where Symons compares the genius of Pachmann to Godowsky's inability to realise that "notes are living things", so that he "tosses them about a little cruelly" and making the listener feeling sorry for them, for they have a life of their own (Symons, "Pachmann" 113). So, with notes being alive, it goes without saying that they must speak a language of their own, a language which both Pachmann and Trevalga set out to understand. They both realised that no matter how many languages men could come up with to express art, art itself, and of course music, will only speak its own language, for to the true artist "the notes exist; it is enough that they exist. They mean for him just the sound and nothing else" (Symons, "Pachmann" 108). Another passage of this essay perfectly clarifies the ties that both Pachmann and, most importantly, Trevalga have with madness. It has been already remarked how Symons conceives the notion of madness in artists and the balance between imagination and the nerves. This very same notion is expressed in the essay when Symons states about music:

> So remote is it from us that it can only be reached through some not quite healthy nervous tension, and Pachmann's physical disquietude when he plays is but a sign of what it has cost him to venture outside humanity, into music. (Symons, "Pachmann" 108)

thus solidifying the connection between the two artists. In fact, it is precisely this search for "the ultimate thing in sound: the music" which makes these pianists so similar to each other; they have both discovered the mystery of art and music and "both have triumphed, not because the taste of the public has improved, but because a few people who knew have whispered the truth to one another, and it has leaked out like a secret" (Symons, "Pachmann" 114), a secret which they were able to evoke through their music like many Symbolist artists. On the topic of madness, it is also interesting to notice how the figure of Pachmann and his "inhumanity" ties back to the other characters of this collection who also fall victim of insanity (Henry Luxulyan and Seaward Lackland), the best example being Seaward Lackland in his heroic sacrifice for what he believed in and the secret he thought he saw behind the veil of religious dogmas.

The story of *Christian Trevalga* is a true treasure trove of influences from various artists other than him. In the very same essay that was used to highlight their close connection, another artist of great importance for Arthur Symons is briefly mentioned, namely Paul Verlaine. This mentioning of Verlaine seems to be entirely deliberate, for it emphasises a connection between art forms which is represented by Trevalga's and Pachmann's ability to understand music as a living being with a language of its own. The two pianists saw music as a physical entity and the fact that they understood it as a language is simply another way to establish how art encompasses all different forms that one could use to articulate it. Therefore, in the same way that they can speak through music, Verlaine was able to make "words sing in the air" and transform his poems into "pure music, the voice of a bird with a human soul" (Symons, *Symbolist* 89), with the understanding that words, much like sounds, are alive.

Another more subtle connection could be made when one focuses one's attention on the character of Christian's mother. In chapter 2 it was highlighted how Christian's mother was a great source of inspiration for the aspiring young pianist; and even if connections have been made between her and Symons' own mother, on grounds of their habit of creating sculptures out of bread (Freeman, *Introduction* 158), more can be said about the peculiar way in which they sculpt them and how they utilise material from nature to create almost living human sculptures. In this description, similarities can be noticed between Trevalga's mother and the famous sculptor Rodin, although the true striking element in this comparison lies in the differences that set the two apart, so that Symons, subtly, underlines the artistic mistakes of Trevalga's mother in contrast with the marvellous

creations of Rodin. In *Studies in Seven Arts*, Symons applauds Rodin's ability to use clay, as the material of the earth, to exploit its link to the earth and bring life into his sculptures (Symons, *Studies* 3). The same can be said about Trevalga's mother, in that she uses the most absurd and unlikely material, bread, to shape it into the "little figures" that she adores. In addition, another praise that Symons has for Rodin is his reluctance in always choosing some beautiful models, only to then become "disappointed, dissatisfied, before some body whose proportions did not please him" (Symons, *Studies* 6), something which is also expressed by Trevalga's mother when she complained about her own figures and the fact that she envisioned them with "subtler curves". Indeed, subtlety and rhythm are crucial for both Symons and Rodin; the "rhythm of nature", as he labels it, is all about the equilibrium that the human body possesses and its ability to maintain its balance through movements of self-preservation (Symons, *Studies* 5). The cleverness and beauty of Trevalga's mother's figures lies in their simplicity, from the little shoulder-blades to the unembellished action of a woman kneeling in front of a well stretching her arms. In her little uncomplicated figures, the rhythm of nature is fully showcased, and yet, she is still not satisfied with them. It is in this moment that her art falls short in comparison to that of Rodin which is able to display "the instant made eternity" (Symons, *Studies* 6). As was highlighted in chapter 3, Trevalga's mother utilises a process of creation which is more interpretative (as Symons thought befits her gender) than actually creative and, therefore, fails to capture the true essence in sculpture, in that "for the living representation of nature in movement, something more is needed than the exact copy" (Symons, *Studies* 7). Trevalga's mother, in other words, does not exploit nature and life as a source for creative purposes in art, but uses art as a means to interpret life and what she sees. In complete opposition, Rodin "more often […] surrenders himself to the direct guidance of life itself: a movement is made before him, and from this movement he creates the idea of the movement" (Symons, *Studies* 21), so that he lets life itself become the artwork and uses it as a guiding hand to shape his sculptures into the finest creations. Ultimately, in this comparison, Symons utilises both the aspects he values in his mother's art and its shortcomings to set her against a true artist like Rodin and demonstrate, with subtlety, the true essence of art.

In the comparisons between the artists of *Spiritual Adventures* with existing artists who Symons admired, perhaps one of the most striking stories is, I argue, *Esther Kahn*. It has been theorised, by looking at Symons' recollections of writing this story, that the figure

of Esther Kahn might be an incarnation of certain actresses that Symons saw in theatre and who struck a chord with him. In particular, a female lead by the name of Rachel Kahn, and an actress by the name of Gladys Fane (with whom he had an affair), together with a young Jewish girl that Symons saw with her family through a window (mentioned in "Genesis of Spiritual Adventures") might be the most probable candidates (Freeman, "Introduction" 140-141). When it comes to these two actresses, their influence on Symons is to be taken with a degree of scepticism; in this respect, Freeman noticed that no records are present in London of an actress by the name Rachel Kahn and suggests, by referring to 'An Actress in Whitechapel' in *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons* (by Beckson), that Symons "could have conflated the event with a teenage music-hall performer called Gladys Vane" (Freeman, *Introduction* 141).

I argue, however, that in the last stage of the story, during her perfect performance, Esther Kahn possesses a plethora of qualities which can be traced back to the actress who Symons considered the best in her field: Eleonora Duse. In the last lines of the story, when the narrator makes a comment on how "the note had been struck, she had responded to it, as she responded to every suggestion, faultlessly; she knew that she would repeat the note, whenever she wished, now that she had found it", a clear implication is made that Esther has now become the master of herself, something which has finally made her an actress (Symons, *Spiritual* 87). In the essay on Duse contained in *Studies in Seven Arts*, this exact praise is one that Symons makes in the very first page of the essay by stating: "it is her force of will, her mastery of herself, not her abandonment to it, which make her what she is" (Symons, *Studies* 331). So, it is immediately possible to realise that the sad experience of Esther Kahn enabled her to master her own sensations and use them in her acting, a feat which was one of Duse's most striking abilities as an actress. Duse, like Esther, was able to harness those feelings, which in turn moulded her style of acting, in which she "acts half mechanically, with herself, pulling up all the rags of her own soul, as she says, and flinging them in the face of the people, in a contemptuous rage" (Symons, *Studies* 332). But the similarities do not end here. Even in their demeanour in everyday talk both Duse and Esther have a tendency to remain impersonal and detached, however, once their interest is piqued, they manage to maintain those impersonal mannerisms but be so close at the same time (Symons, *Studies* 334), a quality which is embodied in the relationship between Haygarth and Esther. Both actresses share the medium through which they achieved such a degree of mastery in acting, in that:

there are moments, in any great crisis, when the soul seems to stand back and look out of impersonal eyes, seeing things as they are. At such moments it is possible to become aware of the beauty, the actual plastic beauty, of passionate or sorrowful emotion, as it interprets itself, in all its succession of moods, upon the face. (Symons, *Studies* 342)

and since Duse expresses how: "it is sorrow, discontent, thwarted desires, that have tortured and exalted her into a kind of martyrdom of artistic mastery" (Symons, *Studies* 332), we return, once again, to the inevitable role that a sentiment of loss and anger plays in the shaping of a perfect actress, thus strongly tying these two actresses to each other.

So, the true art of Duse is to be able, like Rodin, to "do over again, consciously, this sculpture of the soul upon the body." (Symons, *Studies* 342), a kind of sculpture that takes what lies deep within her and shapes it on her body to convey it perfectly, just like Esther in her ability to strike the same note over and over again once she has experienced it. And to continue the comparison with other artists, Symons compares Duse to Verlaine. This is done by reiterating the concept of an artistic journey which reaches its completion only once the artist is able to master form in a way that is "wrought outwards from within, not from without inwards.", a journey that Esther, at the end of the story, knows incredibly well. In conclusion, Esther seems to be the perfect incarnation of Eleonora Duse and, possibly, even of her journey as an actress. Symons might have envisioned her also as Duse's fictional successor, thus ironically confirming some of Duse's own words when she foresaw that:

"Some day another woman will come, young, beautiful, a being all of fire and flame, and will do what I have dreamed; yes, I am sure of it, it will come; but I am tired, at my age I cannot begin over again." (Symons, *Studies* 338)

Of much more interest to this analysis is the last close connection to be found between existing artists and the characters of *Spiritual Adventures*; this last connection proves to be incredibly important for it ties, as Freeman notices, great artists like Whistler and Beardsley to the most accomplished artist of this entire series of short stories: Peter Waydelin. In fact, as was remarked by Freeman, Arthur Symons himself conceived this specific story of *Spiritual Adventures* with two artists in mind: Tolouse Lautrec and, most importantly, Aubrey Beardsley. He recalls that the story was envisioned as something that was supposed to be morbid in nature, a cruel story which could be a representation of Symons' curiosity when he witnessed the bohemian lifestyle of these artists (Freeman, "Introduction" 187).

The first artist of importance for the creation of Peter Waydelin is without doubt Aubrey Beardsley, to the point that Waydelin almost seems to be a carbon copy of the young draughtsman who worked for *The Savoy*. Both Beardsley and Waydelin share the fate of an early death (Beardsley died at 26); and the scene in which the narrator comes to visit a bed-ridden Waydelin is astoundingly similar to the very first time Symons ever met Beardsley in person, as "he was supposed, just then, to be dying; and as I entered the room, and saw him lying out on a couch, horribly white, I wondered if I had come too late" (Symons, *Aubrey* 7). Even the conversations between the narrator and Waydelin follow the same "sentiments" that Symons had concerning Beardsley and his art:

> And here let me say that I have no concern with what neither he nor I could have had absolute knowledge of his own intention in his work. A man's intention, it must be remembered, from the very fact that it is conscious, is much less intimately himself than the sentiment which his work conveys to me. (Symons, *Aubrey* 22)

Akin to Symons, the narrator of *The Death of Peter Waydelin* is "puzzled" by the painter and he "could not get further with him [Waydelin] than a certain point", something which compels the protagonist to think out the problem that his existence poses to him (Symons, *Spiritual* 158,160). This is why Symons, in his essay *Aubrey Beardsley*, does not set out to give a comprehensive critical analysis of the artist, instead he simply wishes to analyse his works as they exist to him.

Their eclectic nature so full of "self-assurance" and "the childishness of a genius" (Symons, *Aubrey* 14) is that of artists who have "a very serious and adequate theory of art at the back of all [their] destructive criticisms", which they express through "a salt, whimsical dogmatism, equally full of convinced egoism and of imperturbable keen-sightedness" (Symons, *Aubrey* 14,15). The accuracy of this last statement is further reinforced if one takes a glimpse at how both Beardsley and Waydelin, in Symons' opinion, pour those theories onto their canvases. The first striking similarity lies in their subjective vision of reality and how they transpose it into painting; Beardsley, like Waydelin, "set himself to see things as patterns […] he swept together into his pattern all the incongruous things in the world, weaving them into congruity by his pattern" (Symons, *Aubrey* 29-30). Not only does Waydelin use almost the same words, but he also further elaborates on his grotesque style which is a consequence of this vision by stating that:

> There is not one of those grimacing masks, those horribly red faces, plastered white or red, leering professionally across a gulf of footlights, or a café-table, that does not live, live to the roots of the eyes, somewhere in the soul, I think! And if beauty is not the visible spirit of all that infamous

flesh, when I have sabred it like that along my canvas, with all my hatred and all my admiration of its foolish energy, I at least am unable to conjecture where beauty has gone to live in the world. (Symons, *Spiritual* 162)

It is exactly in this way that Symons describes and sings the praises of Beardsley's art, in that "he was always drawing to himself, out of the order of art or the confusion of natural things, the thing he wanted, the thing he could make his own" (Symons, *Aubrey* 22). Both painters make things "their own", they trace them back to their essentials and their art "becomes a question of form" in which one leaves in "only the hard outlines, leaving out all that lies between" (Symons, *Spiritual* 161). In fact, as Symons stated: "the secret of Beardsley is there; in the line itself rather than in anything, intellectually realised, which the line is intended to express" (Symons, *Aubrey* 27).

Both the narrator of *The Death of Peter Waydelin* and Symons describe the works of art of Waydelin and Beardsley by saying that they are "brutal", that they are meant to shock people. Nevertheless, it is also true, as Symons himself explains, that it is precisely "because [they] love beauty that beauty's degradation obsesses [them]" (Symons, *Aubrey* 22). In their desire to express their vision, without caring much for the general public's disapproval, Waydelin and Beardsley worked with the intensity of artists who know that they will burn like a flame and disappear quickly; they "hasten to have done their work before noon, knowing that they will not see the evening" (Symons, *Aubrey* 13). And it is incredibly interesting how this last sentence perfectly depicts the very last moments of Waydelin's life, in which he quite literally hastened to draw his final portrait for there would not be a tomorrow for him.

This said, I argue, however, that the greatest figure of importance, in the creation of the fictional painter Peter Waydelin, in his style and conception of art, is a painter who Symons knew personally and with whom he had many chances to quibble about art, namely Whistler. Many similarities between the two can be found by comparing Symons' analysis of Whistler in his *Studies in Seven Arts* and the artistic disquisitions found in *The Death of Peter Waydelin*. In the way they go about art, both artists share a personal way of seeing things; Whistler "touched nothing, possessed nothing, that he did not remake or assimilate in some faultless and always personal way" and that leads him to see "each thing in its own way, within its own limits" (Symons, *Studies* 127,128). This personal view of nature and reality is completely shared by Waydelin, something which we see in one of his conversations with the narrator when he states: "All art, of course […] is a way of seeing, and I have my way" (Symons, *Spiritual* 160). And his own vision of things is

one which he acquired by seeing more than normal people, a way of painting which consists of a summarisation of reality, focusing on the essential elements of it (Symons, *Spiritual* 160). To this extent, they both embody the qualities of a visionary, people who are able not to simply recreate and mimic things on their canvas, but to reshape reality from their subjective perspective, for as Whistler himself asserted: "The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, or flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer" (Symons, *Studies* 133).

For painters like Whistler and Waydelin, seeing things not as they are but with their own impressions is the highest degree of mastery in art. Painters have the great task of having to nurture their skill not in form but in choice, for the artist is the one who "is born to pick and choose, and group with science, those elements, so that the result may be beautiful" (Symons, *Studies* 133-134), a sentiment that Waydelin expresses by stating that a process of choice and technique is what the painter requires to create pure beauty out of their aesthetic vision and natural things (Symons, *Spiritual* 160).

Leaving the pure theorisations on art aside, it is interesting to notice that Waydelin resembles Whistler even in his concern for art and his tendency to talk about it "chiefly in the abstract", with great concern for "the artist's attitude towards nature and its materials" (Symons, *Studies* 123). The significance of the conversations between the narrator and Peter Waydelin also seems to draw a parallel between Symons and Whistler, especially in Symons' recollections of his talks with this great painter. On this basis, the perplexity of the narrator and the utmost confidence of Waydelin in his art can be seen as, perhaps, a refashioning of Symons' long talks with Whistler, thus consolidating the strong connection between the two painters and the instructive influence Whistler had on Symons. The two artists also share an infatuation for Japanese art which they took as a source of inspiration; in the same way in which Whistler "learned the alphabet of decorative painting" (Symons, *Studies* 129) from the Japanese, it was Sada Yacco[7] who taught Waydelin art (Symons, *Spiritual* 173). In addition, the element of teaching is closely tied to the concept of art, and this is seen in the way Symons praises Whistler and states that "the way of looking at nature, which is what art has to teach you, or to do in your place, can come only from the artist" (Symons, *Studies* 144), something which is

[7] See Freeman's annotated version of *Spiritual Adventures* pp 196: "Sada Yacco was a geisha, dancer, and actress. She performed in London at the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill Gate in May and June of 1900."

exactly paralleled in *The Death of Peter Waydelin*. In fact, it is the long and strenuous discussions on art between the narrator and Waydelin (and even the realisation of his sacrifice for his art in the end) that enable the former to realise what Waydelin thinks of art:

> 'I am beginning to understand you', I said, 'and I have not always found it easy. When I admire you, it has so often seemed to me irrational. I am gradually finding out your logic Do you remember those talks we used to have at Bognor, one in particular, when you told me about your way of seeing?' (Symons, *Spiritual* 176)

In conclusion, aside from their keen interest in the combination between strangeness and beauty (Symons, *Studies* 139) and the utilisation of unusual tints to represent light or nature, perhaps the most striking resemblance between Waydelin, Whistler and Symons too, lies in the view on art outlined in the following passage:

> In our time, art is on its defence. All the devouring mouths of the common virtues and approved habits are open against it, and for the most part it exists on sufferance, by pretending to be something else than what it is, by some form of appeal to public charity or public misapprehension; rarely by professing to be concerned only with itself, and bound only by its own laws. (Symons, *Studies* 134)

These artists knew that they did not need to worry about the public's opinion, nor about their artworks being misconstrued, for, like Waydelin, they did nothing "without being sure that [they were] doing a beautiful thing" (Symons, *Spiritual* 162).

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