

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## **‘The Double Blossom of Two Fruitless Flowers’: The Androgyne in the 1860s Artwork of Simeon Solomon and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s ‘Hermaphroditus’ (1866)**

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Connected initially by a shared love of Classical literature, Simeon Solomon and Algernon Charles Swinburne met in 1863 and quickly developed a friendship that lasted the best part of a decade until Solomon’s first arrest in 1873, after which Swinburne began to distance himself from his friend. Swinburne and Solomon enjoyed a shared interest not only in the classics, but also in mythology and their association eventually produced, as Thais E. Morgan remarks in her 1993 article, ‘some of the most aesthetically innovating and morally daring work of the 1860s and 1870s’ (Morgan, 62). She notes that this was a friendship not only forged ‘within the context of overlapping circles of men interested in the arts’ but also with the specific intention of ‘challenging the hegemony of Victorian respectability’ (Morgan, 65). During the 1860s, Swinburne and Solomon produced work with a distinct focus on expanding the boundaries of artistic morality, and both were frequently criticized in the press for impropriety and degeneracy even while simultaneously praised for their talent. Sarah Banschbach Valles notes that Swinburne and Solomon both assaulted ‘contemporary notions of morality and sexuality’ and in so doing ‘created for their readers a new, kaleidoscopic view of morality and reality’ (Banschbach Valles, 133). Poet and artist alike morphed reality to their own perception through their shared representation of androgynous figures to create this ‘kaleidoscopic view’ that offered a challenge, amongst other things, to accepted Victorian expressions of gender and gendered behavior as coded by the dominant structural ideologies of the nineteenth century – namely, the church and the state. While a handful of scholars, including

Banschbach Valles, Elizabeth Prettejohn, and John Y. LeBourgeois have previously brought Swinburne and Solomon together, charting their parallel interests across a visual and literary culture, and others, such as Natalie Prizel and Colin Cruise, have examined their creation of the androgyne individually, none has yet offered a sustained engagement with their *shared* construction of androgyny. By placing Solomon and Swinburne in direct conversation with one another, I trace the ways in which they flout and contest Victorian gender ideologies in their depiction of their androgynes and highlight how the androgynous figures they present are demonstrative of a wider dismantling of binary codes in their work. In Solomon's paintings *A Saint of the Eastern Church* (1867), now known as *A Greek Acolyte*, and *Heliogabalus, High Priest of the Sun and Emperor of Rome, 118-122 AD* (1866), as well as the study of the lost painting *Sacramentum Amoris* (1868), the artist depicts these supposedly male figures as androgynes, thus realising, as Solomon himself suggests, their 'highest and most spiritual form' (Solomon, *LtFL*). Swinburne, on the other hand, in his poem 'Hermaphroditus' (1866), depicts a similar mingling of gender that is inherently erotic rather than spiritual. Swinburne's androgynes challenge the boundaries of normative sexuality, offering instead a sexuality that is non-reproductive and based in the pleasure of the woman rather than the man. Thus, Swinburne and Solomon aim to disrupt the ideology encoded within a dominant Anglican tradition in a comparable way, developing instead a multifaceted vision of gender non-conformity and so-called deviant sexual practices.

<2>In order to fully appreciate what Solomon and Swinburne depict in their androgynous figures, we must first understand which social conventions they flout. The late nineteenth century marked a period of transition in which anxieties about gender resided at the forefront of the cultural consciousness. Conditions of gender in the nineteenth century, around which, according to Herbert Sussman, the 'male body and mind' were shaped were highly essentialist and aimed to rigidly adhere to an ideology of separate spheres with distinct roles for men and women (Sussman, 4). In his 2012 study on masculine identities, Sussman establishes masculinity in the Victorian age as highly industrialized, formulated around action and creation, while femininity was defined as predominantly passive, with women encouraged to defer to male authority. For example, John Ruskin, the influential writer and critic who had been painted by Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais in 1853, wrote in 1865 that

the man's duty as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the maintenance, in the advance, and in the defence of the state. The woman's duty as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state. (Ruskin, 91)

Here, Ruskin's claim illustrates much of the societal attitude towards gender around the time both Solomon and Swinburne were working. Gendered roles, traits, and aesthetics were widely understood to be predominantly separate with very little crossover. However, Solomon and Swinburne both placed their work in opposition to this essentialism in every sense, not only in the Victorian formulation of masculinity, but also by their refusal to adhere to other binary codes.

<3>Solomon brings together many seemingly opposing binaries in his work, such as Hebraism and Hellenism. Elizabeth Prettejohn pays particular attention to his use of this philosophy, originally popularized by Matthew Arnold. In his 1867 text *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold defines Hebraism as the adherence to a Jewish religious past, and Hellenism to the Greek philosophy. Arnold further notes that 'these two forces we may regard as in some sense rivals – rivals not by necessity of their own nature, but as exhibited in man and his history' (Arnold, 129). He establishes these as an essentially oppositional binary, and further claims that 'between these two points moves our world.' He argues that these points reside at opposite ends of a spectrum and that all artists 'exalt and enthrone one of the two', using the other solely as a foil to the preferred (Arnold, 130). Prettejohn suggests that Solomon expertly and uniquely balances these two elements in his work, however, and I argue that this is further extended to include his presentation of other non-Anglican religious practices rather than just the Greek philosophy and the Jewish past (Prettejohn, 39). Solomon crafts a middle ground, a beautiful combination of these two opposing forces, not only in this conflation of Hebraism and Hellenism, but similarly in his union of the masculine and feminine. Solomon creates a multifaceted, (or, as Banschbach Valles terms it, 'kaleidoscopic') version of the world in his art, illustrated through his androgynous, and thus spiritually superior, figures. As Arnold theorizes of Hebraism and Hellenism, so too are the masculine and feminine rivals 'not by necessity of their own nature', but rather because of the oppositional meaning placed upon them by social convention (Arnold, 129). Consistently, Solomon places himself between these points of opposition, rather than adhering to the ideals of masculinity within which earlier Pre-Raphaelite artists situated themselves, and so uses the androgyne to expand upon the challenges to his cultural landscape in the same manner as did Swinburne with his portrayals of deviant sexuality.

<4>The figure of the androgyne, in their destabilisation of gender, and the deviant sexual being both destabilize the dominant Anglican socio-religious culture of the late nineteenth century. All of the works I discuss in this essay occur in the decade following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the groundbreaking work that contributed in part to the Anglican church's growing state

of flux in the latter half of the nineteenth century as increasing advancements in science and the industrial revolution challenged the authority of organized religion. This text was part of a larger cultural moment that accelerated fears about the failing authority of the church in the context of rapidly developing scientific advancement and social questions. While the church's doctrines surrounding sex aimed to limit sexual contact outside of conventional heterosexual marriage, expressly forbidding the kind of desire entrenched in Solomon's work, Jeffrey Weeks highlights that this limiting was often 'haphazard and patchy' (Weeks, 30). He writes that while the dominant religion 'had a critical role in shaping sexual norms and behavior', this was only further enforced by early sexologists who, in the words of Timothy Jones, 'overemphasized the role of Christian tradition within sexual culture' (Jones, 920). That is to say that it was not only the Church of England, but the culture in which it operated as a whole, that set out the construction and regulation of sexuality in the nineteenth century. To circumvent this, Swinburne and Solomon both often used pagan or non-Anglican Christian figures in their depiction of the androgyne which allows them to sidestep the ire of the dominant religious ideology. While Swinburne and Solomon were certainly not alone in their depiction of the pagan, especially among Pre-Raphaelites, this choice did provide them with an additional opportunity to craft the androgyne as an individual who subverts elements of the Church of England by presenting imagery that exists entirely outside of it. By crafting their imagery specifically in this way, both were able to depict instances of non-normative sexuality and gender by taking advantage of the distance in time and space that these pagan figures offered. In Solomon's work, for instance, he crafts male and gender-ambiguous figures, placing the emphasis on, as Dominic Janes argues, 'a legitimation of same-sex bodily contact', with pagan and non-Anglican Christian themes, resulting in highly sensuous and embodied scenes. In using this kind of imagery, concerns around the moral code of the church are somewhat bypassed and Solomon is able to present both gender non-conformity and same-sex intercourse as a purifying, spiritual connection rather than a dangerous one.

<5>By experimenting with gender non-conformity alongside his fellow Pre-Raphaelites, Solomon was able to follow a slightly different tradition. He emphasized an art style that challenged the same structures of the dominant artistic culture that Solomon had previously defied in his kaleidoscopic representations of the religious past. The initial Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was formed in 1849 by a group of men associated with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Everett Millais. They aimed to create art 'suitable for the modern age' by defying contemporary artistic conventions and emphasizing 'precise, almost photographic representation of even humble objects' (Landow). The rich colors, flat lighting, and often medieval-inspired subject matter identified the movement as in contrast to what was, at the

time, mainstream Victorian art based upon an often puritanical morality. Sussman writes of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that they ‘inscribe[d] [the] process of masculinization’ by ‘creating a visual style that incorporate[d] the values of entrepreneurial manliness’ – they crafted images that sought to define the masculine Victorian man as a figure of action and creation (Sussman, 140). It is, I suggest, through depictions of masculinity that Solomon differs fundamentally from the rest of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. While, as Frank Sharp notes, Solomon, working predominantly in the 1860s, was ‘the last of the artists who can be definitively identified as Pre-Raphaelite’, he nonetheless diverges from their style as much as he adheres to it (Sharp, 25). Furthermore, Debra Mancoff identifies that, while Solomon’s work differs significantly from that of the original Brotherhood, he nonetheless ‘formulate[s] his artistic direction – in style, subject, sentiment, and even ambition – on the Pre-Raphaelite model’ (Mancoff, 31). The majority of Pre-Raphaelite works featuring a single figure (as in the single-figure examples chosen from Solomon’s portfolio for this essay) depict women. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blue Bower* (1865) and *Proserpine* (1874), for instance, depict the type of model coined by Rossetti as a ‘stunner.’ Models such as Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris had broad, rather than dainty features, usually with a prominent nose, brow, and chin. According to Henrietta Garnett, it was models such as these who ‘introduced a new concept of female beauty to the Victorian public’, one that was somewhat more masculine than the established standard of femininity (Garnett, *xii*). This is a pattern consistent throughout Pre-Raphaelite art, yet it nonetheless sits within the comfortable gender ideology of the nineteenth century, with the women often remaining passive subjects to the artist’s brush even in spite of their unconventional beauty. In contrast to this new model, Solomon instead often depicts what appear to be feminine men, rather than masculine women, as he explores what Mancoff calls ‘an aesthetic of difference in his exploration of androgynous and homoerotic beauty’ (Mancoff, 35). He exalts these beautiful figures precisely because they are in conflict with Victorian social convention.

<6>For Solomon, the creation of beauty is ever prevalent in his work, while for Swinburne unconventional sexuality and sensuality are foregrounded, though he nonetheless challenges convention in a similar way. Swinburne’s depiction of the mingling of the male and female in ‘Hermaphroditus’ is an inherently erotic process, an aspect entirely more subtle in Solomon’s work. Swinburne, while not a founding member of the Brotherhood, was intimately acquainted with the members of this circle, and lived for a time with Dante Gabriel Rossetti at 16 Cheyne Walk (Everett). His poetry, much like the artwork produced by the Brotherhood, embodies not only significant visual detail, but also transgression, while proclaiming a distance from this due to time, mythology, or cultural difference. Swinburne, however, may be

read as far more explicitly transgressive than Solomon: Valles states that, for Swinburne, ‘meaning can [only] be found in the collision of oppositions’, as distinct from Solomon’s elegant balancing of conflicting parts, which is inherently indicative of, as Morgan reminds us, ‘confrontation and transgression, which are Swinburne’s characteristic modes’ (Valles, 121, Morgan, 322). For Swinburne, perverse sexuality is the predominant subject – Richard Dellamora remarks that, to this day, Swinburne’s poetry ‘retains the capacity to shock readers.’ He cites Swinburne’s own affirmations that ‘great poets are bisexual; male and female at once’ to illustrate his interest in what he calls ‘nonstandard sexual practices, or [...] literary hermaphrodeity’, which he consistently demonstrates in his poetry (Dellamora, 69; Swinburne, *CWS*). Dellamora writes that, in ‘Hermaphroditus’, Swinburne ‘both parodies and disparages conventional sexuality while celebrating bisexual fantasy and experience,’ remaining sexually explicit throughout in order to achieve this (Dellamora, 82). The very literary hermaphrodeity he creates is essentially and inherently erotic and, therefore, requires such explicit depictions in order to function as Swinburne intends.

<7>Swinburne’s poem is a key example of the complex impropriety in his work. In 1866, he writes that ‘there is nothing lovelier [...] than the statue of Hermaphroditus’, the subject of a poem of the same name in his *Poems and Ballads* from earlier that same year. He writes in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* that the ‘divided beauty of separate woman and man’ is ‘a thing inferior and imperfect’ when compared to the ‘original hermaphrodite’ of Platonian legend. He adds that ‘supremacy is solitude’, indicating that it is in the infertility of the hermaphrodite and their inability to ‘serve all turns of life’ that makes them ideal compared to the individual man or woman. Here he suggests that it is the very ambiguity of the statue’s gender that makes it beautiful to him and that this encouraged his decision to commit the myth to verse. (Swinburne, *Notes*, 17-18). In the Greek myth, Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, is physically and spiritually unmanned – as Swinburne describes it, ‘all thy boy’s breath softened into sighs’ (l. 55) – by the water nymph Salmacis when she, in intense lust for him, wraps herself around his person and begs the gods that they never be parted. Sophie Chiari, in her summary of this myth, notes that Hermaphroditus had been ‘one of the paragons of male beauty’, a perfect example of Greek masculinity, and that after he is forever merged with Salmacis he ‘vowed that anyone bathing in [her pool] should henceforth be similarly transformed’ (Chiari, 12). Rather than depicting this with horror or anxiety, however, Swinburne establishes that the fusion of these two beings is the achievement of ‘perfection’, adding that ‘once [this is] attained on all sides [it] is a thing thenceforward barren of use or fruit’; Swinburne revels in this state of ‘use[less]’ perfection (Swinburne, *Notes*, 18).

<8>He deploys in this poem a consistent vocabulary of sterility paired with natural imagery to associate it with natural beauty: ‘the double blossom of two fruitless flowers’ (l. 39), ‘a thing of barren hours’ (l. 42). In the second stanza this is amplified, expanding to include the unproductiveness of their union: ‘turning the fruitful feud of hers and his / To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss’ (ll. 18-9), emphasising barrenness. The double use of alliteration here (‘fruitful feud’ / ‘waste wedlock’) creates a doubling pattern that emphasizes the ways in which their union is entirely sterile, no longer fruitful as it had the potential to be had Salmacis’ lust not overcome her. The potentially ‘fruitful feud of hers and his’ instead becomes a ‘waste wedlock’, a non-reproductive sexual union. The use of the word ‘sterile’ to describe the kiss not only establishes the fruitless – literally, unable to produce children – nature of their union, but also Hermaphroditus’ disdain and complete lack of passion for Salmacis. The combined Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Swinburne suggests, is beautiful and perfect not despite their sterility but because of it. The combination of these two beings into one crafts a perverse, sterile creature who is successfully representative of non-normative sexuality, as Dellamora suggests is consistently Swinburne’s intention (Dellamora, 69). The sterility here exalted by Swinburne threatens to destabilize the expectation of sexuality for both genders in the dominant Victorian culture – women were usually expected to remain passive and reproduce, whereas the male partner was expected to remain in control, adhering to what Weeks identifies as ‘the male-dominate power structures which shaped sexual life’ – structures that were taken for granted in spite of and alongside ‘rapidly shifting realities’ of Victorian sexuality that formed a ‘patchwork of many different sexual cultures’ (Weeks, 30). Victorian sexuality could and did traverse multiple realities, but the binding force between them, Weeks presents, was often the reliance on male power. This is not what happens in the poem. The social roles are not only inverted but also further combined, and the result emphasizes pleasure primarily for the female partner rather than the male over reproductive function. Salmacis’ ownership and control of Hermaphroditus destabilizes his sexual power by placing her own pleasure above that of the male partner over whom she gains control, thus also removing the possibility of a reproductive relationship. Hermaphroditus here becomes the sexual subject, unable to write the scripts of his own desire while Salmacis seizes power that should, in the typical power structures that Weeks identifies, be assumed as his.

<9>Formally, the poem consists of four sonnets of fourteen lines featuring a repeated, consistent rhyme scheme that follows the traditional Petrarchan pattern, where the rhyme scheme changes at the volta as a question is posed or a statement made. This rigid structure opposes the fluidity of the subject matter; the strict sonnet form to which Swinburne adheres acts as a formal boundary within which the

impossible fusion of opposite bodies takes place, transgressing normative social structures. Additionally, the Petrarchan sonnet traditionally bears connotations of an unreachable, idealized form of love, specifically for an unattainable female. This is completely inverted in Swinburne's poem, whose narrator is an unnamed third party, an omnipotent viewer who, while adhering to the idea of the gaze present in the traditional sonnet form, connotes a perverse voyeurism. The object of the poet's desire, therefore, is not the unattainable female, but the unattainable androgyne – the act of merging the male and female form into one perverse, unproductive creature becomes the object of the poet's desire rather than Salmacis or Hermaphroditus individually.

<10>In the opening stanza, Swinburne withholds the gender of the subject, at this point a male Hermaphroditus, by referring to them as 'thy' (l. 1). By utilising direct address, Swinburne avoids gendered pronouns altogether, allowing himself to later establish the confused and combined gender of the subject. He follows this by introducing a series of binary codes: 'choose of two loves' (l. 6), 'two loves at either blossom of thy breast' (l. 7), 'until one be under and one above' (l. 8). These consistent patterns of doubling and opposition highlight the notion of two opposites – two genders – inhabiting the same body at once and emphasizes the inherent eroticism of this fusion: 'two things turn all his life to blood and fire' (l. 12). While in this line 'fire' could refer to sexual passion, it also has a more literal meaning, especially when placed alongside 'blood' to connote violence. Swinburne continues this pattern with another binary opposition: pleasure and pain: 'A strong desire begot on great despair, / A great despair cast out by strong desire' (ll. 13-4). In this couplet, he not only presents an opposition in the content, but also in the mirroring of the lines. This encourages an inseparable connection between the contrasting elements of the line and in so doing emphasizes the sadomasochism of both the speaker and the object of his desire, the combined Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Subsequently, Swinburne continues to pair opposites together throughout the poem – 'upon thy left hand and thy right' (l. 33), 'so dreadful, so desirable' (l. 50) – to establish the combination of man and woman when 'thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis' (l. 53). On an emotional level this merging is entirely without love, especially on the part of Hermaphroditus. This stanza describes the forceful nature of their fusion and how this taints the union, preventing love from ever arising: 'so with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath / Love turned himself and would not enter in' (ll. 27-8). The use of the word 'veiled' to describe Cupid's blindfold, suggestive of a bridal veil, additionally feminizes Love and further suggests he is unable to see such a perverse coupling, thus refusing to bless it. However, despite the apparent horror the personified Love expresses, the overall tone of the poem remains distinctly erotic and with apparent perversity, therefore, is extolled and revelled in by Swinburne.

<11>Swinburne's poems, and 'Hermaphroditus' in particular, Allison Pease argues, 'threatened to destabilize the socially constructed norms of male and female behavior' due to 'their representation of what was perceived as masculine women and feminine men', and 'Hermaphroditus' is no exception. (Pease, 43). Pease succinctly presents the focus of Swinburne's work: this destabilisation of binary sexual codes. Hermaphroditus is feminized by Salmacis' attack, and the non-consensual merging of bodies as well as the lack of love is marked as perverse. The love Swinburne depicts repeatedly in *Poems and Ballads* is transgressive in its altering of normative modes; in 'Hermaphroditus' as the prime example of this essay, there is inference of male rape as Hermaphroditus is unmanned by the transformation: 'make thee woman for a man's delight' (l. 36). This line suggests that Hermaphroditus is reduced to a passive partner, the 'woman', and thus object, regardless of intention or consent, to suffer beneath Salmacis' delight, who here, as the person whose wish granted their eternal union, becomes the active, dominant, 'male' partner. This, building on Pease's argument, is a clear destabilisation of acceptable Victorian sexuality that emphasizes the ideal passivity of the female partner. Here, the female partner is active in her quest to satisfy her desire, but she also uses this desire to overpower and dominate Hermaphroditus, an act which then both literally and figuratively emasculates him. Not only are these two opposites eternally bound, but the very action of this is flipped from what is conventional as the woman's desire and strength takes precedence over the man's. This is emphasized consistently by the prominence of the 'barren' (l. 42) nature of their union, and negative connotations of such a coupling that 'is not love but fear' (l. 43). This love is transgressive because it is not productive, and furthermore, the female partner is active in expressing her sexuality in relation to which the male partner is positioned as the unwilling recipient.

<12>This may have tapped into cultural anxieties about woman's place in society, coming only fifteen years after the 1851 census that showed a surplus of women of marriageable age. Without enough male suitors to marry, many women were forced (or seized the opportunity) to seek appropriate employment in droves. With a significant number of middle-class women seeking to expand their previous role, the "woman question" became a frequent topic of debate in the press. The idea of a woman having the ability and power to sexually overpower a man was perhaps the natural extension of cultural anxieties about woman's place. Yet, Swinburne revels in the transgression when he cites this love as 'so dreadful, so desirable, so dear' (l. 50). He notes in the final line of the poem that Love, 'being blind' (l. 56) cannot know the unnatural nature of this union. This is a prime example of Swinburne's famed sadomasochistic tendencies, which is the principal focus of much of his work, not only through the suggestion of rape, but also through the positioning of love and

pain in conjunction with each other throughout the poem. Swinburne challenges Victorian hegemony further by writing such sexually explicit poetry. Unlike Solomon, Swinburne does not seek to achieve the highest spiritual form of humanity, but seeks to provoke the heteronormative erotic state of Victorian poetry in the ‘perversity’ he depicts, discovering the beauty and perfection in these unorthodox portrayals of sexuality.

<13>Unsurprisingly, Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* was met with condemnation from popular publications such as *The Athenaeum* and *The London Review*, both of which criticized the ‘deliberately and pertinently insincere’ nature of his writing, and his focus on ‘lust, bitterness, and despair’ (*The Athenaeum* 2023, 137; *The London Review* 13.318, 130). However, this was anticipated on Swinburne’s part. The decision to depict and praise such unusual, even perverse, visions of love is integral to the very core of his poetry. *The Athenaeum* critic further suggested that, in this volume, ‘pure thinking is treated with scorn, and sensuality paraded as the end of life’ (*The Athenaeum* 2023, 138). This fleshliness was often a point of criticism against members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, too. Robert Buchanan, in his famously scathing review, accused the Brotherhood of being ‘intellectual hermaphrodites’, a charge which called their masculinity into question through the highly embodied depiction of their subjects (Buchanan, 335). Swinburne revels in such charges, however. His poetry is, indeed, highly embodied and erotic, but as per Rossetti’s rebuttal – that the body is ‘naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times’ – he resists this (Rossetti, 793). Swinburne’s own response further attests that critics such as these ‘were made to throw dirt and stones with impunity at passers-by of a different kind’, arguing that the transgressive nature of his poetry, in opposition to the convention at the time, did not suffice as grounds for criticism (Swinburne, *UM*, 56). Swinburne’s repeated attention to the perfection of such a fleshly form in ‘Hermaphroditus’, despite its sterility, shows that he sees not only the body, but the combined, superior soul.

<14>While Solomon also received mixed reviews of his work, these often appear far gentler, combined with praise of his talent and technical skill where such praise of Swinburne’s work is lacking. The reviewer for *The Art Journal* goes so far as to identify that ‘Solomon seldom tread[s] on the confines of common-place’, adding that his pictures ‘generally have about them traits which are decidedly uncommon, and yet perhaps not entirely commendable’ (*The Art Journal* 51, 71). This suggests that, contemporarily, Solomon was criticised for the deviance in his works, albeit alongside praise for his daring and skill. In this instance, the reviewer presents the lack of commonality in his work despite its unconventional nature as a positive feature, while balancing it against gentle criticism as to its respectability. While

much of Solomon's work received similar reviews, the dynamic at play here suggests that this reviewer is partial to the risks Solomon takes, despite criticising their result. These are risks Solomon takes across his portfolio, but especially during this period of the late 1860s when much of his best work is produced. Solomon's *A Saint of the Eastern Church (A Greek Acolyte)* (1866) was, conversely, praised by the reviewer of *The Athenaeum* for its 'look of luxury' that they describe as 'almost sensual,' however the reviewer goes on to add that the painting 'too obviously lacks manliness to satisfy us', ultimately conceding that it is beautiful despite this shortcoming (*The Athenaeum* 2154, 215).

<15>These two reviewers share opinions of Solomon's work on *A Saint* – that the artist is technically skilled and exceptionally talented, but that the subject matter is too feminine for common praise. The heavy use of gold in this painting provides the luxury the reviewer describes, and the long dark hair and soft, rounded features of this painting provide the feminised look of which the reviewers are less fond. This painting shares Solomon's typical style of facial construction with both *Heliogabalus* and the study for *Sacramentum Amoris*, as well as several other paintings; it is in Solomon's distinctive style. Each of these figures' faces are rounded and softened, glancing away from the viewer, eyes lowered to suggest supplication. Out of the three, *A Saint* is the most obviously masculine, owing to a visible touch of facial hair, yet the similarities in expression, both facially – all share almond-shaped eyes and broad, straight noses – and in terms of technique, are striking. Cruise notes of *A Saint* that Solomon 'employs a highly stylised and personal concept of male beauty in which the features combine the stereotypes of Greek Orthodox icons and the emerging classical type of Solomon's imagined ideal' (Cruise, 133). Solomon's ideal is thus a figure of classical imagination, much like Swinburne's, and his stylisation emphasises the feminine traits rather than the masculine to create this androgynous or male-adjacent characterisation in the painting.

<16>This form of ideal male beauty is even more clear in *Heliogabalus*; it is another painting that is highly typical of Solomon's style, except this piece is based upon a real historical figure. Cruise remarks that 'the emperor's cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity are hinted at in the pose and costume' (Cruise, 136). Much like *A Saint*, the subject of *Heliogabalus* is glancing away from the viewer, but this is combined with further feminising details such as the elegantly wrapped shawl, and the curved, suppliant pose, suggesting a more traditional femininity. Prettejohn adds that Elagabalus was 'an archetype of deviance' who 'declared himself to be both a woman and the Sun-God', thus combining these two aspects of personhood into one, a feature that is captured powerfully by Solomon (Prettejohn, 45). Solomon's choice

to depict the emperor Elagabalus is a provocative one. Elagabalus famously ‘challenged traditional notions of power’ and is a remarkably exoticised figure of deviant sexuality and gender expression, so much so that he is considered by scholars like Eric R. Varner and Louis Godbout to be the first transgender woman – however, since this is merely speculation based on context, and such terminology would have existed at neither the time Solomon was painting nor the time Elagabalus was alive, I continue to use masculine pronouns in line with current criticism (Varner, 198). Varner highlights that Elagabalus was met with ‘recurrent charges of effeminacy’ and, additionally, that his attempts to ‘endow himself with female genitalia’ may have originated from what he calls ‘the ambivalence concerning gender embedded in the eastern cult of the sun god’ of which Elagabalus was a high priest (Varner, 200-01). Solomon’s painting uses gold contrasted against black to highlight the binary of light and dark, male and female, between which Elagabalus exists. Additionally, the golden halo the subject wears is indicative of the cult of Elagabal, around whose gender ideologies Elagabalus formed his famously deviant expression of gender. In the very act of depicting such a provocative subject, Solomon comes the closest to explicit sexual deviance in line with Swinburne. *Heliogabalus* is the most Swinburne-esque of his paintings – not only because of the deviant figure at its heart, but because of the classical subject likely influenced by Swinburne’s presence in Solomon’s life, and the temporal difference between Solomon’s painting and the subject matter allows for a proclamation of distance from such deviance, in true Pre-Raphaelite style (Valles, 121).

<17>Another sexually deviant figure, almost entirely nude and standing with eyes coyly averted, is Solomon’s *Sacramentum Amoris*. While only the 1868 study for this painting exists, the 1890 print by Frederick Hollyer allows us to see what Solomon’s completed painting (although without color) looked like. The figure depicted in Hollyer’s photograph is more obviously a mixture of the masculine and feminine than the study, with a large, square chest visible; however, the face remains rounded and feminine in true Solomon style, and the long hair, flowers, and cape all add to this, as do the small, dainty hands. The original Solomon is lost, most likely because his patron, Frederick Leyland, disliked the painting and almost certainly sold it out of his collection. Roberto Ferrari speculates that ‘Leyland had seen this study early on, mistook the figure for a woman, and was unaware of Solomon’s intention to further increase the androgyny of the finished figure’ (Ferrari, 52). The great attention to detail paid to the face, the most feminine area of this figure, as well as a body far slenderer in the shoulders and rounder in the face than the finished piece, provides credence to Ferrari’s suggestion. The study depicts a figure decidedly more feminine, while Hollyer’s print shows a figure perfectly positioned between two genders, placing it in contrast to the entirely feminised depiction of

Elagabalus in the previous painting. For Solomon, androgyny is the highest form of spiritual and physical love – perhaps emphasised by the title of *Sacramentum Amoris*, which translates to ‘The Sacrament of Love’, or, more simply, ‘marriage’ – a union of these two aspects that achieves the combined image of the androgyne. Unlike *Heliogabalus*, *Sacramentum* is not representative of the deviant. The animal skins the figure wears suggest a pre-contemporary time-period and the buildings in the background are indicative of a classical period, providing the all-important pagan radical distance between the artist and their work, and is further evocative of a non-normative eroticism. The title of this piece, which translates to ‘mystery of love’, suggests that it is this figure, the androgyne, that embodies and encompasses the highest form of spiritual love, rather than the solely erotic.

<18>The embodied and highly sensory nature of this study is a feature common to both Swinburne and Solomon throughout their work. While Swinburne achieves this through language, emphasising the sexual nature of his figures and inciting sadomasochism, Solomon attains this through his creation of rich colors and the depiction of decadent fabrics and exquisite locations, as shown in the animal skins in *Sacramentum Amoris* and the heavy use of gold in *A Saint*. Both create multi-sensory work that invokes some level of tactile engagement through the way it is crafted. In ‘Hermaphroditus’ this is achieved through the repeated invocation of body parts and their descriptions: ‘sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed’ (l. 17). In this line the combination of sibilance and alliteration creates a sense of movement when spoken aloud, and the repetition of the word ‘sex’ with the additional ‘sweet’ in front of it provokes the sense of taste when combined with the lips that follow, the formulation of the line with the verb at the end implies an additional wedding not only of genitals, ‘sex to sweet sex’, but also of other body parts, ‘with lips and limbs is wed.’ Additionally, words such as ‘dew’ ‘fire’ and ‘sighs’ conjure multiple sensory aspects that align with this moment in the 1860s that sits between Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic art forms, both of which favored a heavy use of the sensory – smell, touch, taste, and sound. Fire is used especially often by Swinburne, and its frequency alongside the repeated references to water ‘dew, showers’, ‘water’s kiss’, emphasise yet another seemingly binary opposition that comes together to create a multi-sensory image of a potentially devastating opposition – fire destroys, while water destroys fire in turn. In Solomon’s work, however, this sensory affect is achieved predominantly through sight and touch – the Pre-Raphaelite style emphasises the texture of fabrics and surroundings, and Solomon follows this trend, too, but his inclusion of censers in paintings such as *A Saint* and flowers across all three paintings allows for the addition of olfactory experience to be inferred.

<19>Constructed with parallel attention to sensory detail, Swinburne and Solomon's work evinces not only a shared classical subject matter, but also a shared interest in the classical world and in the deviant gender and sexuality that one can depict there. Though one Roman and one Greek, *Heliogabalus* and 'Hermaphroditus' each demonstrate sexual dissidence and gender non-conformity while using this classical space to create distance from the contemporary culture. This is also evident in *Sacramentum* and *A Saint of the Eastern Church*, as each portrays moments in time or place somehow removed from Solomon's own Judeo-English experience. By showing images temporally removed from the contemporary moment, albeit in a different way than is typical of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, Solomon and Swinburne claim artistic distance from their work, allowing them to retain a modicum of respectability while continuing to present work that challenges Victorian decency. This is also achieved through Solomon's religious difference – being a Jewish artist painting Greek Orthodox and classical figures, Solomon establishes the same physical distance from his work that earlier Pre-Raphaelites achieved by depicting fantastical and medieval scenes. Nonetheless, the androgynes Swinburne and Solomon create indicate a refusal to adhere to Victorian modes of respectability and a challenge to normative morality. Dellamora writes that, for Swinburne, 'the imaginative body proves to be more supple than the moral imagination', and thus provides more scope for art, and the same may be said of Solomon (Dellamora, 83). Both artist and poet create figures that blur the boundaries between the male and female, between binary codes of social interaction, and in so doing create, in Solomon's mind, a superior spiritual being and, in Swinburne's, a perfectly perverse erotic state. They, thus, express and explore deviations unabashedly and are successful in their presentation of their own perspective of sexual and spiritual freedom. While the critical reception of their work was mixed, the conflict their work created, either within itself or in terms of reception, indicates that each succeeded in pushing the boundaries of sexual propriety and so developed their own niche for eschewing the confines of Victorian socio-sexual norms.

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