

## Algernon Swinburne, Anthropologist

John Holmes

On 26 October 1869, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne wrote to his friend the art critic William Michael Rossetti, telling him: "I have begun (for my 'Songs of the Republic') another mystic atheistic democratic anthropologic poem called 'Hertha'" (*Letters* 2: 45). Swinburne's note to Rossetti might seem little more than a throwaway remark, a characteristically exuberant list of his current enthusiasms, bearing at best a circumstantial relation to one another. Yet, the first three terms on his list are clearly apt to his second collection of poems, eventually published in January 1871 as *Songs Before Sunrise*. This collection is openly democratic in its politics, blasphemously anti-Christian, and quasi-mystical in its rhetoric, which has been aptly described by David Riede as "bardic or prophetic, as though presenting an established truth rather than perceiving and creating truth" (181-82). Given this correlation between Swinburne's stated intentions and the book itself, it is worth asking how the fourth of his terms might apply to this same collection. In what sense can "Hertha" and other poems from *Songs Before Sunrise* be described as "anthropologic"? What models of anthropology might Swinburne have had in mind? Do his poems work with the data of anthropology, or do they in some sense undertake the work of anthropology themselves? How does Swinburne's anthropology bear on his mysticism, his atheism, his democratic politics? And what might his poems reveal about how poetry can claim to contribute to a scientific discipline, whether in practice or in principle?

By positioning Swinburne and his poetry within debates on the aims and methods of anthropology in the 1860s and 1870s, it is possible to see that his description of *Songs Before Sunrise* is not merely fanciful, but an integral component in his poetic project in this collection. For all that the tone of his letter is characteristically playful, there are good grounds for taking Swinburne's description of his poems as "anthropologic" seriously. The Council Minutes of the Anthropological Society of London record that Swinburne was elected a Fellow on 4 April 1865 (Royal Anthropological Institute Archives, A 3.1: 114). The Anthropological Society had broken away from the Ethnological Society two years earlier, partly on the pretext that, as the Ethnological Society now admitted women to its meetings, it was impossible for male scientists to discuss with propriety the full range of subjects pertaining to the study of human beings. Swinburne's friend, the explorer Richard Burton, who was a Vice-President of the Anthropological Society, used it as a forum for discussing the sexual habits and physiologies of non-Europeans, as did the pornographer Edward Sellon. This attention to sexuality has typically been seen to account for his involvement in the Society, together with the Anthropologicals' general predilection for causing offense, exemplified by their naming their dining society the Cannibal Club.

Like Burton and Sellon, Swinburne relished notoriety and perversity. Both the "Cannibal Catechism" that he wrote for his fellow Anthropologicals and the comic segue he makes from "cannabalic [*sic*] anthropology" to sadomasochism in a letter to Lord Houghton in January 1869 reflect this shared predilection (*Letters* 2: 2). (For earlier discussions of Swinburne and the Anthropological Society, including the "Cannibal Catechism," see: Gosse and Lutz.) Nevertheless, the three volumes of the *Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London*, which Swinburne

owned (*Uncollected Letters* 2: 129), include only six short papers principally on sexual practices.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that sex and sexuality were relatively marginal concerns within the Society as a whole. Swinburne's own membership of the Society postdates the writing of most of the poems in his first controversial collection *Poems and Ballads*, published in 1866, after which his own preoccupation with exotic and perverse sexuality, at least within his poetry, diminished. What is more, he kept up his membership into the twentieth century, long after the Anthropological Society had reunited with the more respectable Ethnological Society to form the Anthropological Institute. This is confirmed by the lists of Fellows of the Anthropological Institute (Royal Anthropological Institute Archives, A 31.3), which include Swinburne throughout the period from 1872 to 1897. There is a gap in the record at this point, but the lists included periodically in the back matter of the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* confirm that his membership did not lapse until some point between January 1904 (vol. 33) and March 1906 (vol. 35).

Although Swinburne may well have been drawn into the Anthropological Society by the sexual curiosity he shared with Burton and others, his on-going commitment to the field and its institutions cannot be attributed to this same cause. Swinburne is only recorded as having spoken at one meeting of the Anthropological Society, during a discussion on James McGrigor Allan's paper on "Europeans, and Their Descendants in North America" in March 1868. On this occasion he cited the poetry of Poe and Whitman, the essays of Emerson, and representative democracy as evidence that, contrary to Allan's arguments, American culture was not merely an inferior derivative of European culture (Allan cxlv-cxlvii transcribed in Swinburne, *Uncollected Letters* 1: 129-30n). But his long membership of the Anthropological Society and the Anthropological Institute suggest that, even if he did not contribute to their debates directly, his interest in the subject was, at least by his own lights, genuine and sustained.

There is a long tradition of reading "Hertha" and other poems from *Songs Before Sunrise* as articulating Swinburne's, at times, contradictory responses to evolution and positivism (Stevenson 49-52; Beach 455-69; Tillyard 87-103; Roppen 175-209; Ridemour; McGann 38, 198, 248-53; Riede 107-14; Murfin 48-64; McSweeney 133-34; Holmes 46-49). While this article will revisit these themes, it will foreground instead the science of anthropology, which Swinburne himself identifies in his letter to Rossetti as a key theme in this collection. The first half of the article will consider how Swinburne's conception of humanity in *Songs Before Sunrise* relates to attempts by leading figures within the Anthropological Society, the Ethnological Society and the early Anthropological Institute to define their methodologies and their object of study. The negotiations which led to the formation of the Anthropological Institute in 1871, at the same time as Swinburne was writing *Songs Before Sunrise*, offered a new opportunity to redefine the anthropological project. Swinburne's poems participate in this debate.

The second half of the article will examine in more detail the model of anthropology embodied by four of his poems in particular: "Hertha" itself, alongside "Hymn of Man," "Genesis" and "On the Downs." Through poetry, Swinburne was able to recast the epistemic values and the methods of anthropology. This is not to claim that his intervention had any significant impact on the discipline itself. Beyond his own letter, no evidence has come to light that *Songs Before Sunrise* was read as a work of anthropology at the time, nor that it has been since. Nor, aside from a passing allusion to his later classical drama *Erechtheus* in an 1882 paper on girl sacrifice (Walhouse 419), are there any references to Swinburne's poetry in any of the journals

of the Anthropological Society or its successor. Nevertheless, *Songs Before Sunrise* provides a window onto a key moment in the definition of this science in Britain in the 1860s and 1870s, and a glimpse of an anthropology that might have been.

At the same time, by considering Swinburne on his own terms as an "anthropologic" poet, we can better understand the scientific basis, as he saw it, for the mysticism, atheism and democracy he championed in his poems. Swinburne's engagement with anthropology is unique among Victorian literary writers. Unlike Thomas Hardy, he shows little obvious interest in how the methods of ethnography can shed light on survivals from our own past; unlike Robert Louis Stevenson, he is unconcerned with comparisons between savage and civilized cultures in his own time. (On the engagement with anthropology by Victorian authors including Hardy and Stevenson, see the pieces by Radford and Reid in the Works Cited below.) Moreover, he pays no attention to the concrete materials of archaeology or anthropology: the collections of artefacts from around the world that would form the basis of museums such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Horniman in London. Instead, *Songs Before Sunrise* offers a distinctive conception of how poetry can be scientific without overtly incorporating the data, methods or vocabulary of the science to which it contributes. To appreciate how it is an anthropological collection in its own right, we need to read it against the grain of reasonable expectations for what we might recognize as an affinity with anthropology in a literary work. In so doing, it is possible to see the full scope of Swinburne's ambition for poetry in relation to his chosen science.

### 1. Placing Swinburne as an Anthropologist

The 1860s was a key decade for the definition of anthropology as a science in Britain. In May 1863 the new Anthropological Society of London published the first issue of its principal journal the *Anthropological Review*. This inaugural issue opens with an "Introductory Address on the Study of Anthropology" given at the Society's initial meeting on 24 February 1863 by its founder James Hunt, two years before Swinburne became a Fellow. Hunt's address, delivered *ex cathedra* as President of the Society, sets out the terms of reference for its science. In it he urges his colleagues to "show the public that the origin of Man is a question of physical science which can have no light thrown on it by authority or tradition" (16). Throughout, he stresses the need to ground anthropology in scientific fact. The "great problem of Anthropology," he insists, "can only be settled by *facts*, and not by abstract logic" (6; original emphasis). The anthropologist must "take a lesson from the geologist, and found a science on *facts*" (7; original emphasis). These facts must be "exact details" collected according to a "systematic plan" (11). Ultimately, he tells the Fellows of the Society, they must decide:

whether we shall go on playing with the so-called science of man, or whether we shall be content to give up all dogmas, confess our ignorance as to knowing anything about the laws regulating man's origin or development, and be willing to begin *de novo*, only basing our opinions on actual demonstrable facts, and arguing solely from the logical inference from such *data*. (13)

As Efram Sera-Shriar has noted (128-30), anthropology as Hunt defines it is a robustly Baconian science. Through his assiduous empiricism, Hunt casts himself as a champion of scientific method against "authority and tradition," much as T. H.

Huxley – a bastion of the Ethnological Society – was doing at the same moment. Yet, Hunt's insistence that anthropology is fundamentally a "physical science" grounded in "demonstrable facts," belies his pose of neutrality. So too does his apparently incontestable, if curiously insistent, reiteration that:

We must always be ready to change our theories to suit our facts. As knowledge advances, it is absolutely necessary that the theories of every honest scientific man should change. True science cares nothing for theories, unless they accord with the facts. (9)

As George Stocking ("What's in a Name?"; *Victorian Anthropology* 247-57), Ronald Rainger and others have shown, the principal reason why Hunt seceded from the Ethnological Society was because of its liberalism, not as regards gender, but as regards race. (See also: Desmond and Moore 332-66; Sera-Shriar 109-46.) Hunt's insistence on the primacy of physical anthropology in his "Introductory Address" is a move to shore up the science of race by prioritizing the "data" which most vividly indicates difference. Comparing their principal journals, Stocking (*Victorian Anthropology* 250) points out that there were three times as many papers on physical anthropology published in the Anthropological Society's *Memoirs* as there were in the Ethnological Society's *Transactions*. By stressing measurable differences, Hunt and his colleagues could establish "facts" which, when correlated with anecdotal evidence of the apparent savagery or incapacity of non-white races, legitimized the inference that races were fundamentally distinct and that only in the white race was humanity fully realized.

In his "Address," Hunt is scrupulously careful not to decide *a priori* between the competing theories of monogenism, which held that human beings are all descended from one stock, and polygenism, which argued instead that the different human races have distinct origins and are therefore, in effect, separate species (9-10). His racial politics are evident nonetheless. In spite of his caution with regard to unsubstantiated theories, he confidently asserts:

In the political world the subject of "race" has been playing so prominent a part that the dullest legislator must begin to see that political institutions are not simply the result of the statesman's genius, but that there are higher laws in operation, to counteract which all his efforts are useless. It is true that in the present state of our science we can offer no positive dogmas to the politician; but we see enough to know that laws are secretly working for the development of some nations and the destruction of others; which it is both the province and the duty of the politician to assist in discovering.

(12-13)

Hunt's ominous remarks about "higher laws" determining the "destruction" of subordinate races or "nations" sound like the more egregious forms of Social Darwinism, yet his aim is to refute Darwin's own argument that all people share a common heritage by appealing to the "facts" of physical difference. At the same time, where the evolutionary anthropology that would be developed by E. B. Tylor, J. F. McLennan, John Lubbock and Augustus Lane Fox (later Pitt Rivers), on foundations laid by Darwin, Huxley and Wallace, was predicated on mankind's capacity to change over time, Hunt's insistence on racial difference ascribed a taxonomic fixity to the different kinds of human being which set limits to any such evolutionary change. (On

Victorian evolutionary anthropology, see: Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 144-85; Sera-Shriar 147-76.)

While Darwin's monogenism was broadly endorsed by the Ethnological Society, Hunt's polygenism was the dominant tendency within the Anthropological Society (Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 250). Politically, it was reflected in the support the Society gave to the fight to maintain slavery in the South during the American Civil War and to the campaign to exonerate Governor Edward Eyre from the charge of murder after he used summary executions to suppress a revolt by black workers in Jamaica. Scientifically, it took the form of a sustained campaign to demonstrate that the different human races were in fact different species. Within the Society, this began with Hunt's notorious pamphlet *On the Negro's Place in Nature*, reprinted as the first paper in the *Memoirs* (1: 1-64). It continued through such papers as Richard Burton's "Notes on Certain Matters Connected with the Dahoman," which detailed the sexual curiosities of an African tribe with the ostensible aim of "restoring the Negro to his Proper Place in Nature" (*Memoirs* 1: 321); William Bollaert's "Introduction to the Palaeography of America" (*Memoirs* 1: 169-94), with its discussion of "the Red species" (169); the naval commander Bedford Pim's "The Negro and Jamaica," which was followed by three cheers for Governor Eyre when it was read out at the Society (71-72); and John Bower's "The History of Ancient Slavery" (*Memoirs* 2: 380-401), which asserted that "up to the present day the black and white species cannot contract marriages with each other except under penalty of barrenness in the third generation at the farthest" (401).

Given that Swinburne was a Fellow of the Anthropological Society, Hunt's articulation of the methods and aims of anthropology as he intended it to be practised within the Society, and as it was practised in papers such as these, is an obvious starting point for considering Swinburne's own perspective on anthropology. Yet, for all that Swinburne paid tribute to Burton on three separate occasions in his poetry – in the "Dedication" to *Poems and Ballads: Second Series* (1878), in a sonnet in honour of Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights* in *Poems and Ballads: Third Series* (1889), and in a brief elegy "On the Death of Richard Burton" in *Astrophel and Other Poems* (1894) – his own "anthropologic" collection shares neither the empirical commitment to the collection of physical "data" nor the virulent racism which Burton himself shared with Hunt. Swinburne barely considers the physical characteristics of humanity at all in *Songs Before Sunrise*. His one hint at the theme of race comes in the "Epilogue" to the collection, where he characterizes "The many-minded soul of man" as coming "From one incognisable root / That bears such divers-coloured fruit" (279). There is no direct reference to physical properties here, but Swinburne's metaphorical use of colour suggests an analogy with race. But this analogy works according to a monogenist not a polygenist logic, as these differently coloured souls all share the same origin.

Swinburne's political stance was likewise opposed to that of the leadership of the Anthropological Society. Stocking estimates that "whereas there were three Liberals for every Tory among the 'ethnologicals,' among the 'anthropologicals' this ratio was reversed" (*Victorian Anthropology* 251). As a democratic radical, Swinburne would have been in an even smaller minority. In the "Prelude" to *Songs Before Sunrise*, he imagines the human soul as communing "With the actual earth's equalities" (2). This egalitarianism contrasts starkly with Hunt's denigration of non-white races. Hunt claimed to be appalled at the brutalities of the slave trade, yet he insisted that slavery as practiced in the southern United States was a benign feature of the status quo, fit for the negro's place in nature (*Memoirs* 1: 27-28, 54-56, 59-60).

Swinburne admitted in a letter to his friend John Nichol that he had a residual sympathy for the South in the Civil War, partly because he had friends who fought on both sides, and partly because the southern states were asserting "the divine right of insurrection." Yet, he insisted that the two causes were far from being "equal in worth" and that it was the North that embodied a moral "heroism" (*Letters* 1: 251).

In *Songs Before Sunrise*, Swinburne pays tribute to the North's anti-slavery cause in his celebration of its poet. "To Walt Whitman in America" finds the germ of freedom and common humanity at once in slaves and in kings. Across the volume as a whole, "slave" becomes a byword for all kinds of oppression and submission. In the volume's "Dedication" to Joseph Mazzini, "slaves" bring the Italian revolutionary leader "the hate-offering of wrongs" to fuel his revolution, even as Swinburne himself offers up his "handful of songs" (v). Recalling the mind-forged manacles of Blake's "London," Swinburne identifies "fettered flesh with devastated mind" in "The Eve of Revolution," urging his reader "Open thy soul to see, / Slave, and thy feet are free" (17). Echoing Byron, he asks of Crete – the site of a recent revolt against Ottoman rule celebrated in "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia" – "Earth, dost thou feed and hide now none but slaves?" (14), only to answer that "light is here" (15) even though the revolt has been suppressed. In "Before a Crucifix," again, the Church is charged with having made men into "slaves" even as Christ's "word was passed to set men free" (95). And in "An Appeal," written against the impending execution of three Irish Republicans in Manchester in November 1867, those calling for the death penalty are themselves cast as the unwitting slaves of a tyrannical state. Far from being a reflection of the natural order, slavery is for Swinburne the type of the political evils that humanity is struggling to outgrow.

For Swinburne, this political development is part of an evolutionary process. His evolutionism in poems such as "Hertha" and "On the Downs" again sets him apart from Hunt. Evolution appealed to Swinburne for precisely the same reason that Hunt rejected it: its promise to naturalize the nineteenth century's halting and partial, but at times dramatic, progress towards equality and democracy. Read as a developmental rather than a merely haphazard process, evolution was readily mapped onto Whig or Revolutionary theories of history as progress. The evolutionary anthropology developed by Lubbock, Tylor and Lane Fox within the Ethnological Society was predicated on these same progressive assumptions. On this basis, it might seem that, while Swinburne was a Fellow of the Anthropological Society for personal reasons – principally his friendship with Burton – his political, and therefore his anthropological, affinities were rather with the Ethnological Society.

This interpretation gains weight if we consider another of Swinburne's networks in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Under the editorships of G. H. Lewes and John Morley, the *Fortnightly Review* became Victorian England's leading liberal intellectual periodical, with a strong commitment to materialist science. Tylor, McLennan and Huxley were regular contributors to the *Fortnightly*. So was Swinburne. Over the ten years from 1867, when Morley took over the editorship, Swinburne published fifteen poems in the *Fortnightly*, close to half of all the poetry published by the journal over those years. Four of these poems – "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia," "The Halt Before Rome," "A Watch in the Night" and "Super Flumina Babylonis" – were incorporated into *Songs Before Sunrise*. Perhaps, then, when Swinburne described his poems as "anthropologic" to Rossetti, he was thinking less about the anthropology of the Anthropological Society and more about the anthropology published in the *Fortnightly Review*. After all, the first instalment of McLennan's "The Worship of Animals and Plants" was published in the *Fortnightly*

in the very month when Swinburne wrote to Rossetti, while Huxley's "On the Methods and Results of Ethnology" had come out in June 1865, a couple of months after he joined the Anthropological Society.

Yet, while the contrast between the values and methods of Swinburne's poetry and the evolutionary anthropology of the Ethnological Society and the *Fortnightly Review* is less stark than that between Swinburne and Hunt, the affinities between them are, on closer inspection, largely superficial. In "On the Downs," Swinburne projects a "forceful nature ... That within all men lies at wait / Till the hour shall bid them climb / And live sublime" (234). This may resemble structurally the narrative of evolutionary anthropology, but the promise Swinburne holds out is not civilization but freedom, and the process he imagines is far more explicitly teleological. McLennan's attention to primitive or savage customs, anticipated by Tylor in his earlier *Fortnightly* essays "On the Origin of Language" and "The Religion of Savages," could be seen to parallel Swinburne's fascination with ancient mystery cults in *Poems and Ballads*. Andrew Wilton (21) has drawn a similar parallel between the close attention paid to the myth of Proserpine in the painting and poetry of Swinburne's friends Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Meredith and J. G. Frazer's study of the same myth in *The Golden Bough*. But, for all that "Hertha" takes its title and persona from an ancient Germanic Earth goddess mentioned by Tacitus (317), this is no longer a significant concern in his expressly "anthropologic" collection *Songs Before Sunrise*. Furthermore, as in this example, Swinburne's sources, like those of his friends, are typically classical, not ethnographic.

Swinburne's claim that "Hertha" and related poems are "anthropologic" seems close to foundering. *Songs Before Sunrise* bears no resemblance to anthropology as defined by Hunt, the leader of the Anthropological Society, and only a passing similarity to the evolutionary anthropology of the Ethnological Society. If we focus in, however, on the moment of transition from the Anthropological Society to the new Anthropological Institute – the precise moment when Swinburne was writing these poems – a third model of anthropology becomes visible, one which held out the prospect of a new conception of the science. Hunt died aged only 36 on 29 August 1869 (Lorimer 1033), two months before Swinburne began work on "Hertha." Negotiations for a merger between the Anthropological and Ethnological Societies had already been underway for some time. The change of direction within the Anthropological Society was signalled in July 1870 with the launch of a new periodical, *The Journal of Anthropology*, to replace the *Anthropological Review*. The lead article in the first issue set out, in the words of its title, "The Aim and Scope of Anthropology," as Hunt had done in the first issue of the *Anthropological Review* seven years earlier.

The author of this article was Charles Staniland Wake, then Director of the Anthropological Society. Wake took a leading role in the negotiations with the Ethnological Society and went on to become the first Director of the new Anthropological Institute, with Lubbock representing the Ethnologicals as its first President. (On Wake's life and career, see Needham's biographical record of him, together with his introduction to his edition of Wake's *The Development of Marriage and Kinship* [viii-xiv]. Needham also provides a full bibliography of Wake's writings in his edition [xliii-xlvii].) For a brief period from around 1868, when he published his researches with the Anthropological Society as *Chapters on Man, with the Outlines of a Science of Comparative Psychology*, until 1872, when he was replaced as Director of the Institute by E. W. Brabrook in a putsch by the old Ethnologicals, Wake was one of the most prominent anthropologists in Britain, with considerable

institutional authority. In some ways he was a cross-over figure. The other papers he published in the short-lived *Journal of Anthropology*, before it was replaced in turn by the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, addressed typical concerns of the Anthropologicals, such as the physical characteristics of native Australians, or their more recherché interests, such as phallic religions (see: Works Cited below). After the Ethnologicals took control of the Anthropological Institute, Wake joined Burton and others in forming the London Anthropological Society in 1873. This sought to recreate the old Anthropological Society of London, but it collapsed in 1875 through lack of interest and support. Yet, he remained a member of the Anthropological Institute throughout, and had always held by the monogenist theory of human origins when the Anthropologicals *en masse* embraced polygenism. At the same time, his accounts of the emergence of civilization through stages traceable in surviving savage groups in *Chapters on Man* and his subsequent book *The Evolution of Morality*, published in two volumes in 1878, bear a clear resemblance to those developed by Tylor and Lubbock at much the same time.

Although Wake may appear to be a mere intermediary, his account of the aims and scope of anthropology is in fact highly distinctive. For both Hunt and Huxley, anthropology is a means of discriminating different kinds of human, the “‘persistent modifications’ or ‘stocks,’” as Huxley puts it (257), whether these are ultimately deemed varieties, races or species. Even for the evolutionary anthropologists, the task is to establish a hierarchy of human cultures, more or less correlated with these different types, which can be mapped onto a supposed developmental progress over time. For Wake, on the other hand, opening the new *Journal of Anthropology*, “anthropology has relation chiefly to mankind *as a whole*” (“Aim and Scope” 3). It is therefore not principally concerned with difference but “rather ... with *resemblances*” (4). The “general aim” of anthropology is, for Wake,

the generalisation of the phenomena which are displayed by mankind as a whole, so as to discover the laws of human being, in relation to its continued activity, past, present, and future, as well as, if possible, to define the nature of that being itself. (4)

Physical anthropology may be helpful for the purposes of classification, but “Classification is,” Wake suggests, “not the ultimate aim of anthropology” (8), and physical characteristics are “strictly subsidiary to the mental characters associated with them” (5). In studying “mankind as a whole,” then, we need to concentrate principally on “the *products* of thought” which “exhibit, more or less directly, the operation of the mental faculty peculiarly distinctive of man,” principally “*social phenomena, ... language, religion, and morals*” (5).

In proposing this inclusive, generalizing model of cultural anthropology, Wake cites an earlier paper on “The History of Anthropology” by the Cambridge academic Thomas Bendyshe, published in 1865 in the first volume of the *Memoirs* of the Anthropological Society (1: 335-458). In this paper Bendyshe – at the time a Vice-President of the Society alongside Burton – defines anthropology as “that science which deals with all phenomena exhibited by collective man, and by him alone, which are capable of being reduced to law” (335; cited in Wake, “Aim and Scope” 3). Bendyshe’s definition is in one sense more exclusive than Wake’s. As Wake himself notes, “the fundamental phenomena of human being ... are exhibited also by the inferior animals” (3). But it also encompasses an even wider scope, embracing, in Bendyshe’s words, “the whole domain, from the origin of mankind to its ultimate



destiny and extinction as a species" (335). It thus takes in not only ethnography, archaeology, geology and palaeontology, but also history:

All histories presuppose some common principle of action to races and to nations, however different in many respects, to which they appeal, and from which they derive almost all the interest they possess. Such principles are common, in fact to man, or, as we may say, to humanity.... could there be a man so endowed as to explain how those common principles have operated from the origin of man, and produced all past and present history, such a man would certainly be profoundly skilled in history, but would be still more entitled to be called the first of anthropologists. (336)

Bendyshe's claim that human history can be explained by common principles holds out the promise that those same principles will explain the "whole domain" of anthropology, that is, the trajectory of the human species as a whole. We should even be able to deduce our destiny from our history and prehistory. Yet, Bendyshe does not presuppose that that trajectory will necessarily reveal our evolution from savagery to western civilization, nor that different racial types will illustrate the steps along the way.

In their conceptions of anthropology, Bendyshe and Wake represent a position within the Anthropological Society distinct from that taken by Hunt and Burton. Bendyshe and Swinburne were friends when they were both Fellows of the Society (Swinburne, *Letters* 1: 227n). In 1868 they spent Christmas together at King's College, Cambridge, chatting about atheism, anthropology and De Sade (*Letters* 2: 2-5). Swinburne wrote his "anthropologic" poetry in 1869 and 1870, at the same time as Wake was redefining anthropology on lines similar to those sketched out more briefly by Bendyshe a few years earlier. On the evidence of *Songs Before Sunrise*, Swinburne's main affinities as an anthropologist are with their minority position within the Anthropological Society. In "Hymn of Man," he boldly affirms the unity of mankind; in "Genesis," he returns us to our origins; in "Hertha" and "On the Downs," he traces our evolutionary becoming as a historical destiny. Together, these four poems provide the "anthropologic" underpinning for his "mystic atheistic democratic" ideals. To quote the self-consciously scientific vocabulary of "The Eve of Revolution," they reveal the "laws that work not wrong" and define the "natural force in spirit and sense" (27) that guarantees and impels the drive towards liberty across the collection as a whole.

## 2. The Anthropology of *Songs Before Sunrise*

"Hymn of Man" is Swinburne's most strident affirmation of the unity of humankind. This poem was written as a damning counterblast to the First Vatican Council, summoned by Pope Pius IX, which sat from December 1869 to October 1870. Swinburne began it in October 1869, the same month as "Hertha," and completed it in February 1870, revising it for publication that August (*Letters* 2: 37, 87, 89, 120). The Vatican Council shored up the principle of papal infallibility, defining it as a dogma, an act that was seen by radicals as a hostile but futile attempt to stem the tide of secularism and popular revolution in Italy and elsewhere. Swinburne's political mentor Mazzini denounced the Council as "a pitiful aristocracy, created and consecrated by power" (726) in an open letter published in English in the *Fortnightly Review* in June 1870. In "Hymn of Man," Swinburne revived the anapaestic hexameters of "Hymn to Proserpine" – the most defiantly anti-Christian poem from

his first collection – to join in Mazzini's defiance of the authority of the Catholic Church and to prophesy its end.

Alongside his political objections to the Church, Swinburne challenges Christian theology, calling into question the existence of a creator God and arguing instead that such a God is a projection called into being by the needs of his human creators. In place of this fallacy, he suggests, we should take collective humanity itself as our God:

Thou and I and he are not gods made men for a span,  
But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man.  
Our lives are as pulses or pores of his manifold body and breath;  
As waves of his sea on the shores where birth is the beacon of death.  
We men, the multiform features of man, whatsoever we be,  
Recreate him of whom we are creatures, and all we only are he.  
Not each man of all men is God, but God is the fruit of the whole;  
Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible body from soul. (112-13)

If Swinburne's interpretation of the Christian God recalls Feuerbach, his elevation of "man" into "a God" in his own right is clearly indebted to Comte and Positivism. But it chimes too with Wake's conception of anthropology as the study of "mankind *as a whole*." Swinburne generalizes "man" from "the substance of men." The lines which follow steer us to take this "substance" literally, that is to say, bodily, as the collective "God" is imagined as a body in his own right, comprised by implication of our own pulsing bodily lives. This imaginative embodiment of God gives palpable form to the monism that Swinburne sets up against the dualism of Catholic Christianity which, Mazzini argues, necessarily causes "antagonism between earth and heaven, matter and spirit, body and soul" (714). At the same time, it reinforces Swinburne's insistence that all men contribute to the collective "man," regardless of their "multiform features," and regardless too of how these features may lead other anthropologists such as Hunt to classify them. In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman – another of Swinburne's democratic heroes – celebrates the diversity of humanity through long lists of distinct individuals from different groups. Swinburne himself acknowledges and accepts these differences in "Hymn of Man" only to pass over them in affirming a shared identity.

In keeping with his monism, Swinburne goes on to incorporate the mental into the bodily "substance of men which is man." "Men are the heartbeats of man" (114), he writes, but also "Men are the thoughts passing through it, the veins that fulfil it with blood" (113). As the "pulses," "pores," "veins" and "heartbeats" of the new God suggest those of the men who comprise him, so his "thoughts" point to the thoughts of individual human beings. For the Swinburne of *Songs Before Sunrise*, as for Wake, the recurrent tendencies of our thoughts are more substantial than our various bodies and bodily experiences. In "Hymn of Man," Swinburne implies that Bendyshe's "common principle of action" lies in the newfound consciousness across human societies of the collective ideal embodied in the new God. Darwin proposes a similar account of the increasing reach of social and ethical values in *The Descent of Man*, published a month after *Songs Before Sunrise* in February 1871:

As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached,

there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. (1: 100-01)

In "Hymn of Man," Swinburne ruptures this "artificial barrier," urging his readers on towards a common human sympathy in the face of the punitive moral autocracy of the Vatican Council.

This parallel with Darwin notwithstanding, Swinburne's rhetoric and the structure of his argument in "Hymn of Man" is revolutionary, not evolutionary. Elsewhere in *Songs Before Sunrise* he turns more directly to Darwin and evolutionism to establish the anthropologic foundations of his political prophecies. In doing away with a creator God, Swinburne opens a space for constructing new creation myths. He gestures towards this possibility in the opening lines of "Hymn of Man" – "In the grey beginning of years, in the twilight of things that began, / The word of the earth in the ears of the world, was it God? was it man?" (109) – but he does not put much flesh on these nebulous bones in this poem itself. In "Genesis," by contrast, he offers a vivid and at times disturbing account of the origin of things, mankind included. Returning to ancient conceptions of a primeval Chaos, Swinburne imagines a "sad shapeless horror increate," the "very darkness that time knew not of," being "cloven in several shapes" (140):

Then between shadow and substance, night and light,  
Then between birth and death, and deeds and days,  
The illimitable embrace and the amorous fight  
That of itself begets, bears, rears, and slays,

The immortal war of mortal things, that is  
Labour and life and growth and good and ill,  
The mild antiphonies that melt and kiss,  
The violent symphonies that meet and kill,

All nature of all things began to be.  
But chiefliest in the spirit (beast or man,  
Planet of heaven or blossom of earth or sea)  
The divine contraries of life began. (141)

In "The Aim and Scope of Anthropology," Wake is careful to define the remit of anthropology as "'man,' in his totality, not as acted on by supernatural forces, but as a part of nature, and as presenting natural phenomena" (13). Swinburne too is scrupulous in excluding supernatural agents from his cosmogony. In an echo of classical myth and an anticipation of the Big Bang, the pre-existing non-existence is "cloven," but there is nobody who cleaves it. Things begin, they are not deliberately begun. The characterization of "nature" as an "immortal war of mortal things" recalls the struggle for existence described by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*, not only in general terms, but in Swinburne's specific emphasis on sexual reproduction as both a counterpoint to and a site of violent competition. The "illimitable embrace" leads without comment into the "amorous fight." The melting of lovers into one another is juxtaposed with the hostile meeting of circumscribed selves, yet the echo of the "kiss" in the "kill" binds these two contrasting aspects of life together. From these two drives – to reproduce and to kill in order to survive the fatal competition of the

perpetual "war of mortal things" – "all nature of all things" follows "of itself," without external intervention.

Wake was sceptical towards what he called "pure Evolutionism" in anthropology ("Aim and Scope" 14), but he recognized that evolutionary theory bore fundamentally on the subject nonetheless:

Let the law of evolution of organic forms be once established by the application of the principles of biology, and then anthropologists may apply that law to the phenomena presented by man, to see whether it furnishes a key to the problem of his origin. Anthropology, in its strict sense, has to do with man only when he appears with the structure and faculties which constitute him man, and when the principles which govern the origin of organic life have been established, then alone can anthropology, by the application of those principles, hope to account for human origin. (17)

In "Genesis," Swinburne follows Darwin in identifying "the principles which govern the origin of organic life" as the struggle to survive and the drive to reproduce. Naming these as the "divine contraries of life," he posits – or, rather, declares, as the poem is written in the vatic voice of myth, not the voice of argument – that they are "made manifest in men / From the beginning forth unto this day" (141). The specific way in which they manifest themselves within the poem is in a choice between "The white seed of the fruitful helpful morn" and "The black seed of the barren hurtful hours" (142). The former brings sorrow on those who choose it, but they end up honoured as "very God" (142); the latter tastes sweet but those who taste it end up reviled.

There are tensions within Swinburne's myth of human origins and nature in "Genesis" which remain unresolved in the poem itself. In contrast with the resolute monism of "Hymn of Man," there is a curious relic of dualism in the poem's claim that it is "chiefliest in the spirit" that the "divine contraries" can be seen to operate, and in the possibility that this spirit can be seen in a "Planet of heaven" as well as in living beings (or, on another reading, that "man" might be characterized in these same terms). The moral allegory of the black and white seeds is itself dualist in its structure, pitting goodness against the attractions and penalties of sin that fascinate Swinburne in *Poems and Ballads*. These reverberations of a Christian worldview, which *Songs Before Sunrise* as a whole suggests is moribund, may lead us to doubt how far the vatic voice of "Genesis" is the same as the follower of Mazzini who chants "Hymn of Man" or "The Eve of Revolution" – how far, that is, Swinburne endorses this myth as his own.

This ambivalence within the poem extends too to its anthropology. Wake's suggestion that anthropology needs to consider humanity's evolutionary origins is nevertheless couched in terms that imply that at some recognisable point we became "man." Yet, according to the gradualist logic of evolutionism, particularly as expounded by Darwin and his associates, there can have been no such single moment. In "Genesis," Swinburne fails, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to resolve this problem. On the one hand, he celebrates "the great labour of growth" (141), accounting for the suffering in nature through the need for new forms and modes of life to develop: "For if death were not, then should growth not be, / Change, nor the life of good nor evil things" (142). But this apparent affirmation of a purposive drive for change within the universe is undercut by the continuity of human life from "the beginning" onwards. In an idiom redolent of Edward FitzGerald's translation of *The*

*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, the poem declares of individual human lives "Time writes and life records them, and again / Death seals them lest the record pass away" (141; cf. FitzGerald 55-56, st. 49-53). Swinburne echoes the *Rubáiyát* again in the final stanza:

And each man and each year that lives on earth  
Turns hither or thither, and hence or thence is fed;  
And as a man before was from his birth,  
So shall a man be after among the dead.

(142; cf. FitzGerald 51, st. 28-30)

The stark finality of the closing rhyme reinforces this sense of purposeless fatalism. The duality of the divine contraries might have opened up the possibility of some dialectic progress to advance the "growth" promised earlier in the poem, but there is little hint of this here.

In "Genesis," the Darwinian cause natural selection has no significant evolutionary effect. Crucially, it does not sustain a progressive development of humanity such as might account for the emergence into self-consciousness of the collective "man" as promised in "Hymn of Man." In *The Evolution of Morality*, Wake proposes that what is required within anthropology is a synthesis of the "purely humanitarian view as to the origin of morality" as set out by Darwin and Spencer with "what may be termed the supernatural view of Kant" (1: 61; see: Zammito for a discussion of Kant's wider influence on early anthropology). Like Swinburne, Wake is attracted to the ideal of common humanity set up by Positivism, but in constructing his synthesis he seeks to push beyond it to something more comprehensive, arguing that "universal nature itself forms a single Grand-Etre," a "Supreme Being" constituted of "every individual, human, animal, or vegetable" on "all the planetary bodies throughout the universe" (2: 433). This "great whole ... shows its vitality in the evolution of organic nature," which can itself be "identified with God himself" (2: 433-34). In proposing this transcendental account of evolution, combining British and German traditions of anthropology, Wake extends and refines a conception of the universe as a single "infinitely extended and eternally existing organism," "an evolution from the Divine Organism," which he had proposed ten years earlier in the conclusion to *Chapters on Man* (316-17; for an introduction to the different national traditions of anthropology in England and Germany, see: Barth et al. 1-153).

Although his theological and political stance is very different from Wake's, Swinburne advances a comparable synthesis himself in his avowedly anthropologic poem "Hertha." As in "Hymn of Man" and "Genesis," he pursues Bendyshe's quest for the "common principles" of human action. In "Hertha," the "nature of all things" described in "Genesis" gets to speak in her own voice as an ancient Germanic mother-goddess. In reviving this forgotten deity, Swinburne breaks the residual link that remains in Wake's writing between the God that is nature and the God of Christianity. Like the Christian God, the God of "Hymn of Man" is explicitly anthropocentric and implicitly masculine: the poem's closing line is "Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things" (124). Hertha, by contrast, is an expressly female source of natural "forces" which generate "man and woman, and wild-beast and bird" (82). She is "Mother, not maker, / Born, and not made" (85). Yet, as well as being the all-mother, she is also the totality of nature itself, incorporated in all living things, including human beings, whom she addresses collectively in the final line of the poem as "Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I" (92). As

Wake would put it in *The Evolution of Morality* some years later, if "nature is identified with God" and man is "the final product of the evolution of nature—that is, of God," then man has a claim to be "described as a Grand-Etre" himself (2: 433-34).

In this closing line, Hertha identifies herself as encompassing the "Man" to whom Swinburne's "Hymn of Man" is addressed later in the volume. Near the beginning of the poem, she identifies herself with the two impulses – sexual desire and the violent struggle for life – that make up the "divine contraries" of nature in "Genesis," in terms that anticipate the monism of the "Hymn":

I the mark that is missed  
 And the arrows that miss,  
 I the mouth that is kissed  
 And the breath in the kiss,  
 The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the soul and the body that is.

(83)

Over the course of "Hertha," Swinburne bridges the divide between the origins imagined in "Genesis" and the culmination of human destiny prophesied in the "Hymn." In the process, he rehearses, without ever explicitly describing, an evolutionary narrative of human culture. The arrows and the mark – missed here, in a softening of the "violent symphonies" of "Genesis" – suggest hunting, which gives way three stanzas later to agriculture:

I the grain and the furrow,  
 The plough-cloven clod  
 And the ploughshare drawn thorough,  
 The germ and the sod,  
 The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower, the dust which is God. (84)

This in turn leads onto imagery drawn from mining and metalwork:

Hast thou known how I fashioned thee,  
 Child, underground?  
 Fire that impassioned thee,  
 Iron that bound,  
 Dim changes of water, what thing of all these hast thou known of or found?

Canst thou say in thine heart  
 Thou hast seen with thine eyes  
 With what cunning of art  
 Thou wast wrought in what wise,  
 By what force of what stuff thou wast shapen, and shown on my breast to  
 the skies? (84)

Blake's tiger stalks these lines. Swinburne called "The Tyger" "a poem beyond praise for its fervent beauty and vigour of music" in the critical essay he published on Blake a few years before (119). But where it is the tiger and the lamb that are made in Blake's poem, in Swinburne's it is mankind that is "wrought" of elemental matter. Both the technology and the art of the Iron Age are hinted at, simulating an appropriate myth for an iron-age culture such as the ancient Germans who worshipped the original Hertha. Swinburne's account of humanity's origins in this section of the

poem thus places ancient legends within a narrative arc substantiated by archaeology and expounded by anthropology.

In "Hymn of Man," Swinburne uses metaphors from both animal and plant life to characterize the relationship between individual humans and collective humanity. We are the "pulses" and "heartbeats" of the God that is man, and he is our "fruit." Both these biological analogies are given mythological expression in "Hertha." As the mother-goddess, Hertha's relation to human beings is cast in terms of our own animal biology. But she also casts herself as a great tree of which not God but all living things are the fruit:

The tree many-rooted  
That swells to the sky  
With frondage red-fruited,  
The life-tree am I;  
In the buds of your lives is the sap of my leaves: ye shall live and not die.  
(87)

Again, this image combines an ancient myth – Yggdrasil, the world-ash of Germanic mythology – with modern anthropology, or rather its evolutionary underpinnings. In mythologizing the tree of life constructed by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*, Swinburne also literalizes it. Like the German biologist Ernst Haeckel, he finds in the tree the perfect symbol of evolution as growth. (Haeckel's drawings of the tree of life have become ubiquitous in histories of evolutionary theory – see, for example: Bowler 193 and Ruse 180.) Swinburne's tree of life is oblivious to the needs of the individual lives that comprise it. As Hertha herself puts it, "my growth ha[s] no guerdon / But only to grow" (89). Yet, it is also fulfilled through budding and fruiting.

Hertha characterizes her "fruits" as "the lives of my children made perfect with freedom of soul" (89), insisting "I have need of you free / As your mouths of mine air" (90). Here the God is the tree, the fruits the individual lives. In strictly Darwinian terms, there is no reason why, as Swinburne put it in a second letter to William Rossetti in January 1870, "the principle of growth, whence and by which all evil not less than all good proceeds and acts, should *prefer* liberty to bondage" (*Letters* 2: 79-80; original emphasis). Hence his failure in "Genesis" to derive moral and political progress from the bare foundations of natural selection. But in turning from natural selection to the tree of life, and in turning that metaphor in turn into a mythic "life-tree," he gives himself license to follow through the logic of the image. The life of a tree is fulfilled through bearing fruit because those fruit go on to live their own independent lives, as do a mother's children. The oxygen given out by trees – "mine air," in Hertha's words – is essential to our lives, but successfully seeding new life is no less essential for the completion of a tree's life cycle. Swinburne's imagery in "Hertha" encompasses the aggregate of life as a single organism, an organism which comes to fruition in each individual life which comprises it, but which can also be seen to reach a crucial moment of maturation in the flowering and fruiting of "One topmost blossom / That scales the sky," the (monogenetic) "One birth of my bosom" that is mankind (92).

The "principle of growth" mythologized in "Hertha" is Swinburne's answer to Bendyshe's question as to what the "common principle of action" underlying human culture and history might be. Answering this question is the overarching problem of anthropology, as Bendyshe sets it, not least because in answering it anthropology can become not merely descriptive but predictive, even prophetic. But in setting out trends

in human development it can also help to bring them about. Hunt's rigid anthropological taxonomies had a political end in reinforcing established racial hierarchies. Swinburne's anthropology of growth is even more overt in its political radicalism. "Hymn of Man," "Genesis" and "Hertha" provide an anthropological underpinning for his revolutionary project, but they also seek to bring that revolution about. They at once predict, record and stimulate the maturation and fruition captured in the image of the life-tree.

This transition is staged most directly in the fourth of the "anthropologic" poems in *Songs Before Sunrise*. In contrast with the other three poems, "On the Downs" is voiced as a personal lyric, not a vatic prophesy. The speaker is discovered on a bleak English downland in winter, looking up at a dark sky and out at an empty sea which, like the land, shows no sign of human habitation. "I send mine eyes out as for news / Of comfort that all these refuse" (230), he declares, but he finds only further assurance that "watched of helpless skies, / Life hopeless lies" (231). Anthropologically, the choice of this landscape is significant, as it binds Swinburne's speaker to the pre-Roman past of southern England, much as barrows and tumuli anchor Hardy's imagination in the pre-history of his Wessex, and another stretch of downland captivates John Masefield's speaker in "Up on the Downs," from his 1917 collection *Lollington Downs*. Masefield's lyric only hints at an uncanny impression that something survives across time from the ancient British "tribe ... burning / Men in the frame" on the Downs (35). Swinburne by contrast affirms the continuity from one epoch to the next – "So is it now as it was then, / And as men have been such are men" (230) – with no suggestion that primitive savagery might separate our ancestors from our civilized selves. On the other hand, while Masefield's engagement with the landscape's past, like Hardy's in his poetry and fiction, is specific and explicit, Swinburne's is only an intimation, like the implied narrative of cultural development glimpsed through imagery in "Hertha."

The brief suggestion of a collective human identity through time in "On the Downs" is collapsed into a much shorter span of time as the speaker distinguishes the moment when the poem begins from a new, current moment "Here sitting chambered" (230), recollecting the scene. Structurally the move is Wordsworthian, as Swinburne's speaker recollects his earlier experience of the landscape. Yet, he is not tranquil so much as desolate. As his hopelessness mounts, it becomes increasingly apparent that the mood he detects in the landscape is a projection of his own, itself a misguided consequence of his insistent craving for "any God" (231). But Swinburne is setting his speaker up for a conversion. His soul, gendered feminine, asks repeatedly "Where is God?" and "Is there no God?" (232), only to be reproached by the speaker himself as a "fool" for failing to hear "the grey glad mother's song / Ring response from the hills and waves" (233). From this moment of realization, Swinburne's speaker speaks in a prophetic voice that is recognizable from the rest of the volume. The apparently personal lyric element within "On the Downs" is ultimately a dramatic ploy to enable the poet to act out the realization of his new political and spiritual vision; the vision itself is the culmination of the "principle of growth" that is the key to his anthropology.

The last ten stanzas of "On the Downs" resonate with "Hymn to Man," in mother earth's declaration that "There is no God, O son, / If thou be none" (233), and with "Hertha" in its celebration of "One God at growth" (234) and of evolutionary destiny:



One forceful nature uncreate  
 That feeds itself with death and fate,  
     Evil and good, and change and time,  
 That within all men lies at wait  
     Till the hour shall bid them climb  
     And live sublime.

For all things come by fate to flower  
 At their unconquerable hour,  
     And time brings truth, and truth makes free,  
 And freedom fills time's veins with power,  
     As, brooding on that sea,  
     My thought filled me. (234)

In "Hertha" and "On the Downs," Swinburne suggests that a process that is itself morally neutral – Darwinian natural selection – can nevertheless have a moral culmination: the flowering and fruition of a free humanity as a "topmost" branch of the tree of life. What is distinctive about "On the Downs" is that it stages that moment of culmination within an individual. In the process, an alienated and dejected solitary is transformed into a conscious member of a collective humanity, acquiring a new voice – the voice of *Songs Before Sunrise* as a whole – in the process. His fleeting recognition of fellowship with the ancient Britons, it turns out, was the first glimmer of this new consciousness.

The closing stanzas of "On the Downs," though they do not close the book itself, mark a key moment as the anthropology of *Songs Before Sunrise* segues into its political conviction of human destiny:

Like a furled flag that wind sets free,  
 On the swift summer-coloured sea  
     Shook out the red lines of the light,  
 The live sun's standard, blown to lee  
     Across the live sea's white  
     And green delight.

And with divine triumphant awe  
 My spirit moved within me saw,  
     With burning passion of stretched eyes,  
 Clear as the light's own firstborn law,  
     In windless wastes of skies  
     Time's deep dawn rise. (235)

As Jerome McGann and Charles Sligh point out, "Hertha" incorporates the colours of the Italian revolutionary flag as the green leaves, white flowers and red fruit of the life-tree (Swinburne, *Major Poems and Selected Prose* 482). In "On the Downs," these same colours are seen in the landscape itself, no longer under winter skies, as at the beginning of the poem, and no longer dark. "Time's deep dawn" which colours what once appeared a bleak world is the "Sunrise" of the book's title, heralding our awakening, like that of the speaker of this poem, into consciousness of shared humanity. Such is the "destiny" extrapolated from the "common principle" of human existence – the "principle of growth" – discerned by the poet as anthropologist.

### 3. Conclusion: Poetry as Anthropology

What contribution does *Songs Before Sunrise* make to our understanding of Victorian anthropology, and what does it suggest about how poetry can work with science? Swinburne's description of "Hertha" and other poems from *Songs Before Sunrise* as "anthropologic" tallies with Bendyshe's and Wake's accounts of the aims and ambition of anthropology, as proposed within the forum and publications of the Anthropological Society of London, of which Swinburne was himself a Fellow. His particular synthesis of Positivism and evolution in accounting for human moral growth is not unlike the wider conclusions that Wake developed within his own anthropology over the 1860s and 1870s, for all that their politics and theology were at odds. Indeed, looking at their conclusions alone, if we consider *The Evolution of Morality* to be a work of anthropology, then *Songs Before Sunrise* is surely one too. But, of course, a scientific treatise such as Wake's gains that status not only through its theoretical premises and conclusions but through the data against which they are tested and through which they are sustained. Between the initial discussion and the final conclusion of *The Evolution of Morality* are two thick volumes of factual evidence. Whether or not that evidence is accurate or sufficiently justifies Wake's synthesis is beside the point. What is telling is the near total absence of any such data from Swinburne's "anthropologic" poems. In its absence, the "mystic atheistic democratic" elements of *Songs Before Sunrise* are far more immediately apparent than its anthropology. They all militate against it being read as science, the first because it appears diametrically opposed to empiricism, the latter two because they call Swinburne's impartiality as an investigator into question.

Throughout his recent study *The Making of British Anthropology*, Sera-Shriar shows that the received view of the Victorians as armchair anthropologists spinning theories of race and development from doubtful information gathered in the field by officials and amateur observers is partial and unfair. In Swinburne's case, though, the designation holds good, and more. There is very little evidence in "Hertha," his most self-conscious exercise in anthropology, for him ever having left his armchair, nor for him seeing this as a fault or a weakness when it comes to casting symbols to represent the nature of humanity in the past, present and future. Aside from faint glimpses of archaeology – the implied progression from hunting to agriculture to ironwork in "Hertha," the hint at Britain's distant past in "On the Downs" – there is little evidence in these poems that he paid any heed to the details of the emergent cultural anthropology of the 1860s at all. Rather, though his own material was myth and language, his "anthropologic" poetry appears to accede to Huxley's assertion in his *Fortnightly* article "On the Methods and Results of Ethnology" that anthropology was "a section of ZOOLOGY, which again is the animal half of BIOLOGY" (257). But where Huxley, like Hunt, was essentially a physical anthropologist, Swinburne paid equally scant regard to this side of the science, settling instead for the broad sweep and overarching concepts of evolutionism.

Yet, Swinburne's failure to practice anthropology in any empirical sense paradoxically enabled him to realize more fully than Bendyshe and Wake could their ideal of an anthropology of common humanity. For all his brief prominence, Wake did not have a sufficient power-base within the Anthropological Institute to hold his own in the struggle between the Ethnologicals and the rump of Hunt's old Anthropologicals, led by Burton. Institutional politics helped to snuff out his new anthropology before it had a chance to make its mark. But at least as crucially, Wake's own writings suggest that, while he could imagine an anthropology of common humanity, he could not put it into practice in his own research. Unlike Franz

Boas and his pupils, neither Wake nor Bendyshe was ultimately able to break out of a hierarchical conception of race and culture. (On Boasian anthropology's relationship to Victorian evolutionary anthropology, see: Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 287-92.) Instead, in their empirical work they are repeatedly drawn to reinscribe racial difference in spite of themselves. In the same year in which he sought to set racial distinctions aside in his preface to his "History of Anthropology," Bendyshe published a translation, under the auspices of the Anthropological Society, of J. F. Blumenbach's eighteenth-century treatises on the different varieties of mankind, together with an edition of John Hunter's essay on the same topic. Wake resisted this kind of racist essentialism, seeing the mental weakness of certain peoples as a result of stultifying environmental conditions rather than inherent limitations (*Chapters on Man* 289-90). But he too saw different races as having different intellectual and cultural capabilities, and his accounts of the progress of human morals through various savage and civilized societies map onto much the same historical, geographical and indirectly racial categories as those of Lubbock and Tylor. Swinburne, by contrast, is sufficiently detached from the mainstream of Victorian anthropological practice that he can see a common humanity regardless of time, place and race that other anthropologists of his time, even those who are willing to look, remain blind to.

Because Swinburne does not get his hands dirty with practising empirical anthropology, or even with interpreting other anthropologists' evidence, he is able to reconceive the discipline itself. Writing to his friend Theodore Watts in August 1874, after reading John Tyndall's *Belfast Address*, Swinburne characterized himself as having, he hoped, a "not ... unscientific" "habit of mind." Considering his poetry as an exercise in anthropology, most scientists might be inclined to disagree. But what Swinburne had in mind was not a practice but a mode of thought. As he explained to Watts: "my technical ignorance does not impair, I think, my power to see accurately and seize firmly the first thread of the great clue" (*Letters* 2: 335). Swinburne is technically ignorant or at least negligent as an anthropologist, but he takes a clue provided by evolutionary theory and develops it. In staking his claim to the title "the first of anthropologists," he overleaps not only his contemporaries in the field but the entire practice of empirical anthropology itself. It is left up to others to explain in detail how the "principle of growth" embodied in Hertha might have "produced all past and present history." For Swinburne himself, by contrast, the real test of his anthropology is its predictive power. If the revolutions in Italy and Greece signify the efflorescence of humanity and the dawn of a new age of collective identity and goodwill, then its truth will have been borne out.

As Swinburne admitted to Watts, his work was "in the field of art instead of science" (*Letters* 2: 335). The "anthropologic" poems in *Songs Before Sunrise* take a lead from science. But they do not simply incorporate scientific information, nor do they respond explicitly to the science as it already exists. Instead, they seek to contribute to the science itself, and to a wider understanding of it, by practising it in a wholly new way. Through poetry, Swinburne is able to propound a common principle underlying human history and action, as Bendyshe suggests. In reworking the myths of Hertha, Yggdrasil and Genesis, he draws in the "products of thought" identified by Wake as the primary data of anthropology whilst teasing out their significance for understanding this common principle. (For a distinct but complementary discussion of solar myth and radical politics in *Songs Before Sunrise*, see: Levin 59-75.) By incorporating elements of the poetic tradition – Blake, Byron and FitzGerald, as we have seen, but also looking back to Lucretius, Ovid, Milton and Shelley – he can

deepen the cultural resonance of these myths. By moving between voices he can give them the freight of prophesy, the rhetorical force of polemic, the intensity of personal experience. He can also set one poem against another, isolating different elements of his synthesis to see how they fare on their own, and how far they need corroboration or even correction. None of this resembles anthropology as we know it, and it can only be identified as "anthropologic" through careful reinsertion into its own moment. Yet, in these poems Swinburne reveals how poetry can radically redefine a science, showing it a side of itself that it cannot discover by itself, and offering it a new form and a new technique through which to conceive of and explore its own field.

## Notes

1. The six papers on sex in the *Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London* are Richard F. Burton, "Notes on Certain Matters connected with the Dahoman" (1: 308-21) and "Notes on an Hermaphrodite" (2: 262-63); W. T. Pritchard, "Notes on Certain Anthropological Matters respecting the South Sea Islanders" (1: 322-26); Edward Sellon, "On the Phallic Worship in India" (1: 327-34), and "Some Remarks on Indian Gnosticism, or Sacti Puja, the Worship of the Female Powers" (2: 264-76); and John Shortt, "The Bayadère; or, Dancing Girls of Southern India" (3: 274-87).

## Works Cited

- Allan, James McGrigor. "Europeans, and Their Descendants in North America." *Journal of the Anthropological Society* 6 (1868): cxxv-cxlvii.
- Barth, Frederick, et al. *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.
- Beach, Joseph Warren. *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry*. New York: Macmillan, 1936.
- Bendyshe, Thomas. *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach etc..* London: Longman, 1865.
- Bowler, Peter. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 2 vols. London: Murray, 1871.
- Desmond, Adrian, and James Moore. *Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins*. London: Penguin, 2010.
- FitzGerald, Edward. *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Ed. Dick Davis. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989.
- Gosse, Edmund. "A Poet among the Cannibals." *Books on the Table*. London: Heinemann, 1921. 63-66.
- Holmes, John. *Darwin's Bards: British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009.
- Hunt, J. "Introductory Address on the Study of Anthropology." *Anthropological Review* 1 (1863): 1-20.
- Huxley, T. H. "On the Methods and Results of Ethnology." *Fortnightly Review* os 1 (1865): 257-77.
- Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 33 (1903); 35 (1905): back matter.
- Levin, Yisrael. *Swinburne's Apollo: Myth, Faith, and Victorian Spirituality*. 2013. Farnham: Ashgate; Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.
- Lorimer, Douglas A. "HUNT, James (1833-69)." *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century British Scientists*. Ed. Bernard Lightman. Vol. 2. Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004. 1033-35. 4 vols.
- Lutz, Deborah. *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*. New York: Norton, 2011.
- McGann, Jerome J. *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972.
- McLennan, J. F. "The Worship of Animals and Plants: Part I.—Totems and Totemism." *Fortnightly Review* ns 6 (1869): 407-27.
- McSweeney, Kerry. *Tennyson and Swinburne as Romantic Naturalists*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981.
- Masefield, John. *Lollingdon Downs and Other Poems, with Sonnets*. London: Heinemann, 1917.
- Mazzini, Joseph. "A Letter to the Members of the Œcumenical Council." *Fortnightly Review* ns 7 (1870): 725-51.
- Memoirs Read Before the Anthropological Society of London*. 3 vols. Anthropological Society, 1865-70.
- Murfin, Ross C. *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence and the Burden of Belief*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.

- Needham, Rodney. "Charles Staniland Wake, 1835-1910: A Biographical Record." *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of E. E. Evans-Pritchard*. Ed. J. H. M. Beattie and R. G. Lienhardt. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975. 354-87.
- Pim, Bedford. *The Negro and Jamaica*. London: Trübner, 1866.
- Radford, Andrew. "Making the Past Wake: Anthropological Survivals in Hardy's Poetry." *Science in Modern Poetry: New Directions*. Ed. John Holmes. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2012. 167-80.
- . *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2003.
- Rainger, Ronald. "Race, Politics, and Science: The Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s." *Victorian Studies* 22 (1978): 51-70.
- Reid, Julia. "Archaeology and Anthropology." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science*. Ed. John Holmes and Sharon Ruston. London: Routledge, forthcoming.
- . *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006.
- Ridemour, George M. "Swinburne on 'The Problem to Solve in Expression.'" *Victorian Poetry* 9 (1971): 129-44.
- Riede, David G. *Swinburne: A Study of Romantic Mythmaking*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1978.
- Roppen, Georg. *Evolution and Poetic Belief: A Study in Some Victorian and Modern Writers*. Oslo: Oslo UP, 1956.
- Royal Anthropological Institute. Anthropological Society of London Council Minutes. A 3.1. Royal Anthropological Institute Archives.
- . Lists of Fellows of the Anthropological Institute. A 31.3. Royal Anthropological Institute Archives.
- Ruse, Michael. *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Sera-Shriar, Efram. *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813-1871*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013.
- Stevenson, Lionel. *Darwin among the Poets*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1932.
- Stocking, George W., Jr. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: Macmillan, 1987.
- . "What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)." *Man* ns 6 (1971): 369-90.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. "The Halt Before Rome." *Fortnightly Review* ns 2 (1867): 539-46.
- . *Major Poems and Selected Prose*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann and Charles L. Sligh. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004.
- . "Ode on the Insurrection in Candia." *Fortnightly Review* ns 1 (1867): 284-89.
- . *Songs Before Sunrise*. London: Ellis, 1871.
- . "Super Flumina Babylonis." *Fortnightly Review* ns 6 (1869): 386-89.
- . *The Swinburne Letters*. Ed. Cecil Y. Lang. 6 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1959-62.
- . *The Uncollected Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*. Ed. Terry L. Meyers. 3 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004-05.
- . "A Watch in the Night." *Fortnightly Review* ns 4 (1868): 618-22.
- . *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. London: Hotten, 1868.
- Tacitus, Cornelius. *The Germania of Tacitus: A Critical Edition*. Ed. Rodney Potter Robinson. American Philological Association, 1935.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *Five Poems 1470-1870: An Elementary Essay on the Background of English Literature*. London: Chatto, 1948.

- Tylor, Edward B. "On the Origin of Language." *Fortnightly Review* os 4 (1866): 544-59.
- . "The Religion of Savages." *Fortnightly Review* os 6 (1866): 71-86.
- Wake, Charles Staniland. "The Aim and Scope of Anthropology." *Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1870): 1-18.
- . *Chapters on Man, with the Outlines of a Science of Comparative Psychology*. London: Trübner, 1868.
- . *The Development of Marriage and Kinship*. Ed. Rodney Needham. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967.
- . *The Evolution of Morality, Being a History of the Development of Moral Culture*. 2 vols. London: Trübner, 1878.
- . "The Influence of the Phallic Idea in the Religions of Antiquity." *Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1870): 97-105, 199-227.
- . "The Physical Characters of the Australian Aborigines." *Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1871): 259-67.
- Walhouse, M. J. "Some Vestiges of Girl Sacrifices, Jar Burial, and Contracted Interments in India and the East." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 11 (1882): 415-23.
- Wilton, Andrew. "Symbolism in Britain." *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*. Ed. Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone. Tate Gallery, 1997. 11-33.
- Zammito, John H. *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.