

**‘A Poem Should Not Mean, But Be’: POETIC FORM VS. CONTENT IN
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE**

By

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Abstract

This thesis provides a chronological review of the major poetic works of Algernon Charles Swinburne in light of a recent resurgence of critical interest in his work. The thesis compares and contrasts the form and the content, with particular focus on the short, fixed-form poems developed by Swinburne, especially the roundel form that he developed from the French rondeaux. The aesthetic form is contrasted with the numerous instances of challenging or unpleasant content and subject matter that Swinburne grounded many of his poems in. The thesis analyses assertions that Swinburne had a preoccupation with sound and rhyme over any meaningful message to portray through his poetry, thus leaving his poems vacuous and devoid of meaning. This school of thought in Swinburnian studies is contrasted with opposing critical views that Swinburne as poet was a form of public moralist, writing to challenge traditional Victorian political, social and gender stereotypes. The thesis concludes that in refining verse form as heavily as Swinburne had done with the roundel, so this left little room for any further development, and resulted in part in the move to modernism and modernist literature.

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‘A Poem Should Not Mean, But Be’¹: Poetic Form vs. Content in Algernon

Charles Swinburne.

Introduction

Aims and intentions

Algernon Charles Swinburne maintained a steadfast approach to refining strict verse forms during his poetic career, particularly through the roundel and sonnet forms, with varying themes, imagery and content depicted in his work. At times, Swinburne took unpleasant and challenging ideas and images as the subject matter of his work, with a focus on a range of decadent themes such as death, depravity and sex. This thesis will look to contrast and compare this challenging subject matter with the strict aesthetic verse and metric forms employed by Swinburne to contain such themes. A cross-section of Swinburne’s work will be considered, with content from *Poems and Ballads* [1866], which (in its First Series) sparked moral outrage amongst readers and reviewers because of its erotic and decadent subject matter, from *Songs Before Sunrise* [1871], written during a sojourn in Italy, and which demonstrate a more political motivation to his work, and from *A Century of Roundels* [1883], a collection which shows Swinburne’s creativity and fascination with fixed verse forms.

It is important to begin to define contemporaneously what ‘challenging’ subject matter means. Before Swinburne, Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* [1857] was one of the first major symbolist, or even decadent, collections that overtly contemplated themes of decadence, eroticism, death and Satanism. There had been very little widely published literature which handled such challenging themes before *Les Fleurs*

¹ This line is taken from ‘Ars Poetica’ by American poet Archibald MacLeish (1926) available at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/6371> (14th July 2014).

du Mal, and conservative critics in France and England and beyond saw the work as an attack on moral decency. *Les Fleurs du Mal* created widespread and longstanding shock and censure; emotions that Swinburne sought to replicate in some of his work. Whilst critics condemned Baudelaire's work, and obtained legal injunctions banning its publication, Victor Hugo, amongst others, celebrated this 'new thrill' in French literature (in Baudelaire, [1857] 2006). Swinburne reviewed *Les Fleurs du Mal* in *The Spectator* in 1862, and, when quoting from the poem 'The Dancing Serpent', commented on Baudelaire's 'perfect mastery in description, and sharp individual drawing of character and form' (Swinburne, 1862: 999). Baudelaire's influence on Swinburne is clear to see in *Poems and Ballads*, with similar challenging topics presented.

Throughout his poetic career Swinburne used themes and imagery of a challenging nature, predominantly around lust and the death and decay of the human form. Treating Swinburne's three major works in chronological order aids in charting the development of Swinburne's poetic theory, with the nuances and subtle changes in approach, content and style highlighted more easily. This thesis will address a cross-section of poems of all types considering each poem in terms of Swinburne's use of form and how the unpleasant themes and subjects are conveyed in each. It is important to define poetic form by the structure, rhyme, meter and other 'rules' that poems follow.

A proponent of the 'art for art's sake' approach to poetry, Swinburne's early theory of poetry was for art to have 'absolute independence from the political, moral, and religious spheres' (Kay, 2013: 275). Whilst Swinburne is widely accepted as an aestheticist poet, his views on what a poem is and does are by no means simplistic.

This simplistic definition of the 'art for art's sake' philosophy, that 'true' art should be divorced from any didactic meaning, provides an entry into Swinburne's more complex philosophy. This thesis will explore the limitations of this reading of Swinburne's theory of art in such a simplistic way, and use recent critical works to explore more complex interpretations of it. Whilst the early career Swinburne may have asserted 'art for art's sake first of all', through the lens of New Formalism, it is possible to read Swinburne's poems as forms that do advocate moral and social change (Swinburne, 1906: 100). In *Songs Before Sunrise* Swinburne writes with a more overt political focus, producing poetry and prose that was motivated by more social and moral ends, and still within strict and refined verse forms. Beyond *Songs Before Sunrise*, Swinburne's published poetry combined a continued emphasis on form and structure and themes of a political nature. *A Century of Roundels* is a text which focuses exclusively on the refined roundel form, developed from the French rondeau, and the French Parnassian movement of the mid-late nineteenth century. When discussing each 'stage' of Swinburne's poetic career mentioned above, this thesis will draw reference to significant and supportive critical works, particularly from the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. A short literature review of the current critical position of A.C. Swinburne, below, details current critical debates amongst Swinburnian scholars and how they support this thesis.

Literature Review: The current critical position of A.C. Swinburne

Recent studies in New Formalism have provided a new lens through which to view Swinburne's work. Indeed, New Formalism has changed the critical perception of

Victorian poetry more broadly, for many, with its promotion of a return to metrical and rhymed verse. Significant recent works such as Maxwell and Evangelista's (2013) *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*, as well as Andrew Kay's (2013) 'Swinburne, Impressionistic Formalism, and the Afterlife of Victorian Poetic Theory', and work by Yopie Prins, Meredith Martin, Stephanie Kuduk and others have rethought and rejuvenated criticism of Swinburne.

It is via a New Formalist perspective that many critics have seen fresh and interesting ways to analyse Swinburne's work, particularly in relation to the forms Swinburne used, indeed refined, in his poetry. Considered by peers, critics and scholars to be a formalist, an aesthete, and even a decadent, Swinburne's poetry is not easy to define by conventional definitions. Many decadent and aesthetic writers cited him as a major influence on their work, with Swinburne's depiction of themes of vice and avarice, particularly in *Poems and Ballads*, being described by Oscar Wilde as 'very perfect and very poisonous poetry' (Wilde, 1889). It is this combination of 'perfection' of verse form and the 'poisonous' themes and content that distinguishes Swinburne from his peers, but also makes him difficult to pin down using simple definitions of literary criticism. To Andrew Kay, Swinburne's formalist approach treated 'literary forms not as self-contained entities but as engaged in a process of challenging – and ideally overturning – the moral and political ideologies of the cultures out of which they spring.' (Kay, 2013: 292). Kay's article on Swinburne and Formalism is a key text for current Swinburnian studies. The article helps situate Swinburne's poetry within the frame of New Formalism, and sheds light on the complexities of Swinburne's theories of art, particularly Swinburne's perception that 'literary forms

[possess] a powerful moral charge, a capacity both to anticipate and help bring about changes in the social landscape.’ (*Ibid.*: 275).

Swinburne had a major impact on decadent, aesthetic and Parnassian writers in both England and France during the mid-late nineteenth century, and literary critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to critique and cite his work, most notably by T.S. Eliot, who wrote the essays ‘Swinburne as Poet’ and ‘Swinburne as Critic’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* [1921]. Whilst Eliot did not treat Swinburne’s work in the most favourable of lights, he recognised Swinburne as an important literary figure of the period. For Eliot, a perceived favouring of sound over content weakened Swinburne’s poetry, that words and not real objects thrilled him; and that meaning and sound have become one and the same, or that his poems had become ‘bankrupt of thought’ (Kay, 2013: 278). Critics have suggested that Swinburne’s work was written to be read aloud, not in silence. Jerome McGann links the work of Swinburne and Baudelaire to the music of Wagner; particularly the ‘inner harmony’ at the centre of Swinburne’s poems, and aestheticism generally.

This “harmony” is the meaning of all poems, whatever moral ideas they may carry along or even profess... When Swinburne speaks of a poem’s harmony, his thought is always tied to a set of musical ideas and analogies. (McGann, 2009: 621).

McGann puts that much of Swinburne’s work, verse and prose, has musical tropes, employed deliberately and strategically, and because ‘...whatever meaning music

possesses, it is bound up in the arrangement of its notes, in the systematic intervals and patterns that generate harmony and rhythm.’ (Kay, 2013: 278). The treatment of Swinburne’s poems as ‘songs’, which had been written to be ‘performed’ is an interesting consideration to keep in mind when looking closely at the structure and form of his poems.

Another argument made by critics relating to Eliot’s essay, draws on Swinburne’s, and others’, perceived ‘celebration of sensuous and sensual pleasure at the expense of making conclusive moral judgments.’ (Bristow, 2005: 8). This argument is directly contested when looking at the influence on Swinburne of the works of the French Parnassian poets, and the development from fixed verse forms such as the rondeau. These poems, with their wave-like, cyclical forms, remain rich in impressionistic imagery, but hold an important a moral or social element within them. This moral or social pressure isn’t just limited to the fixed verse forms in *A Century of Roundels*, but appear throughout Swinburne’s literary career. Much of Swinburne’s poetry from across his career was ‘sexually and theologically shocking’ in content (Kay, 2013: 278). For Kay, though, ‘it was forms themselves that exercised [a] subversive power...ordered matrices of art that conveyed meaning and exerted power, a tacit eloquence that had little or nothing to do with the explicit content’ within them (*ibid.*).

After Eliot’s essay on Swinburne, Swinburne and his work gradually disappeared from literary criticism. Very few critics and theorists developed Eliot’s (and others’) opinions of Swinburne and his poetry until the latter decades, at which point the aforementioned resurgence in Swinburne studies began, and has continued in the early part of the twenty first century. This relatively recent revival in Swinburne studies has brought his work back into the spotlight of literary criticism, and

approaches his poetic and critical works in new and refreshing ways, to which this thesis seeks to add.

Recent articles discuss Swinburne's religious attitudes, his influence on his peers, particularly the English Decadents and Aesthetes, as well as his connections to French culture and poetry. Recent discussions also tackle the perceived obsession with form over content, or at least how form shaped content and purpose. Jerome McGann has written widely on various aspects of Swinburne's work, particularly the relationship between his poetry and his use of language. He states that 'searching poems for their meanings, we often forget that in poetry, language is not a vehicle of reference by a figural gesture. To make that gesture is to give momentary form to a reality that persists "beyond the singing of the sea"...' (McGann, 2004: 216).

Yisrael Levin cites George Meredith's view that Swinburne's poetry lacks an "internal centre", with T.S. Eliot's perception of Swinburne's verse as carrying nothing but the "hallucination of meaning" (Levin, 2009: 661). Levin asserts that more recent arguments regarding Swinburne's poetic meaning are exemplified by Peter Anderson and Rikky Rooksby in their discussions 'about the structuralist versus post-structuralist nature of Swinburne's verse' (*ibid.*). The introduction to Levin's article demonstrates in short how arguments in Swinburnian studies have changed between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century. With Swinburne effectively disappearing from literary critical circles for much of the twentieth century, the revival in the study of his work over the past decade is interesting and relates to Linda Dowling's view that 'the poetic consequences of Swinburne's pursuit of pure sound have variously enchanted and bored generations of his readers' (Dowling, 1986: 178). Dowling asserts that Swinburne 'chose' to privilege spoken language

over written; a choice which was largely centred around a rejection of the Bible and religion, generally, 'there could be no appeal for Swinburne to any ideal of written language like Pater's. For in Swinburne's view the language of the book implicitly derived its power from the Bible, and the Bible is always for Swinburne the type of repressive authority...' (*ibid.*: 177). Dowling's work on Swinburne's notion of the 'soul' of people and things being represented through sound links strongly Swinburne's poems and their 'inner harmony'². It is this trend in Swinburnian studies which will be looked at in relation to works from *Poems and Ballads* in the next chapter of this thesis.

Republican Poetry

Recent criticism of Swinburne's work is varied in its approach to and use of his poetry. A modern trend amongst critics is to use Swinburne's poetry to support a particular argument regarding the politics of his poetry, or that Swinburne's work enhanced or subverted particular political opinions of the mid-late Victorian era. The points made in favour and against Swinburne's work are wide ranging, and relate to all eras of his work. Julia Saville [2009] calls Swinburne a 'cosmopolitan republican' and a 'public moralist' who immersed himself 'in the very life forces and lived emotions of the cultures [he] represent[ed]' (Saville, 2009: 692). Quoting Swinburne directly to support her argument, Saville turns to the Swinburne who 'challenged bourgeois sexual and religious conventions with iconoclastic dramatic monologues and perverse ballads' (*ibid.*). For Saville, 'far less attention has been paid to the

² See McGann, 2004.

republican political affiliations apparent in most of his erotic and aesthetic poetry' (*ibid.*). Saville uses Swinburne's *Notes on Poems and Reviews* and the essay 'Victor Hugo: *L'Homme Qui Rit*' in *Essays and Studies* to argue that his literary philosophy saw literature as needing to be

worthwhile, [it] "must be large, liberal, sincere", and that "the pestilence of provincial thought and tradition" can be remedied by a turn to other literatures and cultures... "To paint one aright of its [the World's] many faces," he declares, "you must have come close enough on that side to breathe the breath of its mouth and see by the light of its eyes" (*ibid.*).

For Saville, Swinburne, as a cosmopolitan republican poet, emphasised 'the senses as a key to diverse cultural experience' and anticipated a modern definition of cosmopolitanism in recognising that 'cultural prohibitions are experienced viscerally, and are therefore peculiarly resistant to change' (*ibid.*). There are numerous accounts by many biographers of Swinburne experiencing these 'cultural prohibitions', and Saville's description of Swinburne as a political poet differs from others, such as Stephanie Kuduk, regarding his republican motives. Kuduk puts that '*Songs Before Sunrise* charts Swinburne's discovery of a vibrant, cross-class literary practice that renewed and deepened his understanding of poetry as a political tool.' (Kuduk, 2001: 255).

Saville looks for complications in his republican thinking, in comparison to his republican peers such as Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Mazzini and Walt Whitman. Saville combines two key features of Swinburne's work, which critics often look to distinguish

between, namely its aesthetics and its politics. In recognising the complications of Swinburne's poetics and morals, Saville is able to use Swinburne's own theory of art to good use. Writing in his 'Victor Hugo' essay, Swinburne makes clear his understanding of the purpose of artistic works:

The rule of art is not the rule of morals; in morals the action is judged by the intention, the doer is applauded, excused, or condemned, according to the motive which induced his deed; in art, the one question is not what you mean but what you do. (Swinburne, 1906: 100).

When writing this in 1869, Swinburne was between his 'aesthetic' and 'republican' phases of influence, which critics have sought to define. His *Songs Before Sunrise* collection differed markedly in theme and content from *Poems and Ballads*, with *Songs Before Sunrise* winning acclaim with republicans, rather than the aesthetes who had welcomed *Poems and Ballads*.

Saville notes Swinburne's aesthetic practice of 'placing emphasis on result rather than intention [as] stress[ing] the artwork's effectiveness in engaging the feelings of the addressee – whether a listener, reader, or viewer – through an appeal to the senses broadly defined as pleasure.' (Saville, 2009: 699). In his refusal to acknowledge any one subject matter as being any more or less meaningful than any other, Swinburne distances himself from 'pure' republicans, such as Whitman and Mazzini, and keeps a tie with his aesthete peers who had influenced his work in *Poems and Ballads*, such as the Pre-Raphaelites and Baudelaire. Swinburne's ethos

was that, provided art privileged aesthetics, a writer should have complete freedom over content, theme and form.

Swinburne's 'straddling' of these two opposing critical standpoints, which Saville illustrates, allowed him to remain true to 'his own training in classical poetics' (*ibid.*). It is the 'centrality of form to [Swinburne's] artistic vision' which is important to emphasise. In his perfection of form, Kay makes clear that it was the 'metrical feet, the building blocks of poetic structure, [that] mattered so much to Swinburne' (Kay, 2013: 279). They mattered not just in his poetry, but in his criticism of other poets, seen when Swinburne 'rips into Robert Browning for transgressing the form of the anapest, accusing him of the poetic equivalent to "murder" and "parricide"'. (*Ibid.*).

Whilst this thesis focuses on Swinburne's developing theory of art, and his refining of fixed verse forms and challenging subject matter, it is important not to decontextualise or dehistoricise Swinburne from a period of poetic experimentation during the second half of the nineteenth century. Developments in forms such as the lyric, dramatic monologue and nonsense verse, as well as spasmodic experiments show a striking variety in Victorian poets' use, and often abuse of form. Whilst Swinburne can be seen as both a forerunner and revolutionary in some senses, particularly with regards to the roundel, it is important not to isolate him from his peers, or the literary movements and developments of the time.

Parnassianism

Beyond *Songs Before Sunrise*, Swinburne published *A Century of Roundels* [1883].

This collection of fixed verse forms demonstrated Swinburne's skill and fascination

with short poetic constructions, along with his continued interest in rhyme and sound, as he revised and refined the French rondeau form favoured by French Parnassian poets; a small group of largely French poets, who took great influence from Gautier and the 'art for art's sake' doctrine. Parnassian poets adopted a disciplined and rigid approach to poetry, in search of the perfection of poetic form, and without emotion or sentimentality. Swinburne was a key protagonist in the mid-nineteenth century in bringing the Parnassian movement from France to England. Whilst Parnassian forms were considered more suited to the French language than to English, Swinburne and contemporaries such as Théodore de Banville in France and John Payne and Arthur O'Shaughnessy in Britain committed themselves to the Parnassian ideal of art, what James K. Robinson describes as 'the eternal, because pure, aesthetic form.'

(Robinson, 1953: 744).

Parnassian poets took inspiration from forgotten seventeenth century French poets such as Villon, Orléans and Marot, with poets often beginning with loyal and close translations of the original work, before progressing to the development of their own poems. This phase of aestheticism can be defined as being 'preoccupied with expression as the chief justification of a work of art.' (Robinson, 1953: 733). The independence that the forgotten poets had displayed, coupled with the emergence of prominent figures in France resurrecting their work appealed to Swinburne. He read, translated and imitated the poetry of Villon, and wrote original works which derived their form and inspiration from Villon and his peers, with many written at the same time as some of his most famous works, such as 'The Triumph of Time' (*ibid.*: 736). The key difference between Swinburne's work during this 'phase' of his literary career, and other French and English Parnassian poets was that whilst the

Parnassian poets largely wrote proficient but unimaginative works, Swinburne's output of fixed form poetry ranks amongst some of his most celebrated. The accusation, as made by Gerard Manley Hopkins of Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden', that Parnassian poetic theory is over simplistic and 'unintellectual' in conception can be challenged and turned around to view Parnassian conclusions that the value of poetry lay more in the sound than in its sense. The careful musical arrangement of his poems enabled Swinburne to write about some very unpleasant and unsavoury subject matters, with, as Baudelaire had, a 'focus on the sad, strange weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure' (Hyder, 1970), and particularly an interest in cycles of pain and pleasure, differentiating his fixed form work from that of other Parnassian poets by theme as well as form.

Swinburne's espousing of French writers and the 'art for art's sake' philosophy in his praise of Gautier's paganism and Baudelaire's Satanism in *Poems and Ballads* unsettled English critics. Robinson's article suggests that Swinburne's look across the Channel to his French peers and predecessors was an attempt at escapism, 'for relief from the smugness and greyness of mid-Victorian literature and society.' (*ibid.*: 738). He and William Morris were the two most notable artists during the middle part of the nineteenth century to take inspiration from France. That said, there were very few poets, in France or England who were not influenced by Victor Hugo and the development and refinement of the fixed verse forms in both countries were partly a result of Hugo's teachings on technical experimentation and intense word-painting. Experimentation turned to obsession and passion for perfect workmanship, as form, rhyme and sound became paramount indicators by which poets rated or constructed their works.

The Robinson article (1953) about the 'neglected phase' in literary history supports the arguments made in the later chapter in this thesis which looks at Swinburne's fixed form poems presented in *A Century of Roundels*.

'Fleshly Indulgences'

Many of Swinburne's most well-known poems are longer, epic ballads which differ markedly from the fixed, concise forms of his roundels and sonnets, but contain equally careful and deliberate prosodic elements. Whilst Parnassian poems and theories of poetry focussed on the importance of form over content, Camille Paglia argues that Swinburne deliberately remained detached from social and moral systems and that the images he presented in his poems are formed without content (Paglia, 1991: 471). This, therefore, allowed Swinburne to develop his themes in a different and unique way by uprooting language from its traditional origins. Paglia's chapter on Swinburne in *Sexual Personae* presents an interesting and alternative opinion on Swinburne's poetic theory (*ibid.*: 460-488). She suggests that it is the paganism of Romanticism which Swinburne emphasises in his poems, and his use of French Decadence (particularly his links to the French Parnassian poets) which create an English Late Romanticism. She asserts that English Decadence was less concerned with objects and *objets d'art* than it was with style.

What makes Paglia's work more distinctive from other critics is its focus on the themes generated by Swinburne, and other poets across literary history; most specifically, its focus on the themes of the female and sex within Swinburne's work. Whilst it is difficult to accept Paglia's work without challenge, she raises some

interesting concepts within the field of critical work on Swinburne, particularly regarding the portrayal and discussion of themes that are, even today, still to be considered 'unpleasant'. She begins by generalising Swinburne's focus on style, and picking out his development of political and republican messages of equality. However, the equality of sexes is not as a modern day reader may expect. Her assertion, in relation to Swinburne's work, is that he 'empowers' women by portraying them as the dominant sex. Women, for Paglia, are all powerful over men, as they have the power of sex. When written by a man (Swinburne), then the treatment of sex as a subject matter is seen as a torment, not as pleasure. She cites poems such as 'Faustine', 'Triumph of Time', 'Dolores' and 'Atalanta in Calydon' to illustrate the portrayal of the empowerment of women through the suffering and misery they bring to men. In doing this, Paglia accuses Swinburne of malicious intent aimed at challenging high Victorian culture. This manifests itself through poetry that contradicts the accepted stereotypes of gender roles, religious and sexual roles, at the time. This presents Swinburne as a political writer (or even anarchist), and at the very least a poet writing with social and political intentions, as the unpleasant imagery, humiliating males through sexual compulsion do more than simply cause abstract offence. They shock and challenge the accepted norms of High Society. For Kay, it is Swinburne's formalism in verse, rather than the imagery, which challenges the accepted stereotype, and is characterised, in part, by 'a conviction, contrary to the aestheticism for which he is best known, that forms were invested with politically subversive potential' (Kay, 2013: 272).

Swinburne's poetry is certainly rooted in form and structure, with critics then divided over whether the meaning and content were of secondary importance, or whether

meaning and purpose became of equal importance. The 'art for art's sake' philosophy was still prevalent in the early twentieth century, and Modernist poet Archibald MacLeish's 1926 poem 'Ars Poetica' begins with the lines 'A poem should be palpable and mute / As a globed fruit / Dumb' (ll. 1-3) and ends with the lines 'A poem should not mean / But be.' (ll. 23-24). A simplistic interpretation of Swinburne's poetic theory would support this, in that art and morality should be distinguishable, yet there are elements of Swinburne's practise which suggest that they cannot be separated completely.

'Art for Art's Sake first' (Swinburne, 1906: 100)

A Developing Theory

The charge made by many critics over the past century and a half against Swinburne and his theory of poetry is that he placed too great an emphasis on rhyme and form and the overall sound of a poem, rather than its content and meaning. T.S. Eliot's critical piece 'Swinburne as Poet' is such a piece that makes this criticism.

It is a convenient argument that Swinburne was solely interested in building his theory of poetry on sound, rhyme and form alone, and the critics presented in the introductory section suggest that it is inaccurate. It is more plausible to suggest that Swinburne's theory of poetry lies between a Parnassian emphasis on rhyme and form and a desire to use poetry for social and moral benefit. Biographies of Swinburne's early influences credit Victor Hugo, amongst others, as having a defining effect on Swinburne's overall theory of poetry. The Parnassian focus on tight verse forms and rhyme schemes initially diverted Swinburne away from his republican roots, and led him to develop his own 'rule of art'.

The rule of art is not the rule of morals; in morals the action is judged by the intention, the doer is applauded, excused, or condemned, according to the motive which induced his deed; in art, the one question is not what you mean but what you do. (Swinburne, 1906: 100).

In placing emphasis on result rather than intention, the artwork's effectiveness in engaging the feelings of the audience or reader is stressed, through an appeal to

their pleasure principles. Recent criticism of Swinburne under the guise of New Formalism allows for a different and fresh perspective on Swinburne's verse, particularly one which treats his development and focus on form as one which very much gives the verse 'a capacity both to anticipate and help bring about changes in the social landscape.' (Kay, 2013: 275).

Julia Saville's article 'Cosmopolitan Republican Swinburne, the Immersive Poet as Public Moraliser' focuses on Swinburne's conception of 'liberty, both aesthetic and political' (Saville, 2009: 699), and develops Swinburne's insistence that the aesthetics are paramount priority, and once a poem's form is structured, then the poet is free to choose their own subject matter. Whilst Saville's work will be used in the following chapter to discuss Swinburne's development of republican politics and moral virtues through his poetry, it is important to demonstrate the cohesion between early and later Swinburne, that form and structure outrank theme and content, or purpose when composing a piece of work.

Swinburne's earlier work was heavily influenced by Gautier and Baudelaire, as is evident in *Poems and Ballads*. Swinburne was developing his theory of art, which, as Thomas E. Connolly writes, was initially based around Gautier's three principles;

(1) he refused to accept as the critical standard of art the belief that "all that cannot be lisp'd in the nursery or finger'd in the schoolroom is therefore to be cast out of the library"; (2) he rejected didactic art; (3) he insisted on form as the only valid critical standard of art. (Connolly, 1952: 279).

As Connolly documents, Swinburne made two important modifications to his early poetic theory, under the influence of Baudelaire;

(1) he recognized that, although art does not directly seek a moral effect, it is indirectly productive of a moral effect; and (2) he accepted without change Baudelaire's classification of the realms of art, science, and moral philosophy: "To art, that is best which is most beautiful; to science, that is best which is most accurate; to morality; that is best which is most virtuous." (Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, Vol. XVI of *The Complete Works*, p. 144, quoted in Connolly, 1952: 280).

Swinburne's theory of art and poetry has never been completely one-sided, be it based around the portrayal of morals and social usefulness, or that the only basis for poetry is around structure and form. Basing his earlier work around form and structure became difficult for Swinburne when needing to reconcile his interpretation of the 'art for art's sake' theory. Connolly's article tracks this reconciliation against Swinburne's review of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. His published poetry of the 1860's conveyed a poet who refused to recognise values of anything other than a purely artistic nature, however, his critical work suggests an early identification of what Connolly terms 'the theory of the double effect of art which reached its full growth in 1872.' (*ibid.*: 281). Whilst never completely adopting the pure theory of 'art for art's sake', much of Swinburne's poetry of that period displays an intense fascination with experimentation of sound, form and structure.

'The beauty of Swinburne's Verse is the Sound' (Eliot, 1921).

To adhere to Eliot's charge that Swinburne looked only for sound and rhyme when constructing his poems would be to disregard the intention behind writing poems with challenging and unpleasant themes. To consider the themes unpleasant for the sake of being controversial is overly simplistic and needs more development. That said, the works did cause controversy, and the contrast between the unpleasant language in Swinburne's poems and the tight, aesthetic verse forms is stark. Influenced as much by peers such as Morris and Rossetti as by French poets of the period, Swinburne's poetry in *Poems and Ballads* attracted much criticism, to the extent that publishers Moxon withdrew the publication due to the disapproval it received at its shocking content and indulgence in aestheticism and decadence (Hyder, 1970: 125). The *London Review* at the time of publication called it "depressing and misbegotten – in many of its constituents...utterly revolting"... [and] *The Athenaeum*: "unclean for the sake of uncleanness" (London Review, quoted in McGann, 2004: 207). 'Love and Sleep', 'The Triumph of Time' in *Poems and Ballads* and 'Sonnet for a Picture', published much later in *The Heptalogia* [1904], are poems depict Swinburne's fascination with death and lust; particularly the vampiric links in 'Sonnet for a Picture', and themes of death and lust. 'The Triumph of Time', one of Swinburne's most celebrated poem, will be looked at in part, and in comparison to other Swinburne poems such as 'Faustine', as discussed by Camille Paglia. Paglia describes the Swinburnian epic 'Atalanta in Calydon' as a 'grand opera', as Swinburne attempts to push language 'beyond the rational'. The links to music draw us back to McGann's article on music and Wagner. The metrical forms of the verse lend a song-like

musicality to them, especially when read aloud. The 'music' is often coupled with Swinburne's favoured metaphor of Mother Nature as a man-engulfing sea.

Paglia's chapter on Swinburne suggests that the men of Swinburne's verse are drawn, as if by sirens, to the water's edge to die, as they are called and tempted by mother nature to the site of human origin (an evolutionary rather than Biblical view of creation), to the sea where birth and death collide. In the 'Triumph of Time', the ebb and flow of the metre mimics the image of the wave.

'Triumph of Time' and 'Love and Sleep'

'Triumph of Time' (1866) is an adapted ottava rima of forty-nine stanzas. Each stanza is formed of eight iambic lines, most of which are in iambic pentameter, but not all, with some being shorter by one or two feet, which breaks away from the traditional form. The rhyme scheme of each stanza works around 3 alternating rhymes, broken up by a couplet, 'a,b,a,b,c,c,a,b', which differs, again, from the traditional form, with the couplet brought within the stanza in lines five and six, rather than concluding the stanza in lines seven and eight.

The poem is about lost love, with the male speaker longing for oblivion, such is his abject state of mind, but realising that his own life will still go on, but with the realisation that he has lost his love, and indeed that man sometimes has little or no control at all over events in the face of Mother Nature. The poem begins with a recognition of the loss of the speaker's love, 'whose whole life's love goes down in a day' (l6). The speaker could cry, but considers the helpfulness of this, at least from a practical point, that it won't bring his lover back to him; 'Is it worth a tear, is it worth an

hour, / To think of things that are well outworn?' (ll. 9-10). For the speaker, time goes on, but equally, 'Time shall not sever us wholly in twain' (l14), for he will always have the time that they did spend together, as memories.

The effect of the shorter lines at the beginning gives a sense of both irregularity and tension to the poem. The opening line has two fewer syllables from the traditional pentameter, emphasising the significance of the point at which the reader finds the speaker 'Before our lives divide for ever' (l1). The reader is given both an immediate sense of the forthcoming inevitability of the loss, but is also brought into events with a sense of hope, at least that it hasn't yet happened. The reader is introduced immediately to the ravages and enormity of time from the very beginning, but with the positivity that the forlorn speaker is seeking one final moment of happiness to cling to.

The poem is full of alliteration, which emphasise the imagery that the poem creates, but also assists the lilting cadence of the verse to flow from stanza to stanza, 'fugitive flower' (l11), 'Smitten with sunbeams, ruined with rain' (l18), 'days and dreams...dreams that are done' (ll. 49-50). The speaker is so distraught and lost that he states that 'It will not grow again, this fruit of my heart' (l17). For the speaker, the tree or fruit of his love is dead, 'ruined', never to grow again. The 'red fruit' (l22) of his passion and love has turned 'dull', and he feels the emotional, 'poisonous pain' of rejection and abandonment (l24).

The construction of the poem is not linear. There is no progression through events, in a chronological way. There is no journey through the love, the loss and the feelings of abandonment and being alone, nor any moment of illumination of clarity to serve

as the climax. Instead, the poem moves in an almost orbit-like fashion, from the central starting point, the loss of his lover. There is little or no sense of reconciliation or overcoming the loss, other than the realisation that time does continue regardless, whether one comes to terms with their loss or not. The repeating stanzas, each similarly constructed of eight lines, with repeating rhymes, brings the reader in circles, keeping them in the 'moment' with the speaker, and unable to escape the same desolation that the speaker is experiencing.

'Love and Sleep', from *Poems and Ballads*, is a Petrarchan sonnet which subverts the traditional concept of unattainable love usually depicted. Made up of the traditional octave and sestet, the poem employs an 'a,b,b,a,a,b,b,a,c,d,e,c,d,e' rhyme scheme. On first reading, the poem appears to be a traditional hyperbolic representation of the speaker's lover. On closer reading, Swinburne's illustration of a female figure leaning over his bed can be seen in more sinister or unpleasant terms. At night, a man is asleep in his bed, and describes the image of his lover leaning over him. As the woman leans over, the reader's attention is drawn to the description of the 'sad bed' (Swinburne, 1894: 310, l.2). The man has likely died in his bed, or the marital bed has been abandoned by the lover, leaving the speaker never to see nor touch his lover again. The depiction of the woman as being the pinnacle of perfection, therefore lends an unpleasant, sinister lustfulness to the poem.

The poem is full of language describing the woman as perfection, 'smooth-skinned and dark' (l.4), 'perfect-coloured' (l.6), 'all her face was honey' (l.9), 'all her body pasture to mine eyes' (l.10). The Shakespearian or Romantic comparison of a woman's skin to the colour and texture of flowers is fairly traditional in a Petrarchan sonnet, however, the colour of the white lilies, 'Pale as the duskiest lily's leaf or head/

smooth-skinned and dark' (ll. 3-4), and choice of flower again provides imagery of death and funerals. The woman is 'Too wan for blushing and too warm for white,/ But perfect-coloured without white or red' (ll. 5-6). She is an image. The idealizing of this image compares to Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130' and the lines 'I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, / But no such roses see I in her cheeks', (Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 130', ll. 5-6). However, her hands are 'hotter ...than fire' (l.11).

The poet's 'desire' which makes either his, or the woman's eyelids glitter in the final line of the poem suggests a sexual lust for this woman has taken over him. Many other poems in *Poems and Ballads* contain similar language and imagery of death, lust and sexual desire. The male idealisation or sexualisation of the female form is not a solely aesthetic or decadent preoccupation. The difference between 'Love and Sleep' and, for example Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130', is Swinburne's use of more candid language when depicting his lover's form, 'long lithe arms', 'bright light feet', 'splendid supple thighs'. The descriptions are detailed, but also the suggestion that the female could be naked, as the writer can see her arms and feet and the colour of her skin, adds to the heightened sexual tension within the poem, in contrast to Shakespeare's comparatively tame depiction of an ugly mistress whose 'eyes are nothing like the sun; / Coral is far more red than her lips' red; / If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;' (ll. 1-3). If the argument is that the male writer in 'Love and Sleep' is dead, viewing his lover one last time before going into an endless sleep, then the line ending 'with bare throat made to bite' (l.4) becomes even more disturbing. The threat of 'undead' violence to the lover is made immediate to the reader when taking the second and final lines of the poem into consideration. With the woman leaning over the writer's bed, and with his eyelids 'glittering' with desire,

be it lust, or bloodlust, then the woman is in a particularly vulnerable position. The uneasy vampiric imagery created by Swinburne, here, is not in isolation, but repeated on other occasions in his body of work, notably in 'Faustine' and 'Sonnet for a Picture'. Again, the suggestive themes within 'Love and Sleep', when put into context of the other poems in *Poems and Ballads*, can be argued successfully, in a publication which includes such poems as 'A Ballad of Death' and 'Hermaphroditus'.

Swinburne describes 'Faustine', which Paglia calls as a 'terrible and uncanny poem' (Paglia, 1991: 464), as 'the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty.' (Swinburne, *Notes on Poems and Reviews*: 334, quoted in Paglia, 1991: 463). The poem's protagonist is a vampire who is unable to die. In contrast with 'Love and Sleep', the vampire in 'Faustine' is female, subverting the traditional gender roles of Victorian society, in the name of art. Swinburne's description of her as being like 'white gloss and sheen' (l.16) compares to the female lover in 'Love and Sleep'.

'Sonnet for a Picture'

Another Petrarchan sonnet, 'Sonnet for a Picture', repeats some of the themes displayed in 'Love and Sleep' and 'Faustine'. Images of sexual lust appear again as the poet describes the figure of a female who 'with a gasp, / She pants upon the passionate lips that ache / with the red drain of her own mouth,' (ll. 1-2). The poem depicts two figures, as in 'Love and Sleep', with a female and male character locked together in a passionate embrace. Similar to scenes in 'Triumph of Time', the scene

is full of red imagery. In contrast to the fading lust and passion in 'Triumph', the passion and the heat of the embrace are emphasized here. The red imagery in 'Sonnet for a Picture' contrasts the 'Too wan for blushing and too warm for white' skin of the female in 'Love and Sleep' (l. 5). The female figure's mouth described as a 'red drain', threatens to drain the male figures blood.

The Petrarchan rhyme scheme differs slightly in the sestet to 'Love and Sleep', with there only being two alternating rhymes, rather than three;

'a,b,b,a,a,b,b,a,c,d,d,c,d,c'. In the octave, the speaker describes a painting or drawing in which the male character has physical control over the female, with 'his rutilant grasp' of her hair, indicating he his holding her hair tightly that his hand has turned red with effort. This directly compares to the 'hotter hands than fire' of the female character in 'Love and Sleep' (l. 11). Later in the poem, the lock of hair which the man has in his hand 'has burst its hasp' (l. 8). The passive description of the picture in the octave switches to an opinionated judgment of the scene in the sestet. The 'flush' in the nose (of the reader or of the male character), and the 'wild-eyed woes' (ll. 10-11), portray the passion and energy of the scene, and the emotional response to the picture. The use of exclamation marks with 'Ah!' and 'Nay!' emphasize the switch to the dynamic voice, and the use of multi-syllable words such as 'absolutely abominable', 'Responsive' and 'ravenously untripped' (ll. 9, 13, 14) are elongated in the readers mouth, emphasizing the emotional response further, as does the alliteration of 'absolutely abominable'.

The poet refers to the female character only by her body parts. Despite her 'passionate lips', 'Her bosom is an oven of myrrh', indicating that it is sticky with sweat, and 'the legs are absolutely abominable' (ll. 6, 9). Swinburne's use of the

definite article in describing the legs depersonalises them. The use of 'abominable' brings to mind Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne', and his depiction of a rotting animal corpse, with 'Its legs raised in the air like a lustful woman' (l. 5), and Baudelaire's search for beauty in challenging and unusual, even disgusting and disturbing places. Again, the 'bosom...of myrrh' in Swinburne is likened to Baudelaire's 'putrid belly' (l. 17), particularly when the reader moves into the sestet of 'Sonnet for a Picture'. Here, the poem draws overt parallels between death and desire, as discussed in Paglia's chapter on Swinburne. For a female character to be described as being 'lustful' during the mid-nineteenth century, would be a hint that they may be a prostitute, however, it is not so clear with the female in Swinburne's poem. The man appears in control of the scene, perhaps as it is Swinburne in control of depicting a drawing, and so has attempted to subvert the female dominance over men that Paglia draws attention to.

As the sonnet reaches the sestet, the red imagery returns, with the 'red hem [that] earth's passion sews' (l. 13) linking death and desire in a natural connection, joined together. However, if death and passion are inextricably linked, then a developing obsession with one or the other may lead to those who indulge being condemned to red, fiery depths of hell.

The rhymes in both 'A Sonnet for a Picture' and 'Love and Sleep' are simple throughout. The term 'sonnet' itself derives from the Italian *sonetto*, which means 'little song'. The meter and structure of Swinburne's sonnets, as emphasised in 'Love and Sleep' and 'Sonnet for a Picture' create a sense of song when read aloud. As Stephen Arata comments, 'as we move through a poem and begin to discern its metrical pattern, we expect rhymes, if they come, to come at anticipated intervals.'

(Arata, 2011: 521). Swinburne's two sonnets, here, meet these expectations, with the rhymes coming when the reader anticipates them. On the whole, Swinburne structures these poems without controversy. The controversy comes in the subjects and themes Swinburne developed within the traditional verse forms.

'An Expression by Sound' (Eliot, 1960)

When Eliot asserted that 'What we get in Swinburne is an expression by sound...' rather than image, he suggests that the primary purpose of Swinburne's poetry was to rhyme, to appeal to the listener, and be structurally sound, as was the Parnassian doctrine (Eliot, 1960). However, it is contentious for Eliot to continue, as he does, to say that this expression 'could not possibly associate itself with music' (*ibid.*). The melody of Swinburne's poems is strong. Eliot wrote 'Swinburne as Poet' during the modernist period of literary history, a phase during which he and his peers experimented with form, structure and metre more so than during many other phases before, but only being able to do so because of the experimental ground laid out by the aesthetes and decadents. Ezra Pound, Eliot and the war poets such as Sassoon and Owen deliberately altered and dismantled traditional verse structures, by severely truncating lines, using breaks and pauses in interesting and unusual places in lines, and completely rearranging the structure of poems on the page, and the metre and rhyme.³ It would, of course, been easier for Eliot, when writing 'Swinburne as Poet', and his other essays in *The Sacred Wood* to over-simplify Swinburne's use of rhyme in traditional poetic structures to further his argument.

³ See Ezra Pound 'Ripostes' (1912), T.S. Eliot 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917), Siegfried Sassoon 'An Old French Poet' (1918) and Wilfred Owen 'Beauty' (1917) as examples of poems from the modernist period which subvert traditional form, rhyme and content in different ways.

Whilst 'Love and Sleep' and 'Sonnet for a Picture' appear similar in appearance, both Petrarchan sonnets, employing traditional, simple rhyme schemes, Swinburne's manipulation of the text to control the reader's passage through the poem is subtle. 'Love and Sleep' is punctuated throughout at the end of each line, bar the first and last but one line, which gives the effect of slowing the reader down as they progress through the poem. They have more time to contemplate the story of the poem, particularly the impression that the female figure has made on the male story-teller. The delay in the reader's progress through the poem also reflects the state that the male character is in. By the poem's title, we assume that the male character has been asleep, and has been roused by the female character's entrance into his room. He is, therefore, drowsy and half-asleep, and so it takes him longer to visualize and to articulate his lover's presence. The result is a sleepy, meandering description of what he can see. In contrast, such is the heat and passion of the embrace between the characters in 'Sonnet for a Picture', that Swinburne employs more use of enjambment throughout the poem. The poem is quicker due to the nature of the scene described. When Swinburne does stop at the end of lines, the utterances are much shorter than in 'Love and Sleep', such as 'The lock his fingers clench has burst its hasp. / The legs are absolutely abominable.' (ll. 8-9). The poet is looking from an omnipotent perspective upon the scene in front of him, and is not caught up with the same emotion as the active role the poet plays in 'Love and Sleep'. Only simple, monosyllabic words are used to end each line, with the exception of 'abominable' in 'Sonnet for a Picture' and 'Delight' in 'Love and Sleep'. In both poems, the words used to create the rhymes are sensual and descriptive words for each scene, 'gasp /

ache / woes / hell' in 'Sonnet' and 'bed / bite / white / red / Delight / fire / thighs / desire' in 'Love and Sleep'.

This subtle contrast between these two Swinburnian sonnets demonstrates his awareness of audience, but also his ability to treat simple rhymes in different ways. Whilst 'meter is not sound', as Arata indicates, the use of punctuation both inside and outside the lines of poems affects the cadence in which a poem is read (aloud) (Arata, 2011: 519). 'Swinburne had one word for the meaning and origin of all poems: harmony.' (McGann, 2009: 620). It was by creating this harmony within the structure of the poem, largely through a reliance on traditional fixed verse forms, which allowed him to develop more challenging themes within each poem's content.

The poems discussed above convey imagery that would have challenged his contemporary readership. The scenes of lust, death, hints at vampirism and similes and metaphors linking sex to death and eternal damnation were not commonplace, despite the emergence of the aestheticist and decadent movements in literature and art towards the end of the nineteenth century. Swinburne's 'rule of art [was] not the rule of morals' (Swinburne, quoted in McGann: 2009: 620). The meaning of his work could be delivered through the harmony created in each poem, 'whatever moral ideas they may carry along or even profess.' (*ibid.*: 621). For Swinburne, as McGann conveys, the harmony of a poem 'is always tied to a set of musical ideas and analogies.' (*ibid.*). As McGann goes on to point out, '[Swinburne's] critical prose is...everywhere inflected with a musical vocabulary when he writes about the theory and practice of verse.' (*ibid.*). It would seem safe to appropriate Swinburne's theory of verse to his own works, and that they created the 'inner harmony' he sought. For Eliot to dismiss the sound of Swinburne's poems as being unassociated with music

now appears incorrect. As McGann quotes Wagner's ideal poet as one "to employ words, the material of abstract thought, in such a way as to arouse feeling", through an aspiration to the condition of music, the poems discussed above (and below to a certain extent) demonstrate Swinburne achieving Wagner's aspiration (*ibid.*).

Swinburne's developing theory of poetry lends itself, in the poems considered, to a sense of musicality. The way that the poem sounded was integral to Swinburne, and his refinement of fixed verse forms would become almost formulaic with the number of roundels that he would write and publish. The challenging and at times shocking content of Swinburne's poems in *Poems and Ballads* proved contentious with his audience. With a new thrill in literature proving popular in the circles that Swinburne moved in, his submersion into the immoral world of 'art for art's sake' theory created a body of work that he felt the need to defend in his essay on *Poems and Ballads* in 'Notes on Poems and Reviews'. Here, Swinburne advocates a freedom in literature in describing the contents as being "many-faced" and "multifarious" dramatizations' (Saville, 2009: 696). For Swinburne 'Art is not like fire or water, a good servant and bad master; rather the reverse. She will help in nothing, of her own knowledge or freewill...' (Swinburne, 1868: 137). Whilst elements of this artistic 'freedom' would remain throughout his body of work, a more political and purposeful voice would direct his next major publication, *Songs Before Sunrise*. Moving on from the very French influence on *Poems and Ballads*, *Songs Before Sunrise* would look to Italy for influence, and the republican political movement in particular.

'Swinburne's Radical Artifice' (McGann, 2004)

A Developing Theory Continued

When Swinburne published *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), his theory of poetry had moved on from that which he had employed in *Poems and Ballads*. Critics like T.S. Eliot, and others such as Henry Adams and William Empson had condemned Swinburne's work for lacking any great meaning or relevance, but, as McGann points out, each critic's work is 'inflected by the critic's own cultural agenda' and should not be accepted on face value (McGann in Louis, 2004: 402). As McGann has drawn links between Swinburne and Wagner, in terms of the 'inner harmony' and musicality of the former's work, McGann has also commented on Swinburne's poetry after *Poems and Ballads* and his turn to morality and social change. McGann describes Swinburne as 'a wonder, a terror, and finally a catalyst for great social and cultural change.' (McGann, 2004: 207). Whilst immediate reviews of *Poems and Ballads* were unfavourable - the *Pall Mall Gazette* called it "mad...indecenty" (*Pall Mall Gazette* in McGann and Sligh, 2004: xvii) - the publication itself, and Swinburne's reputation, proved to be a 'scandalous success' (McGann, 2004: 207).

As McGann chronicles, Swinburne's turn from the overtly decadent influences of Baudelaire to more radical writing came about at a time when Swinburne's personal life was in tatters, mainly due to severe alcohol abuse. In 1868, Italian activist and politician Giuseppe Mazzini implored Swinburne to give up his fascination with "absurd immoral French art for art's sake system" and to write the "lyrics of the crusade" towards European republicanism (Mazzini, quoted in Hare, 1949: 141). Mazzini would come to apply 'constant pressure' on Swinburne to write these lyrics,

due to his 'fear that the poet would die...Indeed, it seemed perfectly clear that he was drinking himself to death.' (*ibid.*: 142). Even a decade later, well after his sojourn in Italy had ended, Swinburne was still abusing his body with drink. He was rescued by his loyal lawyer friend Theodore Watts-Dunton in June 1878, upon finding him in a desperate condition. Out of control alcohol abuse and decadent personal indulgences had lead Swinburne into serious physical decline (McGann, 2004: 208-209). Despite an upturn in his personal condition, and a move towards radicalism in his writings, there continued a dark and challengingly unpleasant theme to many of his poems published from *Songs Before Sunrise* onwards.

Yopie Prins has also written about the 'sound' of Victorian poetry. In her 2004 article 'Voice Inverse', Prins talks of the 'mechanization of sound and hearing in Victorian communications networks...[and] how Victorian poems...worked as a mechanism for the disembodiment of voice' (Prins, 2004: 44). In the article, Prins quotes Watts-Dunton's assertion that "'metre is the first and only condition absolutely demanded by poetry.'" (Watts-Dunton, quoted in Prins: 2004: 44). For Julia Saville, 'Swinburne was alert to poetry's special capacity to mediate through the sounds and sensations of rhythm and rhyme those viscerally felt emotions familiar to a particular culture.' (Saville, 2009: 692). Swinburne was a sincere advocate of immersing oneself in a particular culture in order to understand and, more importantly, feel the experiences and emotions associated with it. This visceral connection to a culture, or cause, manifested itself in Swinburne's continued usage of unpleasant and challenging imagery to support his arguments, as will be evidenced below. Depicted as a 'public moralist' by Saville, she asserts that:

If to most public moralists civic duty and self-restraint are requisites of communal well being, to Swinburne it is precisely the civic duty of the poet to voice the equal value of diverse passion to a healthy, intellectually vibrant body politic. (*Ibid.*)

To Saville, Swinburne 'is a spectacular example of the mid-Victorian capacity for self-reflection' with his development of a poetic theory which combined poetry's capacity to bring unimagined and perverse pleasure through sensual immersion with different appealing verse forms and structures (*ibid.*: 693). For Meredith Martin, however, Swinburne scholars have 'generally tried to avoid discussing the formal aspect of his poetry and instead focused on other issues such as his radical politics, sexuality, and spiritual insights.' (Martin, 2011: 152). Not unique to Swinburne, Martin suggests that ignoring the prosodic elements of poetry of the period was more wide-ranging, 'with Swinburne as only one example among many of poets whose prosodic innovations fell to the margins of critical interest.' (*Ibid.*).

Songs Before Sunrise

Swinburne composed *Songs Before Sunrise* after time spent in Italy with politician and activist Giuseppe Mazzini. Mazzini had encouraged Swinburne to find a usefulness in radical aesthetics, which Swinburne put into practice with, firstly, *William Blake* (1868), 'both a critical biography and a manifesto of radical poetics, in which Swinburne describes republican verse as the "fusion" of the political and artistic "senses".' (Kuduk, 2001: 253). Second, with the publication of *Songs Before*

Sunrise, Swinburne put into practice the radical aesthetics outlined in *Blake*, 'enacting the power of poetry to "break and melt in sunder" the "clouds and chains" that bind the "eyes, hands, and spirits" of humanity' ('The Eve of Revolution', ll. 145-147, quoted in Kuduk, 2001: 253). For Kuduk, '*Songs Before Sunrise* charts Swinburne's discovery of a vibrant, cross-class literary practice that renewed and deepened his understanding of poetry as a political tool.' (*ibid.*: 255).

The use of poetry and song for political gain or publicity was common practice from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with many charted examples of songs and verse being sung by protestors against slavery, during the Napoleonic Wars, and during Chartist demonstrations. By the middle of the century, many proponents of European republicanism, and similar causes, had turned to using verse and song to provide 'a central way of experiencing radical politics.' (*ibid.*: 255). *Songs Before Sunrise*, for Kuduk, 'reflects, as it helped to create, the sense of anticipation that characterized republican thought' during the middle part of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*). Still surrounded by aesthetes and Parnassians like William Michael Rossetti and William Morris, Swinburne, became more influenced by radical thinkers and exiled European republicans such as Mazzini and 'co-founder of the Oxford "Old Mortality Society" John Nichol, who has been credited with "finally destroying Swinburne's religious faith and confirming him in atheism and republicanism" (Henderson, quoted in Kuduk, 2001: 256). This combination of exposure to aesthetes and advocates of 'art for art's sake' and radical thinkers who intended verse to be used for a political purpose shaped the content of much of *Songs Before Sunrise*. Mazzini dubbed Swinburne the "prophet of [the] crusade", and Swinburne returned the compliment by writing a dedicatory poem to Mazzini at the front of *Songs Before*

Sunrise, using the Anglophile version 'Joseph' of his name. In this dedication, Swinburne presents Mazzini with 'the sword of a song, / The sword of my spirit's desire,' (ll. 19-20).

Composed of seven sestets, with repeating 'a,b,c,a,b,c' rhyme scheme, the dedication takes a similar verse form to the sestets which end the Swinburnian sonnets discussed in the previous chapter. The 'song' verse is in full praise of a republican uprising in Italy, and hopes that France and England will follow suit. The poem is particularly positive with 'the signet of love for a seal' (l.30), without the overt challenging themes and content which commonly typified *Poems and Ballads*, however there remain hints at unpleasantness, with the sowing of weeds amongst the blossom and berry in the first stanza and that the sword, representing his 'spirit's desire', which he symbolically lays at Mazzini's feet is 'feeble' (ll. 20-21); a possible indication that his spirit's desire is not fully behind the cause. The 'feeble' sword, however, can be made strong by 'visions and dreams of the night' (l. 28), which await the republican sunrise. Not quite Blake's rallying cry in 'Jerusalem', 'England, awake, awake, awake!' (l. 1), 'Swinburne...believed in the power of poetry to rouse a sleeping people', and in his role as a poet to contribute poems to bring about social progress (Kuduk, 2001: 257).

In this context, the sword is 'strong', when representing the poem. It is feeble until it is passed to Mazzini. The strength of the poem lies in its rigid structure and regular rhyme. Like the sonnets, the first and third rhyming words are monosyllabic in each stanza, with a longer word as the middle rhyme 'bear / sowing / weed / fair / growing / seed'. The strength of Swinburne's 'desire' to be a poet of the crusade is emphasized with the 'strong/song' rhyme in the poem. His desire for 'that which was cold [to] take

fire' (l23) demonstrates his burning ambition to write political poems, and also returns us to the red metaphors seen in the poems discussed in the previous chapter. The idea of something catching fire and burning out of control is a potentially hell-like and damnatory image that his audience was used to seeing in his work.

"Non Dolet"

Whilst *Songs Before Sunrise* was written under markedly different circumstances and for different reasons to *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne's retention of similar verse forms and structures, as well as a repetition in the later publication of themes found in the former, is interesting. 'Non Dolet', meaning 'it does not hurt' is a Petrarchan sonnet similar in structure to 'Love and Sleep' and 'Sonnet for a Picture' discussed previously. As with 'Love and Sleep', 'Non Dolet' contains five rhymes, rather than the four present in 'Sonnet for a Picture'. As with the other two sonnets, 'Non Dolet' uses the sestet to change the focus of the poem.

In the opening two quatrains, the poet describes a female character holding a knife, smiling as blood runs down the blade. With the title indicating that an injury has not caused pain, the reader assumes that the blood is either that of the 'Roman wife' (l4) herself, or that of her husband, who she has killed. The image of the colour red seen in the two sonnets discussed previously is continued with the 'thick drops' on the knife; only here the colour is given added meaning as a symbol of republicanism. The image presented to the reader is one of violence, but meaningful and, even, necessary violence when the metaphor of the two quatrains is explained in the sestet. The Roman wife is a symbol of Italy, repressed by her husband, who

represents the, then, existing Italian political system. The reader infers from the scene described in the first two quatrains that the female character has killed, or at least injured, her husband. Swinburne informs his readers

not that which had been done

Could hurt the sweet sense of the Roman wife,

But that which was to do yet ere the strife

Could end for each for ever. (ll.3-6)

That is, that blood must be split in order to achieve what one is fighting for, or 'the gift love's blood has reddened for thy sake?' (l. 11).

Whereas the scenes of lust and violence in the sonnets described above were full of heat, passion and emotion, here, the violence is more considered. It is a necessary casualty to meet the republican objective. There is much less, almost no, emotive language within 'Non Dolet', other than the depiction of the wife 'smiling' as she looks at the blood-covered knife. Again, the rhyming words are simple, almost all monosyllabic, emphasising the simplistic nature of the rhyme, and emphasising the simple but cutthroat action that a Republican uprising could bring. Rhyming 'knife' and 'wife' emphasises the wife's culpability in the violence being acted out.

The posing of rhetorical questions in the sestet, once the metaphor has been explained, help to dismiss any challenges to the ideological position which may arise. He argues that lives have been given up in the past for other causes from which his readers have benefitted, and if blood needs to be shed in such a way to progress,

then those passionate about realising their objectives should not be 'hurt' if required to shed said blood. Swinburne was using *Songs Before Sunrise* to develop his poetic and political agendas. The challenging imagery and content remains there to shock the reader, but the image is combined with political support for the Republican uprising, and challenges his readers on a deeper level. The poem is written in the strong structure of the Petrarchan sonnet. The enjambment employed on lines 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10 create a sense of urgency and smoothness, that the speaker is energised at the possibilities of a revolution, and also wishes to portray the idea that it is possible, straightforward and 'will not hurt'.

As the poem reaches the sestet, in naming his target, 'Italia', and referring directly to his readership, Swinburne attempts to bring his audience into his world, and make them complicit in the actions of the poem. 'Non Dolet' is less aggressive, or forceful, than some of the work of *Poems and Ballads*, for instead of depicting scenes of violence, or lust, or other unpleasantness, as taking place outside the reader's control. This is true of other poems in *Songs Before Sunrise*, something which Stephanie Kuduk acknowledges in reference to 'Hymn of Man'.

'Hymn of Man' and Swinburne's revelations

'Hymn of Man' is a long poem in the form of a traditional Christian hymn, however, without any religious sentiment within it. His use of such verse form for democratic means parallels his repeated use of metaphorical awakening to the republican sunrise; 'a simultaneous reliance on and transformation of Christian worship.' (Kuduk: 2001, 261). Accompanied by a letter addressed to the 'Congress of

Freethinkers' that convened in 1869 in Rome, is intended to spark "revelation" in its readers' through its assertion that freedom comes from within, with no "non-natural message from above or without" (Swinburne, quoted in Kuduk, 2001: 261).

Swinburne calls on man, in the poem, to realise that the Christian God is a human creation, 'and that humanity could create a more human spirituality.' (*ibid.*: 262). He proposes the achievable scope of man's possibilities, from glorious to inglorious, pleasant to unpleasant, expected to unexpected, as alternatives to God, from which his complicit readership can build a new spirituality. The hymn, traditionally, is designed to be sung, and Swinburne is manipulating the traditional religious verse and turning it into one of his crusade lyrics, as a counter to replace its religious equivalent. The poem begins with an emphasis on 'the word'. A subversion and revision of the Biblical 'Book of Genesis', his emphasis on the word both plays into Eliot's argument of his obsession, and counters it.

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?
The word of the earth to the spheres her sisters, the note of her song,
The sound of her speech in the ears of the starry and sisterly throng,
Was it praise or passion or prayer, was it love or devotion or dread,
When the veils of the shining air first wrapt her jubilant head? (ll. 1-6)

Rather than adhering to, or relying on 'the word' of God, as the creation story in the Bible, Swinburne is literally enraptured with 'words' which sing of man's realistic

experience on earth. There are hints at challenges and possible unpleasantness, as the beginning years aren't full of colour and joy, but grey, and in twilight. Swinburne's realism is almost pessimistic, as he conveys a different beginning to the world, shrouded in grey darkness, before a new dawn comes.

The alteration of traditional hymn form and metre is interesting, where alternating rhymes are changed to doubles, every four lines, giving, as Kuduk points out, both an internal rhyme and an end rhyme, every two lines (Kuduk, 2001: 263). Whilst the internal rhymes fall regularly, Swinburne's destabilisation of the poem in altering the length of the second part of lines affects the rhythm and structure of the poem, almost as if the hymn is in flux, being assembled, preparing for revolution, as opposed to the traditional form, which is as established as Christianity as a religion. The hymn, as a song form, traditionally sung by a congregation of believers, and well known by all, has been changed to harness the anticipation felt by republicans in their quest for change. As Kuduk points out, 'Swinburne has taken a familiar genre, one associated with the most communal moments of Christian worship, and harnessed it for a radically communitarian message of human power.' (*ibid.*: 264). As much as the grey and dark twilight are an unusual beginning for a 'new world order' and a song presented to all men, the unpleasantness is almost left unsaid at the beginning of 'Hymn of Man'. In writing a new hymn, as a new dawn for the 'wastes of worn mankind' ('Christmas Antiphones', part II, l. 8), he infers that the existing world order needs changing or usurping. He offers republicanism, and atheism as an alternative to Christianity and orthodox religious beliefs. For Swinburne, particularly in 'Hymn of Man', but also in other poems in *Songs Before Sunrise* such as 'Christmas Antiphones', it is important for him to convey his lack of belief in religion to his

readership, and to divide his readership into believers and non-believers, excluding those who choose to continue to follow the word of God, and including wholeheartedly those who chose to reject it. This is epitomised in 'Christmas Antiphones' where the first section, 'In Church', 'begins with the word "thou", [and] the second section, "Outside Church", begins with the word "we."' (Kuduk, 2001: 269). 'In Church' is written from the perspective of a traditional Christian believer, whereas 'Outside Church' comes from the voice of a poor, oppressed, non-believer, through the collective use of 'we' throughout. Unusually for Swinburne, he includes both himself and the reader in the voice of the collective oppressed poor in the poem. This directly contrasts from the 'anonymous songwriter of the "Hymn of Man". (*ibid*: 270). Swinburne identifies with the oppressed of society and gives them a voice through his poetry, identifies with them himself and attempts to ensure that his readership also identify with them, through their inclusion in the words of the poem.

The simple structure of each stanza of the poem, with its double rhyme across 5 short lines is both easy to recite and to read. This then draws attention to the drab and destitute state of the poor non-believers.

We with the strife of life
Worn till all life cease,
Want, a whetted knife,
Sharpening strife on strife,
How should we love peace? (Part II, ll. 11-15)

Swinburne is writing to support social change. In 'Faustine' and 'Atlanta in Calydon', he had looked to subvert typical gender stereotypes, with his empowerment of female characters, largely through making them the dominant sexual characters of his poems, Swinburne in 'Christmas Antiphones' challenges Victorian society through its religious traditions. Drawing attention to the unpleasant plight of the poor underclass of society challenges his readership, made up of largely the middle and upper classes, to become more aware of their suffering. The underclasses are only materially poor. Here, they are presented as spiritually rich, despite the absence of belief in a God, due largely to their humanity; their blood runs 'Red with no God's blood, / But with man's indeed' (Part II, ll. 39-40). The poem then culminates with 'Beyond Church', in which the poet and his readership have become one in their understanding and belief in the republican ideal. Beginning in the grey murkiness of twilight, Swinburne reaches the end of the day having won over his audience with his argument, and the 'sun is one' (l291).

New ideas, refined forms

In *Songs Before Sunrise*, Swinburne articulated his ideas and beliefs in radical and republican poetry. The ideas expressed by radical poets through their work were relatively new and modern and Giuseppe Mazzini actively 'celebrated the power of modern poetry...not simply to move people, but to move them to political action.' (Saville, 2009: 700). Many of Swinburne's poetic peers advocated and argued for a concern in poetry with 'events of the present' (*ibid.*: 699). Swinburne believed that an understanding of the past was fundamental to be able to reflect critically on the

present. In his prose, and his theories of poetry, he refused to advocate a limit to a poet's freedom of choice with regards to subject matter or content. This perhaps explains his preoccupation with fixed verse forms, particularly the poems discussed above, and also the rondeaus and other fixed forms that he would focus on throughout his poetic career, and particularly with his publication of *A Century of Roundels* [1883].

Swinburne was undeniably aligned with the radical European poets of the mid-late nineteenth century with *Songs Before Sunrise*. In producing the text, he also found himself a new readership, who viewed 'poetry as a central agent of political change.' (Kuduk, 2001: 274). Swinburne was not the only one who was engaged with the classical art of his poetic ancestors, as Blake and Shelley, amongst many others, did too. In remaining engaged with his poetic past, and adopting a new motive for writing, Swinburne's 'progressive politics and innovative art were seen in tandem' (*ibid.*). They also demonstrate Swinburne's developing theory of art that recognises the importance of modernity and change in tandem with a remembrance of the past. His manipulation of fixed verse forms to 'house' challenging and at times shocking subject matter progressed from the images in *Poems and Ballads* of lust and death, through to a change in traditional religion, as in 'Christmas Antiphones'. Recent work on Swinburne 'rethinks form and formalist methods' in the twenty-first century (Kay, 2013: 272). New Formalist rethinking of Victorian poetry looks at its 'metrical properties...thought to be instrumental to its capacity to affect the political (and fleshly) body.' (*Ibid.*: 293).

Swinburne's formalism, at least for Kay, was characterised in part by 'a simultaneous understanding, expressed in tropes of waves and of music, that poetic form

manifested itself in time...[and]...were invested with politically subversive potential' (*ibid.*: 272). Whilst the poems of *Songs Before Sunrise* had a meaning and a cause behind them, the resulting publication still received as mixed reviews as *Poems and Ballads*. Where *Poems and Ballads* had been dismissed by critics for its sordid and depraved content, so *Songs Before Sunrise* was welcomed by republican commentators, "E.H.G."...enthusiastically reviewed *Songs Before Sunrise*...calling it the "most remarkable work" of the year' (E.H.G., quoted in Kuduk, 2001: 274). Some of course found fault with Swinburne's turn (back) to radicalism, with well known and respected literary critic Herbert J.C. Grierson dismissing Swinburne's radical stance as an imitation of Mazzini;

Swinburne...had nothing to say except what he had caught, as by infection, from others. He will sing of liberty as Shelly had done, and will with Mazzini identify liberty with republicanism, so that later the poet-laureateship remained close to him. (Grierson, 1953: 15).

Grierson's accusation is that Swinburne was more sponge than radical, using the messages and ideals Mazzini espoused to create poems with a radical and republican edge, simply to demonstrate a new string to his poetic bow. With that said, Grierson still accepts *Songs Before Sunrise* as 'the best known and appreciated today of the lyrical collections' (*ibid.*: 17).

With Swinburne's personal life and health deteriorating rapidly during the period in which he composed much of *Songs Before Sunrise*, and his continued efforts to secure creative freedom through his work, it is not surprising that critics have

suggested that Swinburne's life was lived through his poetry (McGann, 2004: 212). In composing sequences of words restricted by rhyme patterns, metre and form, the sound of each word becomes vital. That the language of his poems takes on the capacity for 'mutation and transformation' into what McGann terms 'Pure Sound' (*ibid.*: 214). Whilst critics such as Eliot have attempted to dismiss the emphasis by Swinburne on sound as an obsession with words, or a series of 'drunken passages', it is the fixed rhyme and metre which allows Swinburne to challenge his readership with his varying subject matter (*ibid.*). This choice subject matter continued with his later publications as will be discussed in the next chapter.

'A Roundel is Wrought'

The Roundel

Swinburne published 'A Century of Roundels' in 1883. The series of poems demonstrated Swinburne's employment of the roundel form, a new fixed poetic form that Swinburne had developed from the classical rondeau form. Where the rondeau is more suited to the French language, the roundel maintains the use of a refrain, with Swinburne refining the fixed form to suit the English language. The repetition of the opening word or refrain at the end of the first and third stanzas emphasises the key phrase of the poem. The simple structure of three stanzas, constructed of four, three and four lines, including the refrain, with the alternating double rhyme running throughout creates a song-like quality, particularly when read aloud, with the repeating refrain acting somewhat like a chorus.

In 'The Roundel', Swinburne describes the fixed form's strength and rigidity, whilst also referring to the alternative meaning of the word 'roundel', as a heraldic disc.

'A Roundel is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere,
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear
A roundel is wrought.' (ll. 1-4).

The cyclical nature of the poem, with repeating refrains book-ending both the first stanza and the final line of the poem, mimics the heraldic disc shape. The circle shape has no start and no end, and continues in infinite repeating rings. With no start

or end, it is a shape that is difficult to break. The cyclical repeating refrain becomes infectious to the reader, much like the 'repetition of musical units thus redeemed an opera from aimlessness and disarray.' (Kay, 2013: 295). Swinburne was very aware of the simple power which rhyme and sound have when placed in the right form, as has been discussed in earlier chapters. In constructing a simple, rigid verse form, Swinburne allowed himself the creative freedom to change his content and subject matter.

The poems in the 'A Century of Roundels' collection span quite a scope of theme and content. From a poem about the structure of the form, the collection contains poems on death, birth, references to the classical and lost poets of bygone eras, as well as allusions to erotica, infatuation and hints at paedophilia and obsession with children. The collection also contains a series of sonnets, many of which are dedicated to notable figures such as Thomas Carlyle and William Bell Scott, as well as maintaining Swinburne's interest in radical poetry, particularly with 'On the Russian Persecution of the Jews'. The collection also falls in between a collection titled 'A Study in Songs' and a collection of 'Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets 1590-1650' and 'The Heptalogia' ('The Seven Against Sense').

Poems such as 'The Lute and the Lyre' demonstrate Swinburne's continuation of his themes of lust and desire as seen in the sonnets discussed previously. With the refrain kept short, to simple 'deep desire', the emphasis Swinburne places in the poem is on the depth and strength of feeling, enhanced by the strength of the form in which the poem is written.

The desire Swinburne depicts 'pierces heart and spirit to the root' (l.1). Whilst the poem doesn't portray the intimacy of some of his earlier sonnets, such as 'Love and Sleep', in depicting characters in an embrace, 'The Lute and the Lyre' focuses on the musicality of the emotion, and the intensity of feeling for the poet. The passion moves through the poet like a burning fire and transforms a 'reluctant voice' (l.2) to an exultant one, a passion which makes rose buds respire (l.5) before they blossom.

The colour of the image is much more subtle than in previous Swinburnian depictions of lust. The reader imagines the rose bud flourishing into a red rose, continuing the theme throughout the poems discussed. The red here could depict the passion of a radical poet, who wears his heart on his sleeve for a political or social cause, or it could depict the burning desire and lust of a poet yearning after a lover. The challenge to his readership with this particular roundel is much more understated than in his other work, although the reader is still confronted with a poem that depicts passion and zeal almost to obsessive ends. The reader is challenged to imagine a cause or a person who they feel so strongly about, in order to attempt and connect with the poem.

To devote an entire series to the one poetic structure emphasises Swinburne's skill and fascination with short poetic constructions, coupled with his obsession with rhyme and sound. Swinburne's focus on developing the roundel form came through attempting to manipulate the rondeau to the English language. Swinburne had written the *Rondeaux Parisiens* at a similar time to *A Century of Roundels* and struggled to find a journal to publish them, as they 'were so violently vituperative' (Hare, 1949: 198).

The violent content of these rondeaus, coupled with their simplistic structure was too much for French publishers to endorse their publication. Traditionally, these fixed form poetic structures had been used to write straightforward love poetry, and were roundly dismissed by established poets as being 'unintellectual'. Gerard Manley Hopkins even criticised the great Tennyson for using Parnassian ideals and forms in his work (Turner, 1990). Swinburne, however, took to using these forms, and developing them to contain sordid and distasteful imagery and content, as with 'Aperotos Eros' and 'The Lute and the Lyre'.

It was the Parnassians who initially developed these fixed form poems. Beginning in France, and influenced by Gautier, poets who subscribed strictly to the 'art for art's sake' doctrine espoused by Gautier, strove to achieve the perfect poetic form, whilst remaining emotionally detached from the subject matter. The Parnassian ideal of art has been described as the 'pure, aesthetic form' (Robinson, 1953: 744). Whilst not limited to France, and becoming somewhat of a niche or cult movement amongst followers in Britain, the movement did not achieve mass popularity north of the Channel. Swinburne's close association with the Parnassian movements in both France and England, and his interest in rhyme and form, allowed him to take to developing the rondeau and other French forms more easily than other poets. This chapter will discuss the extent to which the development of the roundel form supports or detracts from Swinburne's continuing use of challenging themes and content.

Villon and the Parnassians

In 1873, Lord Alfred Tennyson rejected Swinburne's, and others', turn to French art for influence and the 'danger to [English] art from "poisonous honey stol'n from France." Readers from queen to commoner could nod their heads in pious agreement, for they shared Tennyson's Gallophobia...[and]... could only regard those who sipped such honey as un-British to the core.' (*ibid.*: 733). The influence of French aestheticism on English art and culture shocked many Victorians, however, the influence soon became significant and wide ranging. What Robinson refers to as the 'flowering' of a 'Parnassian cult of French fixed forms, headed by Austin Dobson, and a vogue of Villon translation' would extend across English artistic culture for much of the latter part of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*). Whilst leading to the decadent and more extreme period in English (and French) art of the nineties, the Parnassian movement in England was 'preoccupied with expression as the chief justification of a work of art' (*ibid.*).

For Swinburne, one of the flag bearers for French aestheticism, it was the perceived independence of French artists which appealed most to him. Robinson notes Swinburne's 'mother's love of French literature' as a major starting point in his affinity for the country and its art (*ibid.*: 735). However, it was Swinburne's discovery, probably through Rossetti, of the fifteenth century French poet and vagabond François Villon which cemented Swinburne's poetic direction. Again, as Robinson charts, the work which Swinburne produced during the early 1860s demonstrates the influence which Villon was having on him. He translated works such as 'The Complaint of the Fair Armouress', and the 'Dispute of the Heart and Body of François Villon' and attempted to imitate Villon's style and form. This interest and fascination with strict form at the beginning of his poetic career was sustained throughout,

particularly when seen in the inclusion of some translations of Villon in *Poems and Ballads*, and of course with 'A Century of Roundels'.

The early translation of 'The Complaint of the Fair Armouress' was produced in ten stanzas each of two quatrains of alternating 'a,b,a,b,c,d,c,d' rhymes. Written in the first person, the poet speaks with an Armourer's wife who tells of her struggle both in marriage to the armourer, and since his death. The depiction of a beaten down character who has suffered during a hard life and longs for a return of 'the sweet old days' (l 73) could be read as a sad and depressing poem, however, it is Swinburne's witty translation which provides the poem with more light hearted and song-like quality. Each line is made up of 8 beats, generally of 4 iambs, almost without exception. This regular, melodic rhythm to the poem is deliberate in a translation form another language, and demonstrates Swinburne's skill and mastery of fixed verse forms. The translation employs the use of colloquialisms, particularly ones which give an English sense to the poem, as opposed to Villon's fifteenth century France. Opening the poem with the archaic 'Meseemeth' (l1), and using such coarse language from the Armouress as 'wot', 'chary', 'gat' and 'alack' help convey both her social status, as well as help the reader visualise the character making such a complaint to the poet. Her aged body is described by her, through the poet, with 'The bowed nose, fallen from goodlihead; / Foul flapping ears like water-flags;' (ll. 61-62). This decrepit creature would no doubt scare many readers, yet Swinburne feels it prevalent to resurrect her after four centuries. The feeble old frame has warped from a once young and sweet beauty to one with short arms, skinny hands and bowed shoulders. 'There endeth all the beauty of us' (l65), yet Swinburne seeks beauty in her aged figure and Villon's long dead poetic form.

The aesthetic tendency to search for beauty in unusual or less than conventional places could be argued to be recycled from earlier eras. Victorian society initially condemned Swinburne and his peers' attempts to promote an art for art's sake ethos in literature; seen with the reception *Poems and Ballads* received on first publication. On later reflection, however, Theodore Watts remarks on the eventual acceptance of Swinburne's poetic skill and intellectual ability;

...to Mr Swinburne's verse, we, for our part, have come to a conclusion which no amount of popular criticism would drive us from – that, in intellectual agility, and even in intellectual strength, Mr. Swinburne has, among contemporary English poets, no superior, unless it be Mr. Browning. (Watts, in Hyder, 1970: 179).

Watts goes on to comment that Villon be the 'most concise of all French poets' and that Swinburne's translations of Villon are 'marvellous, both for vitality and for closeness' (*ibid.*: 179-180). Watts does, however, criticise Swinburne for failing to repeat the 'medieval coarseness of the original' in replacing lines of text in stanzas seven and nine with asterisks. Whilst the reasons for Swinburne employing asterisks instead of the poem's text are not made explicit, it can be read that he is editing himself from repeating, or at least translating, material which he, or his audience, would see as too improper or rude.

Writing in the *Athenaeum*, Watts praises Swinburne's translations of Villon, as they appeared in *Poems and Ballads: Second Series*, as he praises Swinburne's attempts to translate Victor Hugo, and notes the mutual admiration shared by the two poets

(*ibid.*: 180). He draws a distinct contrast between Swinburne and Hugo; ‘...nothing can be more paradoxical and anomalous than such a duo of “mutual admiration” between men, one of whom is the English exponent of the doctrine *l’art pour l’art*, the other the most notable example of rebellion against the doctrine...’ (*ibid.*: 181), before going on to dispel this ‘myth’, by suggesting that Swinburne is not a true proponent of *l’art pour l’art* at all, and that he is ‘just as ethical and just as teleological as M. Hugo himself.’ (*Ibid.*).

Watts’ criticism of *Poems and Ballads: Second Series* was published in July 1878, the year the second series of Swinburne’s first collection was published, and seven years after *Songs Before Sunrise* was released. It would be a lot easier, therefore, for critics to notice and highlight any revolutionary, teleological or ethical tendencies than when *Poems and Ballads* was first published. Watts, though, ignores this and sees it as ‘proof of the condition into which English criticism has sunk.’ (*Ibid.*). After initially appearing to compliment Swinburne’s work, and his translations of Villon and Hugo, Watts finds Swinburne’s work to be a revolt against God, or Swinburne’s concept of God as being responsible for the failings of Society. Condemning both Swinburne’s attempted ‘revolt’, and the effort wasted on attempting the revolt. He criticises Swinburne’s visage of God, not being God at all, ‘but a certain little pulsation of a certain little mass of “animal pap” – a man’s brain.’ (*Ibid.*).

In reviewing the Second Series of *Poems and Ballads*, Watts can draw both on the first series, and *Songs Before Sunrise*, as well as a wealth of critical opinion on Swinburne that had built up over the course of his career. Despite the criticism mentioned above, Watts still praises the work, and Swinburne the poet. He concludes his review by suggesting that ‘we consider the second series of *Poems*

and Ballads the most striking book – apart from its pricelessness as a body of poetry – that has appeared in England for some years.’ (*Ibid.*: 184). He references ‘a love of nature such as was not seen in [Swinburne’s] previous books’ as a positive development and the ‘violence of some of the political sonnets’ as not detracting from the body of work (*ibid.*). Given the repeated and prolonged exposure to Swinburne’s ‘unpleasant’ imagery by the release of the Second Series of *Poems and Ballads*, it could be argued that a desensitisation had occurred, or begun to occur, whereby critics were beginning to see Swinburne’s work as less challenging or unpleasant, in terms of its imagery and content, and more beautiful, elegant or ‘tender’ in terms of its writing (*ibid.*).

Oliver Elton, writing in *Modern Studies* in 1907, describes Swinburne’s poetic vision as an ‘abstract and moral passion for mankind’, which he gave voice to in 1870 (*Songs Before Sunrise*) and again in 1875 in the *Songs of Two Nations* (Elton, in Hyder, 1970: 227). Elton describes Swinburne as a ‘poet of the emotions, and not merely or mainly of the sensations.’ (*Ibid.*: 223). Speaking of *Poems and Ballads*, Elton suggests that ‘[t]hey are the first verses in England since those of Donne to utter faithfully certain youthful moods of sick revulsion, or of acrid satiety, or of hope idly recurrent, or of passion on the ebb and self-regretting.’ (*Ibid.*). It is these themes that Elton suggests Swinburne returns to in the Second Series of *Poems and Ballads*, particularly in his ‘ballades’ on Villon, Gautier and Baudelaire. In ‘A Ballad of François Villon, Prince of All Ballad-Makers’, Swinburne, at least according to Elton, writes as if in mourning for ‘a friend or companion who dies yesterday’ rather than four centuries earlier (*ibid.*: 227).

Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother’s name!

Alas the joy, the sorrow and the scorn,
That clothed thy life with hopes, sins and fears,
And gave thee stones for bread and tares for corn (ll. 10-13)

Swinburne laments the 'dusk of dolorous years' (l2), which has lasted without the 'bitter bright grey golden morn' (l1) for some four centuries. Villon is not Gautier, as he is not Baudelaire. For both, as Elton describes, were 'thorough...[in their] devotion or in [their] apathy to the hopes of man.' (*Ibid.*: 228). Elton contrasts the familiarity that Swinburne displays in his ballad on Villon with the 'faint and acrid immortelles' of Gautier and Baudelaire in the Second Series of *Poems and Ballads* (*ibid.*). That said, Elton praises Swinburne's elegies of Gautier and Baudelaire, particularly Baudelaire, with it being unusual for an English mourner to praise foreign peers in such a way as, for example, in 'Ave atque Vale':

For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother,
Take at my hands this garland, and farewell.
Thin is the leaf, and chill the wintry smell,
And chill the solemn earth, a fatal mother,
With sadder than the Niobeian womb,
And in the hollow of her breasts a tomb. (XVIII, ll. 188-193)

The poem is made up of eighteen stanzas of eleven lines each. The rhyme scheme is regular, 'a,b,b,a,c,c,d,e,e,d,e', with 5 rhymes alternating, with three sets of couplets within each stanza. This gives each stanza an internal structure, with the eleventh

line of each stanza being shortened to from iambic pentameter in the preceding ten lines, to three iambic feet. This gives each stanza a concluding line on which to round off.

Swinburne's words read both sweet and tinged with caution, with the 'fatal mother' referencing Mother Earth's ability to take life away with finality. Swinburne's personification of the Earth as 'mother-figure', as a sexual being, with a tomb in her breast can be read reassuringly, that Baudelaire rests in the heart of the earth. The reference to a 'Niobean womb' references the Greek mythological story of the daughter of Tantalus, whose children were slain after she boasted of them.

Swinburne seems to be suggesting that Baudelaire's passing is sadder than this myth, or even sadder than Niobe's womb which will bring life into the world only for it to be extinguished because of the mother's actions. Baudelaire died following a stroke after a battle with numerous chronic conditions resulting from years of drug abuse. Swinburne's reference to the Niobean story in which characters were turned to stone may reference Baudelaire's (semi) paralysis suffered as a result of the stroke in 1866. Swinburne's use of classic mythology, combined with a Pagan reference to Mother Earth is a return to a repeated tactic through much of his work, particularly through *Poems and Ballads* and links back to the Paglia criticism discussed earlier in this thesis.

'Time and Life'

In 'Time and Life', Swinburne continues the personification of the earth and extends it to time. 'Time, thy name is sorrow, says the stricken / Heart of life' (ll. 1-2) suggests

that Swinburne, or at least the author, is battling with a condition which has left them struggling to continue with their own life. The 'thoughts that sicken / Hunt and hound thee down to death and shame' (ll. 6-7) could be interpreted to be the challenging and often unpleasant themes which Swinburne has approached in his poetry throughout his career. It could be read that this poem in particular comes as a form of repentance, or at least an acknowledgement (to himself or to his readership) that, perhaps, his obsession or interest in the unpleasant and challenging as subjects for his work have driven him to death. Whilst this sounds exaggerated, and in itself a shocking confession, such was Swinburne's state of mind by the end of his literary career, the extent of his alcoholism and other addictions, and the sobering influence of friend Theodore Watts-Dunton, that it is more than conceivable. Published in 1883, 'A Century of Roundels' was published some four years after Watts-Dunton had actively withdrawn Swinburne from his life of alcohol, shady companionships and other improvidences.

Forming part of the collection of roundels, 'Time and Life' is written in the similar roundel style that Swinburne popularised. The simple, two-verse poem, each verse being made up of three, three-line stanzas, with a repeated refrain in the first and third, demonstrates the strict and cyclical form that the Parnassians developed during the nineteenth century, and that Swinburne adopted and adapted. The repetitive 'a,b,a,b,b,a,b,a,b,a,b' rhyme of each verse, and the short, quick lines of the poem lead the reader from start to finish in very little time. The subject matter of the first verse is one of a paradoxical rush towards the end of the reader's life, whilst hinting at there being unresolved difficulties that haunt the author as death approaches. The repeating of 'requicken' and 'quicken', and use of words like 'pace' and 'hunt'

throughout the verse give a sense of urgency and time diminishing to the reader. This coupled with the short lines and enjambment between many of the lines draw the reader from the start to the end of the verse quickly and smoothly. The lack of punctuation gives the reader little time to pause for reflection, until the halfway point of the poem; instead, the reader simply reads through the almost song-like rhythm of the poem, as the author hints at unresolved difficulties at the end of his or her life, and matters which continue to press upon their conscience. This could, of course, be a deliberate tactic employed by the author, who in some embarrassment or humiliation, wishes to gloss over the 'shame' which they feel over the 'Ghosts that smite and thoughts that sicken' (l6).

The repeating refrain 'Tim, thy name', as a shortened fifth and twelfth line of only three beats really emphasises the content of the line, and chops the stanza short. The alliteration of 'waste with wasting flame' (l2) and 'Hunt and hound thee' (l8) emphasise the morbidity of the image of the 'stricken / heart of life' (ll. 1-2) and the pressure under which the poet feels from the sickening thoughts which cloud his brain.

It is during the second verse, however, that the tempo changes somewhat. Adopting a similar 'c,d,c,d,d,c,d,c,d,c,d' rhyme, the lines of verse two are punctuated far more than in verse one, with line 2 of the second verse even being broken with a hyphen at the beginning of the line and a colon being used in the third line, '- So might haply time, with voice repress, / Speak: is grief the last gift of my dealing?' (ll. 13-14). The effect is to slow the tempo of the poem down considerably, and allow the reader more opportunities to pause and reflect on the message being conveyed. The second verse of 'Time and Life' focuses more on the search for repentance and

reconciling one's own mind before death. The language used in the second verse is one of both weariness, and also a focus on the slower passage of time, as 'weariest', 'tired', 'toil', 'slow', 'Twelve loud hours', 'lie's laborious quest', 'vigil', and 'rest' are all words or phrases which suggest effort, time and struggle, directly juxtaposed to the faster and more immediate language of verse one. It could be argued that the author is slowing down, both in terms of health and decline as they approach the end of their life, and also to 'hang on to' the remaining moment of their life before it passes, therefore focussing on their own tiredness, weariness and toil. Noticeably, there is no focus on pain; the author does not describe any physical or emotional pain, other than a general sorrow and feeling of malaise throughout. The description of the 'bloodred lines' in the author's eyes in the first verse are as close as the reader gets to a physical description of the torment and torture that the author feels. The red, being a common colour used throughout many of Swinburne's poems, to depict many different emotions or sentiments at different times, many of which are described in this thesis, here are both small in terms of their size in the author's eyes and significant in reflecting the mental and physical state in which the author now finds himself. As the poem progresses, the eyes are described as being 'forspent with vigil', further emphasising their weariness and exhaustion, and only find comfort and relief when they close, and the author is at rest. The red imagery is continued with the 'slow sun wheeling', setting at the end of the day, at the end of the author's life, and perhaps setting on the revolutionary ideals advocated in *Songs Before Sunrise*. The image is brought to the reader's mind of a large sun slowly setting, 'wheeling' round the horizon and turning the sky a shade of crimson, the colour of the Republican revolution.

Swinburne's skill with the roundel form is highlighted in 'Time and Life', and his ability to slow the tempo to fit the subject matter as the poem progresses, through assonance 'wearied / toil, slow, wheeling / laborious / reeling / revealing', without disturbing the metrical feet between the two stanzas, which are the same in both. Swinburne manages this through a combination of punctuation and his choice of vocabulary. In keeping the rhythm and timbre of the poem consistent throughout, and therefore the musicality of it. As a roundel, the focus is on the repeating refrains of verses one and two, and therefore on both 'time' (verse one), and the notion that it is running out, and 'rest' (verse two) and the peace that the author achieves, or at least asserts that he has achieved by the end of the poem, and also the end of his life. A feeling of empathy, possibly even pity, is evoked in the reader, as the author writes almost in repentance for the unpleasant deeds of one's life. The twist is that verse one is written in the second person, with 'time' being personified, and the focus being on the time that is ebbing away, before a switch to the first person, and the author's quest to find comfort and rest. The roundel form both here in 'Time and Life' and throughout 'A Century of Roundels' has been perfected by Swinburne to take on the tight, rigid form of the earlier Parnassian poems. Its effect is the tight, regular rhyme, repeating refrain and song-like rhythm, whilst enabling Swinburne to discuss a range of different, often challenging or unpleasant themes and subject matters. 'A Century of Roundels' includes poems about love, life, death, and other typical themes of poetry of the period, in addition to poems that focus on lust, eroticism, the death of a baby (in part set to music by Elgar), revolution and other more challenging and unorthodox themes, which tend to be prevalent throughout the body of Swinburne's work.

As Robinson says of Rossetti, the same can be said of Swinburne that Swinburne 'never subscribed to [the Parnassian's] cult of objectivity which led first to ridding poetry of the author and then to practically all content whatsoever.' (Robinson, 1953: 734). Many of Swinburne's roundels are seemingly autobiographical, and certainly contain the narrative voice required of a prevalent author. This is in spite of his battle against 'Victorian Philistinism' and his proclamation of "art for art's sake first of all" (*ibid.*: 737). It could and has been argued that Swinburne's public advocating of firstly the aesthetic movement in art of the period, and more nuanced Parnassian ideal, were not always embraced through his poetry, both as the writer developed his own style and position, as well as continually reconciled his own morals and beliefs, and the purpose of his poetry, noticed in the transition between the aesthetic *Poems and Ballads*, through the revolutionary *Songs Before Sunrise* and the highly structured and rigid *A Century of Roundels*.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the often paradoxical, complex and entwined relationship of Swinburne's poetic verse forms and subject matter, particularly focussing on his 'obsession' with sound and the tight, fixed verse forms used throughout his body of work, and culminating in the publication of *A Century of Roundels* in 1883. Swinburne is celebrated today as an aesthete, decadent, and as an important writer, poet and critic of the Victorian period, who contributed much to literary society. That said, and as is discussed at the beginning of this thesis, Swinburne's almost complete fall from favour in literary circles throughout the main part of the twentieth century following T.S. Eliot's essays in *The Sacred Wood* (1921) left a void that has only in recent years begun to be filled. This thesis has treated poems from all three of Swinburne's major works, *Poems and Ballads*, *Songs Before Sunrise* and *A Century of Roundels*, and sought to compare and contrast the use of verse form with the choice of subject matter, where indeed subject matter is clear. What we are left with are a number of conclusions that can be drawn.

Firstly, and simply, it can be concluded that Swinburne was acutely aware of the impact on his readership that the juxtaposition of verse form with theme could have; particularly and more accurately, the apposition of strict and tight verse forms with more decadent and challenging subject matter. It could be argued that the development and deployment of the song-like roundel form for poems that discuss in varying degrees of detail, death, lust and other more sordid themes could be seen as a way of 'hiding' or 'masking' the subject matter from the reader, particularly when the poems are read aloud, with the words falling pleasantly to the ear of the reader in the regular rhyming patterns of the poems. This would support and also challenge Eliot's

assertion that Swinburne was 'merely' obsessed by words, their sound and not their meaning, which is evident in refining and creating the roundel form, and its requirement to have a tight, regular rhymes, and repeating refrain, but which can be moderated to suit the tone and content of the poem, particularly seen in 'Time and Life', and the addition of key punctuation and enjambment to control the emotion espoused in the theme of the poem. Whilst Eliot's criticism of Swinburne can be read in a purely negative fashion, the same criticism can be adapted to incorporate a positive view on Swinburne's work in light of the above reflections. This is something that Tucker appears to reference in his endnotes to his chapter 'What Goes Around: A Century of Roundels' in the recent edited collection of essays *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*. 'Eliot's essay is more analytically appreciative than one can readily tell from the effect it had on later readers' (Tucker, 2012: 19). In short, that Swinburne had a preoccupation with the word, particularly the spoken word and rhyme, but that he was acutely aware of the impact of this on his readership, and the ability to use rhyme and song to convey or to describe challenging and unpleasant topics or meanings. By the time *A Century of Roundels* was published, Swinburne's honing and perfecting of the fixed verse form that had intrigued the Parnassians was complete. Eliot was most aware of this, and to read his essays on Swinburne in only a negative light is to do a disservice to both Eliot and Swinburne. Swinburne had progressed beyond imitation (largely of Baudelaire) and the deliberately shocking *Poems and Ballads*, through his flirtation with and penchant for political and revolutionary poetry in *Songs Before Sunrise* and arrived at a collection of short, concise poems still intent to tackle the complex and challenging subject matter of his previous work. This thesis condenses Swinburne's literary

career into these three key collections, which of course leads to numerous limitations, but in light of the three key collections, and the poems from them chosen for analysis, continuity and development are seen to run throughout.

Whilst Wilde may criticise Swinburne's *A Century of Roundels* as his retirement 'to the nursery', there continues to be something 'very perfect and very poisonous' about all of his poetry (Wilde, 1889). Both the rhyme and significant portion of *A Century of Roundels* dedicated to children do indicate both an unhealthy fascination with children and with nursery rhymes (discussed in detail elsewhere), but also a playfulness and awareness that a sing-song structure and rhythm is infectious to a reader. The very fact that there has been a rekindling of interest and criticism in literary fields in recent years in Swinburne's work indicates that he and his work continue to be relevant to the modern reader and critic, particularly with New Formalist thinking and re-thinking of Victorian poetry. The Maxwell and Evangelista 2013 book demonstrates this, with the text comprising of eleven new essays from international scholars, offering a reevaluation of Swinburne's canon in light of recent critical work on topics such as form, gender, cosmopolitanism and aestheticism as recent publications have sought to establish. Tucker's essay on the roundel asserts that as the roundel itself is cyclical, returning as it does in its last line to the very refrain that opened each poem, so the collection *A Century of Roundels* is also cyclical, and should be taken as a 'whole', particularly as he draws the conclusion that in the final roundel 'Envoi', 'the concluding image of flight to a 'haven' is an end that recapitulates a distant textual beginning, sending us back to the roundel entitled 'In Harbour' that appears on page 1' (Tucker, 2012). Another chapter from this collection is by Yopie Prins, who reads Swinburne's forms and metres by way of his

flagellation; highlighting the playful and revolutionary nature of his verse (Prins, 2013). Similarly, this thesis looks to go from *A Century of Roundels* back to *Poems and Ballads*, and the resolution of Swinburne's developing theory of art. As Connolly indicates, Swinburne's early work 'insisted on form as the only valid critical standard of art' (Connolly, 1952: 279). In developing his own form, the roundel, Swinburne is setting new standards, by which few, if any, can be measured. Swinburne's theory of art has come to fruition in the publication of *A Century of Roundels*. He, as H.J.C. Grierson describes, is a poet who 'is primarily an artist, who thinks of poetry as an art in which he desires to perfect himself, who does not believe that this thoughts have any special virtue.' (Grierson, 1953: 15). Grierson puts that Swinburne was an imitator who 'had nothing to say except what he had caught, as by infection, from others.' (*Ibid.*). *Poems and Ballads* is an English interpretation, or imitation, of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, with a deliberate attempt to shock and repulse one's audience. Similarly, *Songs Before Sunrise* could be seen to be the imitation or interpretation of other republican poets and artists, but what then of the later publication of *A Century of Roundels*? This thesis suggests that whilst writing under different influences and impressions at different points in his career, Swinburne did hold two constants, both that of using unpleasant and challenging topics and themes and that of developing the fixed verse form, both seen throughout his major, and minor, publications. These constants demonstrate, at least to some degree, a passion and fervour to both the development of sound and song through poetry, as many critics agree on, but also to posing a constant challenge to his readers, and a belief in and subversion of the art for art's sake ethos that content can be challenging, but not at the loss of meaning.

The aim of this thesis has been to look at the unpleasant or challenging subject matter of many of Swinburne's poems in comparison and contrast with the aesthetic fixed verse forms, and regular, repetitive forms of a vast body of his poetry. Whilst it has not been the intention, nor is it plausible to state, that the use of unpleasant subject matter mirrors Swinburne's personal and social life, the fact that he was a person who engaged in decadent behaviours is a factor in his ability and skill in describing unpleasant scenes. Grierson criticises Swinburne as being 'no great story-teller in verse', largely taking Eliot's line that a preoccupation with rhyme and sound were at the expense of story and content. With the fixed form poems, this is an easy accusation to make (Grierson, 1953: 20). In commenting on Swinburne's literary criticism, Grierson accuses Swinburne of literary 'diffuseness'. Of his poetry, the argument is that he 'sang always of the same themes, in the same high strain. There was no progress, for there was no central thought, nothing that he had not caught from this or that poet...' (*ibid.*: 21). The use of language by Grierson echoes the key criticism of T.S. Eliot and that the beauty of Swinburne's work is in its sound. Critics today have continued with this line of thought, as with McGann referenced earlier in this work. With that argument in mind, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that content was important to Swinburne, in at least that similar themes are shown throughout his body of work. Themes of lust, death and decay are rife throughout all three of the major works studied here, often tackled from a subverted or twisted viewpoint. Nevertheless, the recurring themes, and particularly recurring images of the female form discussed throughout this thesis in various states of consciousness, lust or alchemy demonstrate a poet who was as aware of his theme and subject as he was of his form and of his readership. Whilst his quest to perfect the short verse

form and rhyme and rhythm of the roundel may have preoccupied Swinburne more so than his peers, particularly in England, throughout his poetic career, he maintained a rich devotion to meaningful content, and never adopted the art for art's sake mantra in its most simplistic form.

Swinburne's language choices in his poems were very deliberate, with each word considered and used in equally measured a way as every other. Socially, as Mollie Panter-Downes' account of his life suggests, 'Swinburne's language was frequently as colourful and fluent as a London cabbie's. (Panter-Downes, 1971: 40). This tendency to descend into flights of abuse never fully bore out in his written verse; which was much more considered. In devoting so much of his literary career to refining the roundel form, and variations of it, each word became of paramount importance to Swinburne, both for its sound and, ultimately for its meaning. The song-like forms that he developed allowed for his followers to chant the poems 'rapturously through college quads', so that the melodies would be heard and 'caught' by others (*ibid.*). This suggests a predominant interest with sound over meaning, although this thesis challenges this. The balance between strong and unpleasant themes and tight, structured poems is even across the chronology of Swinburne's major texts studied here.

The disappearance of Swinburne's work from the literary canon for many years in the early twentieth century can be put down to the level of high profile criticism that it received from figures such as Wilde, Eliot and others, and his fall from grace in social circles, and his ultimate retreat from public view to The Pines. A small number of critics ensured that Swinburne's work did not disappear from literary circles completely, such as the work of Grierson, Panter-Downes, and Hare, and have

created a foundation on which the recent resurgence in interest in Swinburne's work could be based. Arata, Hyder and Maxwell, amongst many others, have found many different aspects of Swinburne's work to devote time and research to, and to contribute to a rich field of literary criticism, with little real consensus. The prevailing point is that Swinburne was as challenging an individual as he was a poet, working to constantly refine his craft in terms of form and structure, and maintain a challenge to his audience in terms of content. The result, taken across the whole chronology of his career, is a collection of poems in part pleasing to the ear in cadence and rhyme, whilst posing a question to his audience as to whether sound is sufficient when discussing unpleasant and challenging themes.

Whilst Grierson's short critique of Swinburne makes some damning accusations and conclusions, as mentioned above, it also shows the sway and influence that Swinburne had over his peers in the late nineteenth century. Referring to the English flirtation with Parnassian poems and the French fixed verse forms, Grierson comments that some of the poems in *A Century of Roundels* 'linger in my mind' (Grierson, 1953: 24). Whilst refraining from naming the poems that do 'linger', the description and judgment of Swinburne's short form poems is apt, in discussing both the initial melody, and then the content. Grierson notes that the literary movement in England after the *fin de siècle*, was a move to literary modernism, away from the rhyming cadence and metre of stress and unstress refined and perfected by Swinburne, to 'a rhythm in closer contact with the rhythm of spoken language.' (*Ibid.*: 25). We turn back to the Kay quote used in the introduction to this thesis on Swinburne's formalism where he 'sees literary forms not as self-contained entities but as engaged in a process of challenging-and ideally overturning-the moral and

political ideologies of the cultures out of which they spring.' (Kay, 2013: 292). It is this formalism that allowed Swinburne the shape and space to experiment with content and to shock and challenge his readership in the ways presented above.

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