



Songs of Midnight. Sound, Spirit and Sense in Algernon Charles Swinburne's Poetry

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Maryam Mehraeen. Songs of Midnight. Sound, Spirit and Sense in Algernon Charles Swinburne's Poetry. Literature. 2012. dumas-00931174

HAL Id: dumas-00931174

<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-00931174>

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Songs of Midnight

***Sound, Spirit and Sense*
in Algernon Charles Swinburne's Poetry**

Shatila Mehraeen

Songs of Midnight
Sound, Spirit and Sense in Algernon Charles Swinburne's Poetry

Un Résumé

Comme un artiste poète qui est déçu par la vie, Swinburne se libère du mythe victorien et par mythopoeia, redéfinit son rôle en tant qu'être au centre de l'univers. Il rejette une acceptation passive de toute idéologie reçue et encourage une réinterprétation de la tradition. Ceci est réalisé par une soumission à ce qui est, en face de la vérité dans son intégralité et en permettant à notre esprit de s'élever à un état au-dessus du monde matériel. Ce processus ne se réalise pas en se retirant dans un mensonge moral ou religieux, mais en embrassant l'aspect sensuel du monde pour se rendre compte finalement qu'il est inutile pour l'essentiel. Le poète doit être prêt à rejeter ce monde à tout moment et de trouver et de se détourner des illusions dans l'art et la vie. Pour ce faire, il faut accepter la mort et de l'oubli en saisissant un instant éphémère Gilles Deleuze appelle «Minuit». Ce point d'indifférence est un cataclysme de renouvellement et de remise qui donne naissance à la créativité et à l'originalité. Un tel acte exige un acte de pure volonté, la volonté d'aller dans un état préconscient, Swinburne visée à "Thalassius" le "deep, divine dark day shine of the sea". C'est un état d'esprit créatif dans lequel son âme retourne à la veille de la pré-naissance, tout en le préparant à communier avec lui-même et vivre en harmonie avec son âme.

Dans cette étude, la musique révèle beaucoup de théories Swinburne et des idées. Pour un poète, pour tenter de décrire ce qui ne peut être décrit linguistiquement, c'est tout un exploit en soi. La perte de l'individualité, l'annihilation de l'ego, l'unité, l'harmonie et l'immortalité ne sont que quelques-uns des sujets reconnus par Swinburne.

Mots-clés : mythopoeia, tradition, la mort, Minuit, point d'indifférence, créativité, préconscient, la musique, l'individualité, l'annihilation de l'ego, l'unité, l'harmonie, l'immortalité




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All my gratitude and appreciation goes to Sébastien Scarpa who agreed to supervise this dissertation. I am grateful for his encouragement, enthusiasm and infinite help and support.

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And so the elfin dwarf, on the loftiest branch of the highest tree, in some unnamed forest, some uncaptured moment, lay there, as if anticipating what was to come. He smiled his half smile, all at once impish and madly divine; perhaps it was already there. Unopened eyes were needed to see it, of that he was sure: it did not reveal itself to everyone. Yet, how many were willing to see it? How many were willing to tear apart the tightly bound chains of what life meant, what they meant, in fact, what everything meant! Able hands were needed for this escape. He sat there, this half pint man of no great physical stature and felt himself, his inner being extend and merge with the land and sea and wind all around him. He let his fair brother the Sun, overtake him, intoxicate him, with its sheer will and warmth and burning love, until he was drunk with its fire and force, until he no longer knew if he was an imp or an elf or the sun itself. The neighboring warm waves whispered coolly in his ears, washing up and around and through him. Sometimes they came with a slight tap, sometimes with a blow, yet never ceasing, never standing, earnestly beckoning him to some hidden secret; an always flowing, always fleeting piece of eternity.

The other dwarfs sometimes came to poke and prod at this fairy born wood dweller living by the seaside, coming at him time and time again with their clubs and sticks, their doubts and speculations, banging away at the tree trunk until their hands gave way to fatigue. He never heard them, never saw them but vaguely remembered them as shadows slipping in and out, for his ears were hell bent on listening to some far away land, his gaze for a forgotten time, his being only open to see and hear a faraway scent, arising from the depths of the great blue. Some faraway nightingale, stranded on an island was calling out into the winds, its whistles bringing tides and breaths of some faintly familiar yet forgotten call and he, this elfish creature, his head tilted back in repose or uncontrolled passion, replied in silence.

Shatila Mehraeen

My heart has been as thy heart, and my life
As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing,
Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring,
That seeks its food not in such love or strife
As fill men's hearts with passionate hours and rest.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, "On the Cliffs"

Introduction:

Unpoetical Carrots: Birth of a Small Rebel

Many a description has been made of the eccentric appearance and character of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ranging from a variety of exaggerations, to words such as demoniac, wild or simply mad. Barely five feet tall, with a head that was larger in proportion to his body and a wild mess of flaming red hair, it was not easy for him to go unnoticed. Born with a frail and fragile health which lasted until his death, he was also gifted with an inner fire and passion for life; a nervous thirst and fearlessness which sometimes doomed him to the outer edges of recklessness. He was abnormally short with narrow shoulders and tiny hands and feet. His eyes were green and he had a habit of fluttering his hands and hopping about as he excitedly talked, provoking Henry Adams (an American journalist and historian) to compare him to “a crimson macaw”.¹

Such descriptions, even if seemingly unrealistic at times, were not completely unfounded as validated by their early description of him as a child made by his cousin Lord Redesdale:

What a fragile little creature he seemed as he stood there between his father and mother, with his wondering eyes fixed upon me! Under his arm he hugged Bowdler's Shakespeare, a very precious treasure, bound in brown leather, with, for a marker, a narrow slip of ribbon, blue I think, with a button of that most heathenish marqueterie called Tunbridge ware dangling from the end of it. He was strangely tiny. His limbs were small and delicate; and his sloping shoulders looked far too weak to carry his great head, the size of which was exaggerated by the tousled mass of red hair standing almost at right angles to it. Hero-worshippers talk of his hair as having been a 'golden aureole'. At that time there was nothing golden about it. Red, violent, aggressive red it was, unmistakeable, unpoetical carrots.²

Born on the fifth of April, 1837 in London, Algernon Charles Swinburne was the eldest of six children. His father Captain (later Admiral) Charles Henry Swinburne and his mother Lady Jane Henrietta, (daughter of the 3rd Earl of Ashburnham) both came from the aristocratic class of society. His grandfather Sir John Swinburne, 6th Baronet (1762–1860) had a well known library and was President of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle upon Tyne. Algernon's early literary influences came mainly from his mother and

¹ "Algernon Charles Swinburne ." *Encyclopedia of World Biography* . N.p., 2004. Web. 17 May 2012. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Algernon_Charles_Swinburne.asp&xgt;

² Landow, George P.. "Victorian Web literature, history and culture in the age of Victoria." A Description of Swinburne as a Child. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/swinburne/bio2.html>

grandfather who encouraged him to read poetry and learn French and Italian. His grandfather even dressed up in true French fashion and had a strong influence on his grandson. Young Algernon would do his grandfather a great service in the future; one of his greatest mentors would be one of France's greatest poets: Victor Hugo. From the very beginning, his surrounding environment played a significant role on him, being immediately removed from his birthplace London, he always felt a genuine dislike for the surroundings and influences of living in the busy bustling capital. His childhood was spent in a very different environment. His grandfather owned a piece of land in Northumberland, and his father bought a beautiful spot between Ventnor and Niton in the Isle of Wight, called East Dene, together with a strip of undercliff known as the Landslip. Sir Edward used to spend half the year in the Isle of Wight, and his father shared his northern home with family for the other half. Algernon's earliest memories were therefore steeped in a strong sense of contradicting states, inspired on the one hand by the dark atmosphere of the north, and on the other by the colorful and warm south. Of the two, it seems the effects of the island are, perhaps naturally, the stronger in his poetry; and many of his most beautiful pieces were actually written at the Orchard, an exquisite spot by Niton Bay, which belonged to relatives and which he constantly visited. One can envision this small boy riding his pony, as he often did, along the moor, his red hair tousled by the wind and glowing with the scent of sun and salt.

He attended Eton College from 1849 to 1853 and later went to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1857. It was there that his deep love for Greek literature began. Except for the Tylorian prize he won for French and Italian, he was not recognized academically and he was never considered an Honor student. As a student he contributed to a series of newsletters entitled the "Undergraduate Papers" and wrote many poems, none which were ever seriously taken into consideration by his professors. He became known for his violent attacks on the Christian faith and on conventional morality as well as for his late hours and heavy drinking. He later became more interested in political issues and he found a very deep personal interest in this subject even reciting verses of poetry out loud to a portrait of the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini that he hung in his room at Oxford. There was a brief pause in his studies when he left the university in 1859 for having publicly supported the attempted assassination of Napoleon III by Felice Orsini. After his rustication, he returned in May 1860 but didn't continue his studies and never got a degree. Thus began the earliest signs of rebellion, opposition and deep discontent which would flourish so passionately later on in his life.

While still a student Swinburne formed lasting friendships with two of Oxford's most famous scholars, Walter Pater and Benjamin Jowett. In 1857 Swinburne formed close relations with the Pre-Raphaelites Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Edward Burne-Jones. By 1860 Swinburne's Balliol colleagues considered him dangerous but his decision to leave Oxford without a degree was apparently his own. His father, greatly disturbed by his son's leave from university, nevertheless provided him with a permanent allowance. Swinburne moved to London and devoted the rest of his life to writing.

The Reign of Victoria

For a better understanding of Swinburne and the general influences on his writing, a very brief look at the social and political climate he was living in is necessary. The reign of Victoria witnessed a wide range of progress and change, changes which in comparison to the periods before and after it, were the most revolutionary regarding to the basic principles of human thought and existence. It is for this reason that by some, it is considered the most progressive in English history. In *The Victorian Age of English Literature*, William J. Long has distinguished three tendencies which profoundly affected not only the Victorian era itself but also, our present life and literature. Such tendencies without a doubt would leave a lasting impression on Swinburne and the general foundations of his works.

The first is political and democratic: it began with the 1832 Reform Bill. Long claims it is still in progress, and "its obvious end is to deliver the government of England into the hands of the common people".³ In earlier ages, people saw a government which laid stress on royalty and class status as a privilege; they were the basic foundations of society.

In the Victorian age the divine rights of kings were considered outdated by some; the privileges of royalty and nobility were controlled, and ordinary common men were the real rulers of England, through their representatives in the House of Commons.

A change in government brings about corresponding change in literature. In former ages, literature, as well as politics, used to be an exclusive entity held in the hands of a

³ Long, William J.. "The Victorian Age of English Literature." *D. J. McAdam*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.djmcadam.com/victorian-literature.html>>.

minority. It was supported by the nobility; it shared the views of the elite or upper classes. But the masses of men began to be educated, began to think for themselves, and a large number of periodicals and newspapers appeared in response to their increasing hunger and need for reading matter. Writers and thinkers had many different kinds of readers whereas previously they had but one. In a word, English government, society and literature all became more democratic. This is one of the most prominent features of modern history.

The second tendency is described as the flourishing advancement of science: "At the basis of this tendency is man's desire to know the truth, if possible the whole truth of life; and it sets no limits to the exploring spirit, whether in the heavens above or the earth beneath or the waters under the earth. From star-dust in infinite space (which we hope to measure) to fossils on the bed of an ocean which is no longer unfathomed, nothing is too great or too small to attract man, to fascinate him, to influence his thought, his life, his literature."⁴

This earnest scientific passion or spirit began to dominate and influence people's thought, to influence even their poetry and fiction. The Elizabethans looked with astonishment at a visible world that was becoming bigger and bigger, and the wonder of it is reflected in their prose and poetry; the Victorians rediscovered that world through the many advances in technology and science, then turned their attention to an unexplored world of invisible forces, and their best literature excites us all with the sense of immensity and awe of the universe in which we live in.

Darwin's *Origin of Species* published in 1859 - which laid the foundation for a general theory of evolution- is one of the most famous books of the age, and of the world as well. *The Swinburne Letters* provided evidence that Swinburne was deeply influenced by Darwin's Theory. Associated with Darwin were Wallace, Lyell, Huxley, Tyndall and many others, whose essays are, in their own way, quite as significant as the poems of Alfred Tennyson or the novels of Charles Dickens.

Long describes the third tendency of the Victorian age in England by the word "imperialism." In earlier ages, English colonization had set forth on so many foreign shores;

⁴ Long, William J.. "The Victorian Age of English Literature." *D. J. McAdam*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 May 2012. <<http://www.djmcadam.com/victorian-literature.html>>.

in the Victorian age the scattered colonies increased greatly in wealth and power, and were closely unified into a grand empire of people similar in manners of noble speech and the high ideals of justice and liberty. The concept of politics and political reform is strongly felt throughout all aspects of Victorian life.

In ideology, politics, and society, the Victorians brought about astonishing innovation and change: democracy, feminism, unions for workers, socialism, Marxism, and other modern movements took form. In fact, this age of thinkers like Darwin, Marx, and Freud appears to be not only the first that experienced modern problems but also the first that attempted to create modern solutions. The Victorians are considered the pioneers of the modern idea of invention, the notion that one can provide solutions to problems, that man can create new ways of bettering himself, his environment and, consequently, those around him.

In religion, the Victorians experienced a great age of doubt, the first that called into question institutional Christianity on such a large scale. As Walter E. Houghton suggests, this was probably “a direct inheritance from the eighteenth-century philosophers, notably from Voltaire and Hume.”⁵ In literature and the other arts, the Victorians attempted to combine Romantic emphasis upon the self, emotion, and imagination with Neoclassical concepts on the public role of art and the subsequent responsibility of the artist. In Swinburne’s criticism as well, this notion is constantly repeated.

Despite such vast improvements, what lingers on in the minds of many upon hearing the word “Victorian”, are terms like repression, slavery and rigid social structures. That is not entirely false. Yet to focus only on this aspect, is to ignore others crucial in understanding this era. The Victorian age was not one, not single or unified, only because Victoria's reign lasted so long but more so as it comprised of several periods. Above all, it was an age of paradox. This sense of seemingly opposing ideas, contradictions and paradoxes was very prevalent, if not the zeitgeist of the time. All these opposing ideas and sudden loss of faith in ancient systems of belief such as Christianity brought about a severe sense of isolation and alienation to thinkers and also the general public. The Catholicism of the Oxford Movement, the Evangelical movement, the spread of the Broad Church, and the rise of Utilitarianism, socialism, Darwinism, and scientific Agnosticism, were all in their own ways

⁵ Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. London: Yale University Press, 1957. 94.

characteristically Victorian; as were the many writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, the criticism of Arnold, and the empirical prose of Darwin and Huxley.

For many, as mentioned before, the Victorian age is considered the mother of our modern age, yet as any great ideological change which rapidly rises to encompass life and people's worldview, the strength and force of which it applies those concepts brings about natural reactions; reactions, which in some cases go against the very foundations of which it is based upon. Writers, poets, novelists, critics or thinkers, are all products of the time they live in, a notion which is obvious to all. Algernon Charles Swinburne is no exception; a better understanding of his ideas necessarily implies a basic understanding of the age he was living in.

Swinburne's Works

Swinburne was one of the most accomplished lyric poets of the Victorian era and was a preeminent symbol of rebellion against the conservative values of his time. The explicit and often pathological sexual themes of his most important collection of poetry, *Poems and Ballads First Series* (published in 1866), delighted some, shocked many, and became the dominant feature of Swinburne's image both as an artist and an individual. Nevertheless, critics have found that to focus exclusively on the sensational aspects of Swinburne's work is to miss the assertion, implicit in his poetry and explicit in his critical writings, that his primary focus was the nature and creation of poetic beauty.

In 1861 Swinburne began his long association with Dante Gabriel Rossetti (also skilled in poetry), who continued to influence him strongly for a long time, thus enabling him to write some of his finest lyric poetry. Swinburne published two plays in 1860, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamond*, but they received no significant critical attention. However, in 1865, his powerful imitation of Greek tragedy, *Atlanta in Calydon*, was an instant success. Most critics were mesmerized by the metrical skill he displayed in the constantly changing rhythms of the play's choruses. But *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, made Swinburne's sensuality and anti-Christianity undeniable to all. This volume contains his finest poetry: beautiful in uniquely changing and unusual rhythms, in extremely melodious sound combinations, and in intricate images. The most important poems in it were clearly intended to shock the Victorian public. The *Hymn to Proserpine* portrays Christ as the "pale Galilean," and "Faustine," "Laus

Veneris, " "Anactoria, " and "Dolores" boldly flaunt Swinburne's sadomasochistic sexuality. The book was harshly attacked by the press, and a controversy raged. Swinburne answered in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. Indeed there were very few of his works which did not bring about any type of controversy or debate among critics. If one looks carefully at the works of this poet, one can easily see the many contradictory sides to which he carefully analyzes his subjects; he is a true symbol of Victorian poetry.

In 1867 Swinburne met Giuseppe Mazzini - an Italian politician, journalist and activist - who told him to turn from "love frenzy" to the utilization of his poetic gift in the "service of the republic."⁶ The result was *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), a volume of poems dedicated to the cause of freedom and democracy and depicting the Italian struggle for independence. In 1878 Swinburne published *Poems and Ballads, Second Series*, but this volume contained few poems as beautiful and none so shocking as those of the *First Series*. It marked the end of Swinburne's greatest poetic achievement.

Throughout this period of literary activity, Swinburne took to heavy drinking. His overindulgence brought on a number of attacks similar to epileptic fits, but his amazing energy allowed him to return each time to his frenzied style of life.

In September 1879, however, Swinburne collapsed so completely that a friend, Watts-Dunton, took him to his home in Putney, a suburb of London. There Watts-Dunton imposed a very strict diet and lifestyle to which the poet probably owes his life. The poet spent the remaining 30 years of his life with Watts-Dunton in a manner as calm as his youth had been wild. The sober discipline Watts helped him maintain, gave Swinburne the chance to write and to publish 23 volumes of poetry, prose, and drama during these years. *A Century of Roundels* published in 1883 is a good example of his craftsmanship and dazzling ability to experiment and explore new linguistic territories. Yet, in spite of continued, constant reading some critics believed he did not go beyond any of his former works intellectually or artistically. The artist died of pneumonia on April 10, 1909, at Putney.

Poetry for Poetry's Sake: Legacy of an Artist -Poet

⁶ "Algernon Charles Swinburne ." Encyclopedia of World Biography . N.p., 2004. Web. 17 May 2012.
<[http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Algernon Charles Swinburne.asp&xgt;](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Algernon_Charles_Swinburne.asp&xgt;);

Seeking to better understand and unravel Swinburne's many fine, tightly-woven webs of hidden meaning, a sense of purpose is needed. Satisfying a basic human instinct for knowledge would seem a fair purpose to the curious mind. Unfortunately, readers are not so curious and Swinburne has not received as much attention as he deserves. When one starts reading all the many different colored opinions of many scholars, it is easy to be baffled and even more confused than before starting. Though it will be just a small pebble in the stream, this dissertation is nonetheless another effort to reveal another aspect of this Victorian poet, critic and artist.

In fact, one notices that Swinburne has long been referred to as an artist in many commentaries and criticisms; it must be a good reason. From his time as a student in Oxford where he first entered Dante Gabriel Rossetti's circle of friends and became acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, to his acquaintance with Walter Pater and his theories, Swinburne was steeped in art of all forms, all of which led to a long lasting influence on his own works. The highly musical quality of his poetry and the vividly painted imagery strikes a very deep chord within all critical readers. But it does not stop there. For many a poet, musical influence is what poetry is based on, this is no new assumption. In the case of Swinburne it goes further beyond that. Correlations between different modes of art and poetry have long been discussed, as have their intimate relations and influences on each other. Few people though, have tried to go beyond the boundaries of their work and attempt to cross over into uncharted territories: to try to understand until what limit (if there is any at all) words can expand and grow and evolve. Most would think such an attempt even impossible. Swinburne is of the rare number of people who, despite being aware of these limits, still sought to go ahead. He was not merely influenced by music and painting, he wished for his poetry to become as musical and visual as possible. This creates such sense of astonishment and wonder, that like Swinburne, for a while we are deviously tempted to also set aside the much studied canon of literature, and take a dip into what he has to offer. Though we may not dive into the depths of the sea as he did, we may nonetheless, paddle our way out to merely take a glimpse at what he was trying to say. This in fact is the main intention of this study.

This study is an attempt to rediscover Swinburne's poetry with an in-depth analysis and comparison with music. We will also look at the ties between his poetry and painting. In order to do so, we will start by looking at his main principles, theories and those who inspired and formed them. Next, we will try to find more meaning in his work through his criticism of

other writers, mainly Shelley and Coleridge and look into comments critics made on his work. The following stage shall be a look at his overall purpose and the techniques he used; the notions harmony and form of shall be tackled more specifically thanks to an analysis of synesthesia and the tricky question of perception. Following that, the concepts of passion and imagination will be discussed, these can be considered the heart and core of his work. Finally, we will try to unveil the essence of his poetry by attempting to find out what he actually tried to sing out again and again.

1. Dangling On the Cliffs:
General Principles and Theories

1.1 Swinburne: Rebel without a Cause?

Upon an initial reading of Swinburne's poetry, one seeks to find words to convey a bit of what was "understood" and usually, not much comes to mind. As with any other piece of poetry, multiple readings are required, yet unlike a large number of generally-accepted and critically-acclaimed works, to hope to come to a deeper appreciation by merely re-reading Swinburne is an unfulfilled wish. Reading Swinburne without any prior knowledge of his mental framework or background is like being left without a guide *On the Cliffs* (dangling helplessly one handed with nothing but a faint tug of unfamiliar wind at our shoulders and feeling yet not seeing a bottomless abyss below us.). For those more used to what we may take liberty in calling "conventional" poetry, reading Swinburne's poetry will require a helping hand and a detailed look at his theories, principle and general assumptions. It should be noted that though he is known more as a poet, he also wrote a lot of critical prose.

Although much attention has been paid to his poetry, for the most part it has left a fair few bewildered as to what it might imply. To read his poetry knowing nothing of the theories behind it, or to base all assumptions of meaning on the poem itself can be considered the first fatal flaw. Though some may dispute that poetry is to be read without any prior assumptions or history, we should remember that for a better understanding of some pieces, background knowledge is not only necessary but absolutely vital to even getting close to the main idea of the poem.

One simple reason may be that as an unconventional writer of such high degree, his ideas will need further explaining, ideas which the majority of readers have never heard let alone thought about. And though the final assumptions will be left to the readers alone, as with any other piece of literature, coming to a solid grasp of his ideas means knowing the theories he based them on and was influenced by. The small number of critics who have summarized his ideas have, sadly but often, come to the conclusion that he was an impulsive, whimsical writer whose writing has neither external nor internal coherent organization. On the other hand, Thomas E. Connolly, strongly disagrees with this conclusion and claims that

“behind every effusion of appreciation lies a solid core of poetic theory that can be recovered by careful analysis.”⁷

When it comes to criticism, we will first start by looking at the foundation of his work as understood through his own works and then go on to those who have helped him shape those ideas.

Thomas E. Connolly summarizes the five major motivating forces behind his critical standard the first two of which will be discussed here briefly, due their greater relevance to the topic: 1) Politics and Republicanism 2) Art for Art’s Sake 3) His Own Psychological and Aesthetic Movement 4) The Classical Literary Tradition 5) Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama.

Swinburne’s rebellious and vicious attitude to society is strongly felt in his sense of Republicanism, influenced heavily and early on by his grandfather. Sir John motivated his grandson to adopt radical views in politics, telling the boy how, in years long passed, he had constantly made himself liable to be arrested and executed for treason because of his outspoken republican sentiments. Mazzini, as mentioned previously, and his disciple John Nichol were among the others who strongly whet Swinburne’s tastes for everything political. Connolly goes on to say: “Is it any wonder then that Swinburne recited passages from *Les Chatiments*, that violent invective against the Emperor, as he walked alone on the beach near Bonchurch, or that he himself later wrote the series of ‘sonnet-curses’, *Dirae*?”⁸

It was not only Swinburne’s Republicanism that contributed strongly to what he defined as the end of art as humanistic. This can be found in this sentence from Swinburne in the article entitled ‘King Lear’ published in *Harper’s Monthly* in December 1902: “Among all its other great qualities, it is the first great utterance of a cry...on behalf of the outcasts of the world- on behalf of the social sufferer, clean or unclean, innocent or criminal, thrall or free”⁹.

⁷ Connolly, Thomas E. Preface. *Swinburne’s Theory of Poetry*. New York: State University of New York, 1964. Preface

⁸ Ibid. 7.

⁹ Ibid. 29.

Swinburne being an ardent devotee of the *Art for Art's Sake* movement, was a highly debated issue among his critics and, in fact, some have even accused him of devoting his writing only to Beauty. They have largely ignored the fact that, for him, poetry began and ended with politics. After meeting Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1857, he was strongly influenced by this new rising trend which denounced the currently existing norms of art. Here again, is another instance of his infinite love for rebellion and the unconventional. What also helped reinforce this new founded friendship was Rossetti's tie with poetry. They were the first to encourage and praise him when he wrote his 'Poems and Ballads'.

Rossetti had also suggested *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to Swinburne, in the preface to which Gautier set forth his theories. On reading Swinburne's "Notes on Poems and Reviews" and "Notes on Some Pictures of 1868", Georges Lafourcade talks about the main principles seen in Gautier's theories and summarizes them as such: "1) he refused to accept as the critical standard of art the belief that 'all that cannot be lisped in the nursery or fingered in the schoolroom is therefore to be cast out of the library 2) he rejected didactic art; and 3) he insisted on form as the only valid critical standard of art.'" ¹⁰

It was also during the Pre-Raphaelite association when Swinburne first discovered Baudelaire. Whistler was a mutual friend of Swinburne and Baudelaire and there have been guesses of him introducing them to each other. Lafourcade goes on to note the influence of Baudelaire on how Swinburne's "William Blake", has been derived from Baudelaire's "Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe and l'art romantique"; he took two modifications of his theory: " 1) he recognized that, although art does not directly seek a moral effect, it is indirectly productive of one; 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.'" ¹¹

More than being an avid follower of any movement, Swinburne's choices were always finally decided by his own psychology and he was ultimately a hero or idol worshipper. It is in fact this very reason that was able to shift his attention away from the *Art for Art's Sake*

¹⁰ Ibid. 8.

¹¹ Ibid. 8.

movement and to finally end his deep infatuation with it. For him, the mentor who led him away from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was someone who had long influenced Swinburne, and one whose opinion Swinburne cherished above all. For him, it came in the shape of a French master named Victor Hugo.

1.2 The Brotherhood of Art and Politics: Victor Hugo and Giuseppe Mazzini

Early on from his schooldays at Eton, Swinburne was already held fast and captivated by Victor Hugo, who he came to call his ‘dear and venerable master’. He had even become accustomed to writing long letters to the poet, expressing his love, respect and admiration for him. Reading Swinburne’s praise on the French poet, it is not hard to see him as a fanatic sometimes and indeed, in many of his adorations we are faced with exaggerations of such magnitude that we doubt their validity. Among his early critical works are reviews of Victor Hugo’s books, articles he sent to Victor Hugo who replied through the editors of the related publishing newspapers.

When he was attracted by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and had come to the conviction that Art is and was for Art’s Sake, what pulled away his interest was indeed his dear master. Before this, when the Pre-Raphaelite movement so affected him, there had been a time when he was at odds with Hugo. In what seems to his last defense, he rejected an end outside of art and in the “Notes on Poems and Reviews” he stated: “...if literature indeed is not to deal with the full life of man and the whole nature of things, let it be cast aside with the rods and rattles of childhood. Whether it affect to teach or to amuse, it is equally trivial and contemptible to us...”¹²

Confused and weary of his strife with the Art for Art’s sake movement and wanting to further his political writings, he met Giuseppe Mazzini. Nicknamed ‘The Beating Heart of Italy’, the latter was an Italian politician, journalist and activist for the unification of Italy. His lifetime efforts aided in bringing about the unified independence of Italy. He also helped define the modern European movement for popular democracy in a republican state and it was

¹² A. C. Swinburne, Notes on Poems and Reviews, Works, 370

for these reasons that Swinburne devoted himself to him. He had even hung Mazzini's portrait, who he came to call Leader, on the wall of his room while a student in Oxford and was seen reciting poetry out loud to him. A true disciple of the Italian, he wrote highly emotional letters to him alongside his poetry and Mazzini replied once to advise him to write political poetry without any restraint.

Between 1867 and 1872, alongside his relationship with his political mentor, Victor Hugo showed a growing affection for his English friend, but it was not until 1872 that Swinburne formally announced his breaking away from the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

After showing concern for the ethical responsibility of the poet in matters political, Swinburne went on to show his final verdict on *Art for Art's Sake* and suggested there was both a true and untrue side to it.

He explains that any work of art that is void of life cannot be considered art in the first place; in this regard he is at ease with the supporters of the *Art for Art's Sake*. Taking into consideration all points of view he suddenly says: "... but on the other hand we refuse to admit that art of the highest may not ally itself with moral or religious passion, with the ethics or the politics of a nation or an age... In a word, the doctrine of art for art is true in the positive sense false in the negative; sound in the affirmation, unsound as a prohibition."¹³

What is interesting to note is that it was initially Victor Hugo himself who coined the term "l'art pour l'art", but went on to later condemn it himself. Swinburne was finally able to come to peace in this challenge and again find solace in the suggestions of his beloved master. He never changed his opinion after that.

1.3 Prophetic Poetry: The Nature and Subject of Poetry

Though his political/republican views had a lifelong influence on him and his temporary devotion to the art for art's sake movement colored much of his earlier works, we must now turn to the basic issues that long challenged Swinburne both prior to and during his life as a critic-poet. He constantly asked himself about the nature and, subsequently, about the subject of poetry.

¹³ Ibid. 370

Swinburne used a very specific classification for the poetic nature which, despite seeming limiting, is useful in understanding not only his concept of the poet but also in realizing his critical method. In his general hierarchy for all types of poets, he distinguished between what he called “Gods” as opposed to “Giants” and “Singers” as opposed to “Prophets.” The Gods are spiritual idealists whose emphasis is placed on the ideal and absolute, while the Giants, such as Ben Jonson, are rational realists who pay attention to the intellect; this in turn shows the limits of human reason in their work. In his opinion a poet could be both a God and a Giant but he was also very strict in what he considered a poet: a poet should be a Giant to be considered a poet at all. In addition, he considered the work produced by a Giant inferior to that of a God; that of a Giant being the product of the intellect and reason and having rational ends. Swinburne places emphasis on the ultimate superiority of the God poet, such as Shakespeare, and continuously speaks about a passionate spiritual emotion which they do not choose to have but, instead, are inclined to have naturally through their poetic beings or essences.

Swinburne’s second basis for classification opposed singers and prophets. On this, he places much emphasis. According to him, all poets must be singers, only a very select few are prophets.

In his essay “Mathew Arnold’s New Poems”, which was published in the *Fortnightly Review* in October 1867, he claims: “The essence of an artist is that he should be articulate. It is the mere impudence of weakness to arrogate the name of poet or painter with no other claim than a susceptible and impressionable sense of outward or inward beauty, producing an impotent desire to paint or sing.”¹⁴ The prophet poets are a very exclusive of poets; not all poets can be prophets; the best example for Swinburne without a doubt, was the English poet William Blake.

¹⁴ Connolly, Thomas E. *Swinburne’s Theory of Poetry*. 1964. 32

1.4 William Blake

He was born and baptized into the church of rebels; we can hardly imagine a time or scheme of things in which he could have lived and worked without some interval of revolt. All that was accepted for art, all that was taken for poetry, he rejected as barren symbols, and would fain have broken up as mendacious idols.”¹⁵

As the quote above makes clear, no poet, artist or author has influenced Swinburne as much as William Blake, as can be seen in the quote above from Swinburne himself, in the introduction to Blake, in the book of the same title. Blake was the ultimate rebel, the madman of his own time, whose poetry and painting spoke of prophecies and passionate revelations and who, just as Swinburne, was not met with significant praise during his life. Swinburne could not find a better possible mentor. In turn, Swinburne showed his appreciation by renovating the reputation of William Blake in the nineteenth century. He, along with others such as the Rossettis and Alexander Gilchrist (who also wrote a biography entitled *Life of William Blake, Pictor Ignotus*, in 1863), wrote greatly about the mysterious author.

Blake’s impact on Swinburne goes back to many of his principle beliefs regarding religion, faith and the definition of poet and poetry. He believed that organized religion obscured the truth and the vision of any aspiring artist or thinker. Swinburne’s religious views have also been a long-debated issue and many have found his statement on Christianity and the church immoral and blasphemous. Whether or not Swinburne had strong religious views is another question explained in detail by Louis in *Swinburne and His Gods*; Louis believed Swinburne “lost his faith in Oxford...and never regained it.”¹⁶ As so far as vision and inspiration came to mind, Swinburne saw conventional religion as an obstacle.

Another point of view Swinburne shared with Blake was his belief in the transcendence of human reason by imagination and intuition. Both Blake and Swinburne rejected analytical reason as the key to unlock the mystery of the universe. Connolly describes how, for Swinburne, imagination accounted for Blake’s prophetic powers and his ability to

¹⁵ Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. London, 1868. 3

¹⁶ Louis, Margot K. *Swinburne and his Gods The Roots and Growth of an Agnostic Poetry*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1954. 10.

pass through the material presences of things to their spiritual essences. Swinburne had no doubt that imagination, not reason, could do this.

This gave more freedom to the prophet-poet from contemporary criticism. Reaching out beyond the limits of mind, the poet-prophet cannot be criticized by standard rational analytical methods. In other words, the critics have no claim upon his work.

These prophet-poets or supreme poets, as Swinburne called them, soared beyond the limits of human reason to reach the depths of spiritual harmony with the universal essence. Again he distinguishes between the Gods, and the Giants, the latter having no spiritual passion but having the highest perfection of the human state through reason. The divine prophet-poet is far beyond any ordinary poet and, in a sense, becomes a mouthpiece, a voice for that which he is to retell. In Swinburne's opinion, the supreme examples were William Blake and Victor Hugo.

1.5 Criticism of Contemporary Poets

From the very start of his life as a poet, Swinburne placed emphasis on the subject matter. His critical view on how poetry should be defined made him a harsh critic indeed and, in his many commentaries on the works of other fellow poets, nothing was immune from his probing eye. The frank and sometimes mocking tone in his criticism must have made him a not so favorite figure with many of his contemporaries. A critic enthusiast at heart, he did not stop at anything and did not spare even the greater and well recognized poets of the time.

According to him, poets should choose from an unlimited scope of subject matter and not ban themselves from a specific list of themes for whatever reason. He believed that it was not the subject that was chosen that was significant but the quality and treatment of the subject matter. In a passage from "Notes on Poems and Reviews" published in 1866 he says: "If literature indeed is not to deal with the full life of man and the whole nature of things, let it be cast aside with the rods and rattles of childhood."¹⁷

¹⁷ A. C. Swinburne, Notes on Poems and Reviews, Works, 370

Here, once again, he places great responsibility on the capability and merit of the poet and it is based on these elements that he analyzes other poets. Any subject related in any way to human beings was acceptable by his standards. The suitability of a subject for poetry doesn't depend on its internal "moral" codes when measured by any external poetic standards, or those imposed by the moral codes of society and religion. Any subject matter could be deemed poetic depending on the poet's application and handling of it. It is not the conventional world of rules and decorum we are faced with here, but the unlimited world of art. Art is in itself a neutral outlook, neither positive nor negative, out of which many things can be produced.

Alongside his ideal mentors Blake and Hugo, Swinburne also spoke about other poets whose specific styles are worthy of attention. The reasons for which he chose these poets and the ways he criticized them further elaborates his detailed principles in poetry.

1.6 Imagination and Passion:

A brief look at Swinburne's body of critical texts suffices to realize that for the most part, they were about lyric or dramatic poetry. He believed these two were the highest possible forms in literature and an ideal poem would be a combination of both.

When classifying lyric poetry, he divided it into two types: either imaginative or passionate. When it came to imagination, none rose higher than Coleridge. Swinburne spoke of Coleridge as the greatest poet in matters of imagination praising him as one of the finest ever seen. In matters of imagination no one could surpass Coleridge and it is interesting to see though there are differences between their theories, it is nonetheless, similar to Coleridge's concept of the primary imagination: "The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."¹⁸

In addition to this aspect of imagination, he also speaks about the creative sense of imagination. In this regard, Coleridge and Shelley were the supreme examples of creative

¹⁸ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 159-160

imagination. Swinburne constantly speaks of the ideal creative imagination alongside the terms *sublimity* and *spiritual instinct*; a high quality of our mind.

On the other hand, when speaking of Shelley, he constantly refers to a passion or *moral passion* that is not seen at all in Coleridge's writing: "...the clearer spirit of Shelley fills his verse with a divine force of meaning, which Coleridge, who had it not in him, could not affect to give"; he goes on to say:

The sensuous fluctuation of soul, that floating fervor of fancy, whence his poetry rose as from a shifting sea, in faultless completion of form and charm, had absorbed- if indeed there were any to absorb- all emotion of love or faith, all heroic beauty of moral passion, all inner and outer life of the only kind possible to such other poets as Dante or Shelley, Milton or Hugo.¹⁹

Further on, he expands on the definition of 'passion' by dividing it into two groups: a higher passion or 'moral passion', and a lower passion. As early as 1866, he identified lower passion with suffering or pathos in "Notes on Poems and Reviews". Moral passion, which he also referred to as 'positive passion' is describes as "that absolute fusion of the whole nature in one fire of sense and spirit."²⁰

It can be observed that the moral passion that creates a divine force of meaning in poetry is quite similar to the notion of the prophetic or godlike poet mentioned earlier. Both moral passion and prophetic power talk about the divine significance of things and allow the poet to go from a material world to a spiritual one. The concepts of moral passion, prophetic poetry, and music are all closely related when it comes to Swinburne's principles. Understanding each of them requires knowledge of the others.

1.7 The Sublime

Although passion and imagination are considered the essential elements of great poets, it does not stop there. According to Swinburne, the test of imagination and passion is sublimity. In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article written on Christopher Marlowe, he states

¹⁹ A. C. Swinburne, Works, 147

²⁰ Connolly, Thomas E. *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry*. 1964. 58

nothing will compensate for sublimity. No poet is ever great without it. Setting apart invention or fancy in imagination, sublimity is the true test of the ideal creative imagination.

The term “sublime” was originally coined by the Greek writer Longinus who in his work *Peri Hypsous*, (translated as *On the Sublime*) defines the literary sublime as the excellence in language, the expression of a great soul and the power to provoke awe and ecstasy in readers.

In one of the most famous books on the topic of the sublime, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke defines the sublime as "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger... Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror."²¹

Burke believed that the sublime was something that could provoke terror in the audience, for terror and pain were the strongest of emotions. However, he also believed there was an inherent "pleasure" in this emotion. Anything that is great, infinite or obscure could be an object of terror and the sublime, for there was an element of the unknown about them. Interestingly, Burke suggested ugliness as an aesthetic quality in its capacity to create feelings of intense emotion, finally creating a pleasurable experience. He described the sensation attributed to the sublime as a kind of ‘negative pain’ which he called delight, and which is distinct from positive pleasure. This “delight” he saw as far more intense than positive pleasure.

This subject relates strongly to Swinburne’s use of “blasphemous” inverted Christianity and his many sensational passages in poetry. It was not only limited to his poetry. Many of Swinburne’s friends claimed he went into states of frenzy, with his entire body and hands shaking in excitement and enthusiasm. Reading Swinburne one is constantly pushed to experience sublime ‘limits’, in moments of intense passion and emotion. Neither allowed to go forward or backward, but left to swirl in circles of “linguistic forms” we too are left dangling on the cliffs.

²¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 39

1.8 Criticism of His Work

Of all the criticism written on Swinburne, perhaps the most interesting is that of the dispute between him and Robert Buchanan. Despising not only Swinburne but also the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, which he called 'the fleshly school of poetry', Buchanan wrote many articles on Swinburne who never hesitated in responding.

In a poem entitled "The Monkey and the Microscope" (a parody of Swinburne's essay named "Under the Microscope") taken from an essay of the same name, Buchanan describes Swinburne in quite a peculiar manner:

Seeing a sight to slay all hope:
A monkey with a Microscope!
A clever monkey,—he can squeak,
Scream, bite, munch, mumble, all but speak;
Studies not merely monkey-sport,
But vices of a human sort;²²

In fact, Buchanan unleashed his criticism not only on Swinburne but on Dante Gabriel Rossetti as well. Much of the criticism made by Buchanan in some way summarizes what other critics who opposed Swinburne felt too, albeit in a more vehement and sensational manner. In a nutshell, Swinburne was considered an impulsive, sensational, drama-seeking writer who only imitated the style of other great writers. They believed his criticism would start off sanely but end in exaggerated, biased appreciation for his idols, carried out in the most sentimental manner. The fact that Swinburne went down on his knees when first meeting the political leader Mazzini proved this point. Of his poetry, it was believed that it was not based on any sound theoretical foundations but fancy and whim. The subject matter was also regarded as obscene and lewd.

Buchanan ends his outburst in this poem by saying:

²² Buchanan, Robert. "The Monkey and the Microscope." <<http://www.robertbuchanan.co.uk/html/micro2.html>

A clever monkey!—worth a smile!
How really human is his style;
How worthy of our admiration
Is such delicious imitation!
And I believe with all my might
Religion wrong, and Science right,—
Seeing a sight to slay all hope:
A monkey use a Microscope!²³

Though Swinburne was often criticized by many for his impulsive, sensational, drama-seeking nature, his work constantly reveals his enthusiastic thirst for truth and sublimity. As a critic he wishes to not limit this experience to himself but allow for others too to be overwhelmed with what cannot be explained or described in words. It is only when all limitations of our rational language are put aside that we can feel what they attempt to point to.

²³ Buchanan, Robert. Ibid.

2. The Lute and the Lyre:

Swinburne in the Realm of Music

It is no mere play on words to say that Swinburne was an artist- poet. His earlier ties with art and artists alike have been briefly mentioned but now, we shall take a deeper look at specific artists and movements that affected his outlook on the world and thus, on poetry.

The more direct implications of his poetry with art reveal itself when we start with a very simple yet necessary question: what did he try to achieve with his poetry? What was his goal or aim? And what role did art play in this? Just like his poetry, the questions seem simple on the surface only to reveal many layers of meaning and speculation; we must wish to be successful in prying away the hidden covers at each step we take without losing our footing. In fact, one guesses if there are any footholds at all in his poetry. That will be left for a later discussion.

To say that he wished for his poetry to reach or rise to the state of art is a bold statement in itself and needs further clarification. We are now going to look at those aspects his poetic principles shared with art and what methods and technique he used to show them.

2.1 Harmony or Form and Artistic Unity

In his review “Mathew Arnold’s New Poems” in the *Fortnightly Review*, published in October 1867, he says: “...of all such false and foolish catchwords as the names of classic and romantic I repudiate as senseless, and revere form or harmony as the high one law of all art.”²⁴ He uses form or harmony in the same sense here but let us consider where and when he uses the two terms. In his essay “Morris’s Life and Death of Jason”, he explains: “I do not here speak of form in the abstract and absolute sense; for where this is wanting, all is wanting; without this there can be no work of art at all. I speak of that secondary excellence always necessary to the perfection, but not always indispensable to the existence of art”²⁵. This “form in the abstract and absolute” is the “high one law of art”. It is not mentioned very much in Swinburne’s other essays, further clarification is needed.

²⁴ Connolly, Thomas E. *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry*. New York: State University of New York, 1964. Print. 73

²⁵ Ibid. 73.

The term *harmony* originally comes from the Greek. It means joint or agreement and, interestingly, the term was often used for the whole field of music, while "music" itself referred to the arts in general.

When Swinburne speaks of harmony he speaks of a spiritual life that leads all elements of the poem in a unified fashion, a life that helps the overall movement but does not interfere in the natural state. This spiritual life is the key factor for the excellence of a poem. Also, he emphasizes the unique fusion of the inner essence of the poem with the external elements; the fusion of ideas with the words used. By words he includes the choice of suitable words or other poetic elements such as meter and rhyme, all used in harmony with the essential inner ideas. In other words, the *words* chosen must be just representatives of what they wish to convey. Being an ardent Shakespeare lover, it comes as no surprise at all when this notion echoes the terms used by the great English bard himself. Swinburne repeatedly substituted these two words, *thought* and *word*, with the *spirit* and *sense* borrowed from Shakespeare. He also used the words *soul* and *sense* to show this thought and word, as can be seen in the first stanza of the poem "Plus Intra":

Soul within sense, immeasurable, obscure,
Insepulchred and deathless, through the dense
Deep elements may scarce be felt as pure
Soul within sense.²⁶

What is important is that harmony is not just related to one particular aspect of the poem, but to all aspects, all senses, the first of which is probably the most significant in poetry: music.

2.2 Music in Poetry

Let us begin by taking a short look at the context and background Swinburne came from, to come to a better understanding of his ideas on music in poetry. Walter Pater, the most influential figure in the Aesthetic movement of the late 19th century, met Swinburne while he was studying at Oxford and was influential in introducing him to the Rossettis and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In their discussions he constantly emphasized on the need for a more

²⁶ Swinburne, Charles Algernon. *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*. Bonchurch Edition. Vol 5. 26

liberal look when it came to aesthetic judgments. He spoke of the need to look at the essential features of each work and of the subsequent effects on the person experiencing that work of art.

Pater's philosophy comes from a need to not only celebrate art but also try to explain its evident importance. His aesthetic theory speaks of the contrast between the temporary and immediate experience of a work of art and the abstract notions logical thinking tries to extract from it. He believed that our intense experience of these moments is the only basis for life.

In his essay "The School of Giorgione" (1877), he says that each type of art, be it music, painting, poetry, has its own charm and leaves its own specific impressions on the audience. In addition, each art has certain limitations and can temporarily deviate from them by tending towards another art. In other words, through "what German critics term an *Andersstreben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations, by which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces."²⁷

He goes to state his famous claim, that "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music", for in other arts we can easily differentiate between form and matter, something that art is constantly trying to avoid. In music there is no such distinction. In this lays its superiority above all other arts:

"That the mere matter of a poem, for instance—its subject, its given incidents or situation- that the mere matter of a picture—the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape—should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling; that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter:—this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees."²⁸

Another critic who influenced Swinburne was Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish satirical writer, essayist, historian and teacher of the Victorian era. Although Carlyle was not fond of him, Swinburne read and admired his books. In his Book entitled *On Heroes, Hero-Worship*,

²⁷ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*. 6 .

²⁸ Ibid. 6

and the Heroic in History, Carlyle touches on aspects that must have appealed very much to Swinburne. He mentions that though modern society considers the two words *prophet* and *poet* as entirely different, in some old languages they are the same; *Vates* meaning both prophet and poet. For him, poets and prophets alike have a certain impact they cast on people when they communicate with them: a sense of eternity and infinity. Carlyle adds to this by asserting that we can understand this idea better when taking the musical aspects of poetry into consideration; its most significant aspect. He says:

A *musical* thought is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing; detected in the inmost mystery of it, namely the *melody* that lies hidden in it; the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul, whereby it exists, and has a right to be, here in this world. All inmost things, we may say, are melodious, naturally utter themselves in song. The meaning of Song goes deep. Who is there that, in logical words can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us gaze into that!²⁹

For Carlyle, the most passionate language results in music; poetry can be called musical thought.

Swinburne went on to further define the musical aspect of poetry and created a division between what he called inner and outer music.

2.2.1 Outer Music: The Word

He commences by describing outer music as the mechanical devices used in poetry: meter, rhythm, rhyme, assonance, alliteration and so forth. Many critics appreciated Swinburne's gift in the use of these devices but many believed he stressed more on sound than on stress; these claims, as have already been mentioned, remain unjustified, probably stemming from a lack of understanding of his principles.

²⁹ Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* . 72

His description of musical elements in poetry does not stop there: Swinburne goes beyond that and finds yet another different appeal in some of William Blake's poetry, a kind of sound that extends beyond the normal poetic sound of rhyme and meter. He describes this newfound sound as "The sound of many verses of Blake's cleaves to the sense long after conscious thought of the meaning has passed from one: a sound like running of water or ringing of bells in a long lull of the wind."³⁰ We can understand that here, he is not speaking of the conventional notion of outer music but a more discreet, delicate kind. What complicates this is that he believed that sometimes solid, conventional outer music was not needed for a poem to have right outer music. As an example he gives some of Blake's poems such as "The Lamb":

He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and he is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb.
We are called by his name.³¹

In fact Swinburne believed that in Blake's poetry what created that outer music was not a normal human voice but sounds that echoed strongly of the sounds of nature. The physical sounds made up by the rhythm, the words and the meter, repeat the sounds in nature: the songs of birds, of lambs and, in many instances, waves or ripples of water (the latter being constantly seen in all his poetry). He sums it up to say: "The verse pauses and musters and falls always as a wave does."³² In "A Singing Lesson" he speaks of this idea briefly: "As the turn of a wave should it sound, and the thought/Ring smooth, and as light as the spray that disperses/Be the gleam of the words for the garb thereof wrought"³³ (Swinburne 50). He also spoke of this same feature with Victor Hugo in poems such as "Une Nuit qu'on entendait la

³⁰ Connolly, Thomas E. *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry*. New York: State University of New York, 1964. Print. 65

³¹ William Blake, The Lamb. Songs of Innocence and Experience. 6.

³² Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *William Blake: A Critical Essay*. 134.

³³ Swinburne, A Singing Lesson, The Complete Works. 50

mer sans le voir” and Swinburne recognized this as the most valuable feature in outer music: the human ability to replicate or become the sounds of nature. He also allows us to feel the natural senses in his words as well, such as the winding movement of the wind in the hollow sky or the motion of the waves in “The Way of The Wind”:

The wind’s way in the deep sky’s hollow
None may measure, as none can say
How the heart in her shows the swallow
 The Wind’s way.
Hope no fear can avail to stay
Waves that whiten on wrecks that wallow,
Times and seasons that wane and slay.³⁴

The euphonious rhyming of “hollow”, “swallow” and “wallow” as well as the alliteration of the <w> sound, found both in the first and second stanza, help reinforce both the sense of vastness and hollowness in contrast to the wind’s movement in the sky or the waves motion that “whiten” upon hitting the banks. This delicate play of contradictory elements against each other is seen very much in Swinburne’s poetry and portrays the multi-faceted levels of meaning one may find in his poetry.

2.2.2 Inner Music: Thought

Beyond the bounds of meter and rhyme and even natural sounds, there are spiritual qualities in poetry which, according to Swinburne, are known as the inner music of poetry. The most important source for inner music is nature; through the complete communion of the poet with nature and a unified fusion of his spirit with the world. Here nature is seen as the divine source for poetic inspiration, all things start from Her. According to Swinburne, another aspect which distinguished a true poet of value from the others was their inner talent in being able to go beyond the external music of poetry and becoming one with nature. He firmly believed Shelley was the ideal singing god. In him ideas and form, spirit and sense combined together in nature in the highest harmony and unity. He also mentions Byron and Hugo as fine examples of inner music. Connolly speculates that “they expressed the spiritual strength that they derived from nature, they created ‘inner’ music. They passed above and

³⁴ Swinburne, Charles Algernon. *The Way of the Wind*, Ibid. 5

beyond material nature and achieved communion with the ‘large motions and remote beauties of space’”³⁵ It is interesting to see that Swinburne formally dismisses some of the conventional nature poets such as Wordsworth as ever having reached this inner music.

Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” can be seen as a good example of inner music:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is;
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!³⁶

Here Shelley cries out initially as the singing poet but goes beyond that, in requesting to become the West Wind’s lyre; no longer the singer but the song itself. Why Swinburne considered this as one of the best examples of harmony is evident: the speaker in this poem begs earnestly of the Spirit to be his spirit, to “be thou me”!

The process through which these poets are able to reach this inner music starts out by simple physical description of what they see in nature; through contemplation of these physical presences a strong desire overpowers them. They then transcend physical pleasure to attain an understanding of the divine significance of the natural object. He speaks of passion gained after contemplation of the physical object; it is the same moral passion discussed before which is one of the main sources for lyric poetry.

This mystical-musical aspect in Swinburne’s poetry becomes clearer after we consider the request of the poet or the speaker of the poem to be the flute, the lyre, the reed: the instrument itself. No longer wishing to be subject and object, they wish to be the object itself. No longer wanting to be the person who merely lends his breath for the use of the instrument, they desire to be the instrument and consequently, the breath itself. What this implies is harmony in the highest sense of the word: a complete loss of self and a union with the eternal song.

³⁵ Connolly, *Ibid.* 69

³⁶ Shelley, *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Complete Poetical Works*, 48.

2.3 Unmoving Motion:

Another aspect that is a singular feature in Swinburne's musical poetry is the use of leitmotives: a dominant and recurring theme or an often repeated word, phrase or image. The perfect example of this would be the roundel, in which a word or phrase from the first line is caught up and used as a refrain, as in "Plus Ultra":

Far beyond the sunrise and the sunset rises
Heaven, with worlds on worlds that lighten and respond:
Thought can see not thence the goal of hope's surmises
Far beyond.

Night and day have made an everlasting bond
Each with each to hide in yet more deep disguises
Truth, till souls of men that thirst for truth despond.

All that man in pride of spirit slights or prizes,
All the dreams that make him fearful, fain, or fond,
Fade at forethought's touch of life's unknown surprises
Far beyond.³⁷

Here we see the phrase "far beyond" being repeated not only in the first stanza but also in the last. This is the most recurrent concept in Swinburne's poetry, having a fixed idea which is stable throughout the song but eventually added to, only to return in the end to where it first started. It is in other words a response of an idea to an idea, a line to a line, an echo resounding deeply in his work, fixed yet changing, standing yet turning. It is as if one were to stand and turn around oneself: unmoving motion. Swinburne best summarized the general concept of the roundels in an eponymous poem:

As a bird's quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,
A roundel is wrought.³⁸
The leitmotif is not unique only to poetry but also widely used in music.

³⁷ Swinburne, Plus Ultra, The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne.12.

³⁸ Swinburne, The Roundel, Ibid. 46.

According to *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, a leitmotif is a theme, or other coherent idea, clearly defined so as to retain its identity if modified on subsequent appearances, and whose purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force or any other ingredient in a dramatic work, usually operatic but also vocal, choral or instrumental. It is derived from the German word "leitmotiv" which is explained as the leading motive or guiding motif in a specific piece of music.

The person who this term is attributed to originally is Richard Wagner, though he never claimed of naming it himself. It was used to create subtle sensations and associations in the listener.

After its initial appearance, the leitmotif is gradually changed, whether it is in terms of rhythm, harmony, orchestration or accompaniment; all this adds a new interpretation to the original theme. What is important is that it gradually becomes closer to its original form only to completely return to that state again. In some pieces it can also be accompanied with other leitmotifs to suggest a new dramatic condition. It is usually a short melody that helps to bind a work together into a coherent unified whole and relates a story without use of words or adds extra level of meaning to an already existing story. Famous pieces that use leitmotifs are Richard Wagner's operas, Debussy's (despite his criticism of Wagner and his leitmotifs) and Richard Strauss's pieces.

The similarity of Swinburne and Wagner has been noticed by many, most especially for Swinburne's use of leitmotifs which many believed was influenced by Wagner's operas. Though not musically talented and even almost deaf, Swinburne was influenced by Wagner's operas and it was one of them, "Tristan und Isolde" (performed in London), that resembled Swinburne's poem on the same subject entitled "Tristram of Lyonesse". The poem was published only weeks after Wagner performed the opera and the similarities in the use of leitmotifs throughout the poem are significant enough to mention. While working on his poem, Swinburne himself wrote that "the thought of Wagner's music ought to abash but does stimulate me"³⁹. More specifically, critics have noted on the use of leitmotifal techniques:

³⁹ Nijssen, Kasper. "Victorian Web literature, history and culture in the age of Victoria." . N.p., 17 March 2010. Web. 31 May 2012. <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/swinburne/nijssen.html>>.

according to John R. Reed, "there is no doubt that Swinburne did employ, in *Tristram of Lyonesse*, the technique of a conscious and disciplined motif suggestive of musical composition, and thus Swinburne might have noted and sympathized with Wagner's device of the leitmotiv."⁴⁰

In other words, for a musical theme to be identified as a leitmotif, it must be (1) so clearly defined that its recurrences can be recognized as variations, and (2) connected to a specific story-element.

Raymond Furness also provides a more elaborated definition of a literary leitmotif:

Either a repeated group of words or a mere verbal formula that must make an emotional impact, and here it is Wagner's example that is of importance, for his continual transformation of existing motifs into new ones, conveying a sense of progressive emotional and psychological development, immeasurably enriched the potential of language. (See footnote 40)⁴¹

This description adds another essential feature to the definition: a leitmotif is not only a group of words (instead of a musical theme) that is recognized when it re-appears as connected to something in the story: it must also show us a sense of emotional or psychological progress in the character or theme which it is referring to.

Swinburne uses leitmotifs at several points in "*Tristram of Lyonesse*". The first of these occurs at the very end of the first canto. It represents the poem's central theme: the love between Tristram and Iseult of Ireland. The relevant sequence of words appears just after the two have drunken the love potion on board of 'The Swallow,' the ship that is to take them back to Cornwall. The relevant lines are the following (I have italicized the phrase that may be considered to be a leitmotif):

Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn in one,
And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun
Far through fine rain shot fire into the south;
And their four lips became one burning mouth. ⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Swinburne, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, Complete Works, Vol IV, 165

This is achieved especially through the interplay between stress and alliteration; in the first part, all the alliterating syllables are all stressed. 'Heds' and 'hands', 'still', 'unsunken' and 'sun', and, though here the alliteration is not complete, 'they' and 'dark', are all alliterating stressed syllables. In combination with the pauses, this slows down the rhythm dramatically. Then, in the third line, 'far' and 'fine' both fall on unstressed syllables, creating a great amount of anticipation for the third and again stressed alliterating syllable, 'fire', resolving in the final line's 'four'. Another aspect that contributes greatly to the strongly marked mood of this passage is the use of assonance, especially between 'dark' vowels, as in 'drawn in one', 'saw dark' and 'unsunken sun'. Finally, the great care with which Swinburne composed the music of these lines also appears from the leitmotif itself: the separated short syllables 'their four lips', make for a meaningful contrast with the much more fluent, unified, 'one burning mouth'.

The phrase discussed above re-appears at the very end of the poem, in canto IX: "The Sailing of the Swan." After all their joys and sorrows in England and abroad, Tristram has finally died and Iseult of Ireland has just come upon his death-bed, when Swinburne writes:

[She] came and stood above him newly dead
 And felt his death upon her: and her head
 Bowed, as to reach the spring that slakes all drouth;
*And their four lips became one silent mouth.*⁴³

Here we find the same phrase, with the only alteration that the 'burning' mouth has become a 'silent' one. Since it is representative of their relationship, this leitmotif occurs at their two most important scenes together and symbolizes their development from, put simply, being alive to being dead. In both cases the lovers are unified by a kiss, but first at the height of their youth and then at (or just after) their last moment alive. The contrast also appears from the opposition between first 'their heads neared' and then 'her head bowed'. The line 'their four lips became one burning/silent mouth' contains all the characteristics associated with a leitmotif, and is one of the main ways in which Swinburne creates unity in his poem and intensifies its emotional content. He uses the phrase to achieve exactly what, according to Raymond Furness, a leitmotif's main function is: "[to intensify] the quality of feeling by

⁴³ Swinburne, *Ibid*, 165.

repetition, unifying the various parts of the composition and relating the various parts to the whole."⁴⁴

2.4 Limits and Closure

Poetry as music is described as the realm of the inexpressible and indefinable. Many have sought to come to a better comprehension of how either of them actually function, exactly what they create in us and what it leaves behind. Though there have been no definite conclusions, there are more widely-accepted surmises in music; having been studied for a much longer time than poetry. In regards to this and their similarity, a deeper look at the “why” and “how” of music may help to uncover the mysteries of poetry and in our case, Swinburne’s poems.

Of all his works, the two semi-autobiographical poems “On the Cliffs” and “Thalassius” remain the vaguest to critics and readers alike. What was noticed and questioned by many was Swinburne’s excessive use of run-on lines, repetitions and at times very long sentences.

In “Thalassius” the parallelism of “Because thou hast...” alongside the end rhymes of youth/truth and eyes/skies as well as the alliteration of consonants preceding the end rhymes, create an overall very rhythmic effect:

Because thou have given thy flower and fire of youth
To feed men’s hearts with visions, truer than truth;
Because thou hast kept in those world-wandering eyes
The light that makes me music of the skies;⁴⁵

This repetition of similar phrases (seen more explicitly in his roundels), which are slightly added to in meaning, only to return to where they first began, resembles the circular motion of the sea, the tidal throb echoing in his work. In fact one is reminded of Debussy’s “Jeux de Vague” translated as “Play of the Waves”. Swinburne constantly spoke of the sea,

⁴⁴ Nijsen, Kasper. "Victorian Web literature, history and culture in the age of Victoria." . N.p., 17 March 2010. Web. 31 May 2012. <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/swinburne/nijsen.html>>.

⁴⁵ Swinburne, Thalassius, The Complete Works, Vol III, 303

sun, air and wind and we can hear of this in his poetry as well. In “Thalassius”, he speaks of a “passionate pride of deep sea-pulses” and even goes further to speak of “The tidal throb of all the tides keep rhyme/And charm him from his own soul's separate sense.”⁴⁶ We can also see use of alliteration and run-on lines when addressing the wind in “On the Cliffs”:

O wind, O wingless wind that walk'st the sea,
Weak wind, wing-broken, wearier wind than we,
Who are yet not spirit-broken, maimed like thee,
Who wail not in our inward night as thou
In the outer darkness now,
What word has the old sea given thee for mine ear
From thy faint lips to hear⁴⁷?

One might ask: what is the purpose of such excessive alliteration and repetition? Barbara Herrnstein Smith, author of *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, attempts to provide an answer by making interesting comparisons between poetry and music. Any artistic work, she says, should have closure, “a sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or clinch.”⁴⁸ A structure is considered closed when it is experienced as “integral: coherent, complete, and stable”⁴⁹ In music as in poetry, repetition is the best element to create closure.

She says that in music and poetry the reader or listener’s psychology is important in understanding how repetition affects us and what we in turn expect from the “performance”. When reading or listening to a work we come to establish a formal pattern in our mind and thereafter expect to hear a particular sound. In poetry this is found in rhyme. This expectation continues, even after listening to a text or piece of music two or three times. In his essay entitled “On Speaking Verse”, Paul Valery describes poetry as not wanting to say something but do something. In other words, he defines poetry as a process. For him a poem, like a piece

⁴⁶ Swinburne, *Ibid.* 303

⁴⁷ Swinburne, *On the Cliffs*, *Ibid.* 305

⁴⁸ Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 2.

of music, is a recipe becoming alive by whoever performs it. Speaking of a poem is speaking of a potentiality; it is “an abstraction, a piece of writing that stands waiting.”⁵⁰

According to this, meter and rhythm are not a property of the text but of the performance and the reader. It is a process of our own performance. This process and experience continually changes in response to the continually changing context of what we are exposed to. After we have made assumptions about what we should expect from the text, any minor change or any unconventional arrangement will create tension and emotion: be it positive or negative. Based on this, what “satisfaction” do we get from Swinburne’s poetry? What purpose would long sentences and enjambment have? Why the use of so many repetitions that slightly grow with each appearance?

Would it be Swinburne’s obsession to push language to its limits? Is it to show nothing and just pure nonsense? Is it an attempt to show emotions or to show a completely different perception of the world and reality? Or should we step back (as we have for music) and understand our role in “performing” his poetry? In fact, assuming that poetry is a musical language, should we not also look at it from a musical point of view?

Marvin Minsky in “Music, Mind, and Meaning” believes that the key lies in emotion and thinking. Emotion is deeper in sense of evolution but it is a myth that emotion is more complex than reason. For many years, we have tried to find laws for music and to constantly ask ourselves why we love it. According to him, it is not a question of why but a way to think about things; learning about thinking itself. As any teacher would, sonatas and sonnets both start teaching the simple ideas first, repeating the basics before something essential is represented. We may not know a piece of music note by note or a poem word for word but we do remember something: our own networks of knowledge. In the case of musical repetition it is time.

Repetition helps in focusing our attention on what we have to feel as a reader-performer. Why do we tolerate repetition? Minsky claims there are many reasons but suggests metric frames in music “are transient templates used for momentary matching.”⁵¹ Its rhythms

⁵⁰ Ibid. 2.

⁵¹ Minsky, Marvin. “Music, Mind, and Meaning.” *Computer Music Journal*. 5.3 (1981)

are co-ordinated pulses used to match new phrases against the old to better contrast them with difference and change. As differences are sensed by us in the text, rhythmic frames fade from our awareness and we pay more attention to new ideas suggested in between the old. Interestingly, one can conclude that minor changes in view may best show an object's form or even show us whether it is there at all. In light of Swinburne's need to question conventional concepts, this makes sense.

Listening to a musical performance makes things in our minds which disappear shortly after. The question is: what remains? Minsky believes when people hear something, they can recognize it again, something remains in our mind but it is not music but a way of hearing. Usually, when one cannot fit something into a familiar framework one simply says it is meaningless, just as critics did regarding Swinburne's poetry. From this point of view, a thing has meaning only after we have learned different ways to represent or process what it means.

Minsky starts by differentiating between knowing and understanding: a thing seems meaningful only when we can represent it in different ways, through different perspectives and associations. Just as Swinburne constantly allows for "new meaning" to unfold with each new appearance of a theme, we can only claim to think about something when we can see it from different aspects. Jerome McGann explains this as "language communing with itself" which distinguishes Swinburne's language: "he uses the most general word because his emotion is...reinforced, not by intensification, but by expansion"⁵² We can turn the word around in our minds: however it seems at the moment we can see it in another way and never come to a full stop. This notion reminds us of the concept of the never-ceasing roundel. As a result, something has meaning only when it has a few, if we understood something in one way, we would not understand it at all. As Swinburne repeatedly echoes different nuances of one theme in his poems, he constantly creates room for questioning in our mind. This reveals that seekers of the "real meaning" never find it. Perhaps there is no "meaning" to be found.

2.5 Schopenhauer's Theory of Music

⁵² McGann, Swinburne an Experiment in Criticism. 133.

Among those who influenced not only Swinburne's musical theory but composers such as Richard Wagner is Schopenhauer. He believed human pain is caused by craving and that through art one no longer sees the world as an object of perception; we become one with what we perceive. This means there is no separation from the world. He distinguishes between human works that are for a useful purpose and those of genius. The latter exist alone for their own sake, creating enjoyment for us because we rise out of the atmosphere of need and want.

Among the arts, he believed music is the highest and the most metaphysical. It helps us by presenting abstract forms or feelings separated from their daily circumstances. Emotion removed from things that cause pain and suffering allow us to appreciate a world without suffering. Yet he didn't stop there. Schopenhauer also thought that if one looks deeply enough into oneself, one will discover not only one's own essence but also the essence of the universe. This reminds us again of Swinburne's "Plus Intra":

All that may pass, and all that must endure,
Song speaks not, painting shews not: more intense
And keen than these, art wakes with music's lure
Soul within sense.⁵³

Here Swinburne speaks of the musical aspect of language where language is no longer used in the conventional sense but as sounds. Sounds that, like music, bring forth the long-forgotten emotions in all of us. This resembles Schopenhauer's opinion: the key to such introspection comes from the "will": a mindless, non-rational urge at the foundation of our primitive drives.

On the other hand, Schopenhauer also thought that nature is double-sided with an inner (Plus Intra) and Outer (Plus Ultra) form. The world, for him, is divided into two separate dimensions: that of the representation and that of the will, the former being what we witness through our limited human perception. Such a dichotomy creates distance from an essence that always remains out of reach and "far beyond", as in "Plus Ultra":

⁵³ Swinburne, Charles Algernon. Plus Intra, The Complete Works, V, 12. 26

Night and day have made an everlasting bond
Each with each to hide in yet more deep disguises
Truth, till souls of men that thirst for truth despond.⁵⁴

Schopenhauer, who sees this distance between the essence and what we are allowed to sense, pictures the world as an endless striving with no end in view and devoid of meaning and, ultimately, of God. Our lives, therefore, are in eternal frustration, endlessly striving for nothing, going nowhere and only returning to where we started.

What is clear is that, for him, inspiration came from an outer, metaphysical source and that intuition and emotion played a just as important role in defining what is “right” as reason. In the poems “Thalassius” and “On the Cliffs”, he speaks of the external inspiration of the poet. The Sapphic Bird-God is the highest creative activity and through him the divine and yet human fusion of this new poet is created. From the point of view of “Thalassius”, Apollo, “the live sun’s very God” is a force existing before the poet’s existence and bestows upon him creative intuition. In *Swinburne’s Poetics*, Raymond says that Thalassius is “a transmitter of the divine song, the music of the skies. Further, Swinburne’s use of the terms, SENSE, SOUL WITHIN THE SENSE, and the SENSE WITHIN THE SOUL indicates an external source of power.”⁵⁵

Hence music and poetry, enable the listener and reader to experience the gradual process of their own desires and thoughts. By constantly repeating and slightly adjusting a major theme, we are distanced from our own thoughts and feelings and encouraged towards a kind of “meta-awareness.” Through this we question the validity of a concept and maybe even, its existence. What may appear as a confusion of linguistic forms may actually be an attempt to go beyond them. When there is no distance between the subject and object-as in music and poetry- we are allowed, albeit temporarily, to become the “living” process itself.

⁵⁴ Swinburne, *Plus Ultra*, Ibid. 12

⁵⁵ Raymond, Meredith B. *SWINBURNE’S POETICS*. The Hague: Mouton 1971. 46.

3. Theories of Perception

3.1 British Empiricism and Descartes

British Empiricism comes from the 17th-century period of early modern philosophy and modern science. The term was used in order to describe differences of perception between two of its founders Francis Bacon, described as an empiricist, and René Descartes, who is described as a rationalist. John Locke and David Hume were the primary leaders of Empiricism in the 18th century, with Locke being known as the person who founded Empiricism in the modern sense.

John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) famously stated that the only knowledge human beings have is based on experience. He also introduced the idea that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, a "blank tablet," or "white paper" in which all the experiences obtained through sensations are stored. According to him, there are two sources for our ideas: sensation and reflection, the former being more important. Locke also believed knowledge of things is a perception of ideas that are in agreement or disagreement with each other, which is very different from rational certainty Descartes believed in.

Hume added skepticism to Locke's theory and claimed that all of people's *ideas* are derived from their *impressions*. For Hume, an *impression* would be equivalent to the modern notion of sensation. To remember or to imagine such impressions is to have an idea. Ideas therefore stem from sensation. He also stated that all knowledge cannot be gained by reason alone.

3.2 Swinburne and Empiricism

With the spread of Empiricism at the end of the eighteenth century, there came the conviction that knowledge comes primarily from sensory experience. Without a doubt Swinburne was influenced as a poet of the time. In his works, we witness a constant engagement with Transcendentalism and also the worries of Empiricism: the illusion of perception and the limitations of perspective. Swinburne's poetry speaks of sensationalism and repeatedly challenges and undermines rationality. His poems are deeply based on sensation, observation and experiences.

In many of his works we see a consistent use of the present tense and also titles that point to particular times and places, such as "March: An Ode" and "By the North Sea". There are also specific references to proper names of animals, towns and bodies of water as well as

straightforward descriptions of natural settings: the cliffside or the sea. It is interesting to note the juxtaposition between two opposing elements such as the sea and land and a specific time setting that is usually a transition such as the dusk in “The Cliffside Path” or “On the Cliffs.”

Between the moondawn and the sundown here

The twilight hangs half starless; half the sea

Still quivers as for love or pain or fear.⁵⁶

As a British poet Swinburne was also heavily influenced by British empiricists who helped in shaping his view on perception, the senses and the visual arts.

3.3 Harmony in Painting

Swinburne’s criticism and attempt of applying artistic theories in his poetry did not stop at music and expanded to other arts as well. In painting, we recall his very close ties with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre- Raphaelite Brotherhood. Though they did help in shaping his initial concepts of harmony in painting and poetry, he was also influenced by many other artists. Here we are going to take a very brief look at his idea of harmony and unity in painting, alongside a comparison of his poetic style with visual elements and styles.

Swinburne’s poetry, has creative imagination as its basis which asks for a kind of mutual agreement between emotion and reason. Here reason also encompasses intuition and memory which is practical knowledge from human life. The correct combination of this leads to a harmonious wholeness in which there is a unity of totality and a complete loss of identity through fusion. The result is sublimity and immorality.

Swinburne classifies two kinds of unity. The *unity of totality* is a consistency among individual parts and their blending and fusion resulting in wholeness which will not allow severance, detachment or change in the arrangement of any part, whereas the *unity of direction and dominance* states that elements mutually exist together by subjection and restriction. Here, we find a dominance imposed by the subject matter, the point of view, the character and the relating character and purpose. Swinburne himself believed the former superior to the latter. For him, true unity is achieved when the theme of a work of art grows in

⁵⁶ Swinburne, On the Cliffs, The Complete Works, Vol 3, 304

its structure indirectly and naturally rather than being imposed directly and consciously by a controlling point of view. This, he calls artistic unity. He also states that this unity should be completed with a variety of forms in any work.

It is worth noting that he does not merely call for a variety of forms and elements and unity which can be seen despite each other; he prefers a harmony that will cause all the differently-colored elements to be combined together in a unique fusion of white. Referring again to music, he also names tonal unity which he explains as various tones heard as one but also permitting them to be heard in a variety of keys. This unique fusion and lack of detachment of elements in a work is the only way to bring about immortality in art.

As an example for this he speaks of the excellence of harmony in Whistler's paintings, who was also a very good friend of his. Whistler was also one of the main supporters of the Art's for Art's Sake movement and he, too, drew comparisons with music and his paintings, using the terms "harmonies", "nocturnes" and "arrangements" for their titles. He says that they all "have the immediate beauty, they all give direct delight of natural things; they seem to have grown as a flower does."⁵⁷

This is slightly reminiscent of "Thalassius" and the harmony of the speaker in with the divine force he continuously yet vainly tries to reach. In communion with the "light from the lyre" and "the bright heat in the child's heart" he finally becomes one with the fire and flame of music:

And in the soul within the sense began
The manlike passion of a godlike man,
And in the sense within the soul again
Thoughts that make men of gods and gods of men.⁵⁸

This he also considered the epitome of genius for the artist; the complete fusion of all various elements as a whole. Interesting here is the inversion of "soul within the sense" and

⁵⁷ Raymond, Meredith B. Swinburne's Poetics. 46.

⁵⁸ Swinburne, Thalassius, The Complete Works, Vol 3, 292

“the sense within the soul” which is the only thing that can “make men of gods and gods of men”.



Whistler, Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl

3.4 Synesthesia

When Swinburne speaks of harmony he always emphasizes on the perfect fusion of the internal essence of a poem with the external expression. Not limiting harmony only to sound, he also calls for a need of unity with the other senses. For him imagery was just as important as the musical quality of a poem. In his essay “William Blake” he praises the sensory harmony in “Poetical Sketches”: “They have a fragrance of sound, a melody of colour, in a time when... colour and sound never mixed together into the perfect scheme of poetry”⁵⁹ He speaks of the natural co-operation of senses and synesthesia in “a fragrance of sound, a melody of colour.” The harmony is complete when the senses naturally embody each other’s qualities.

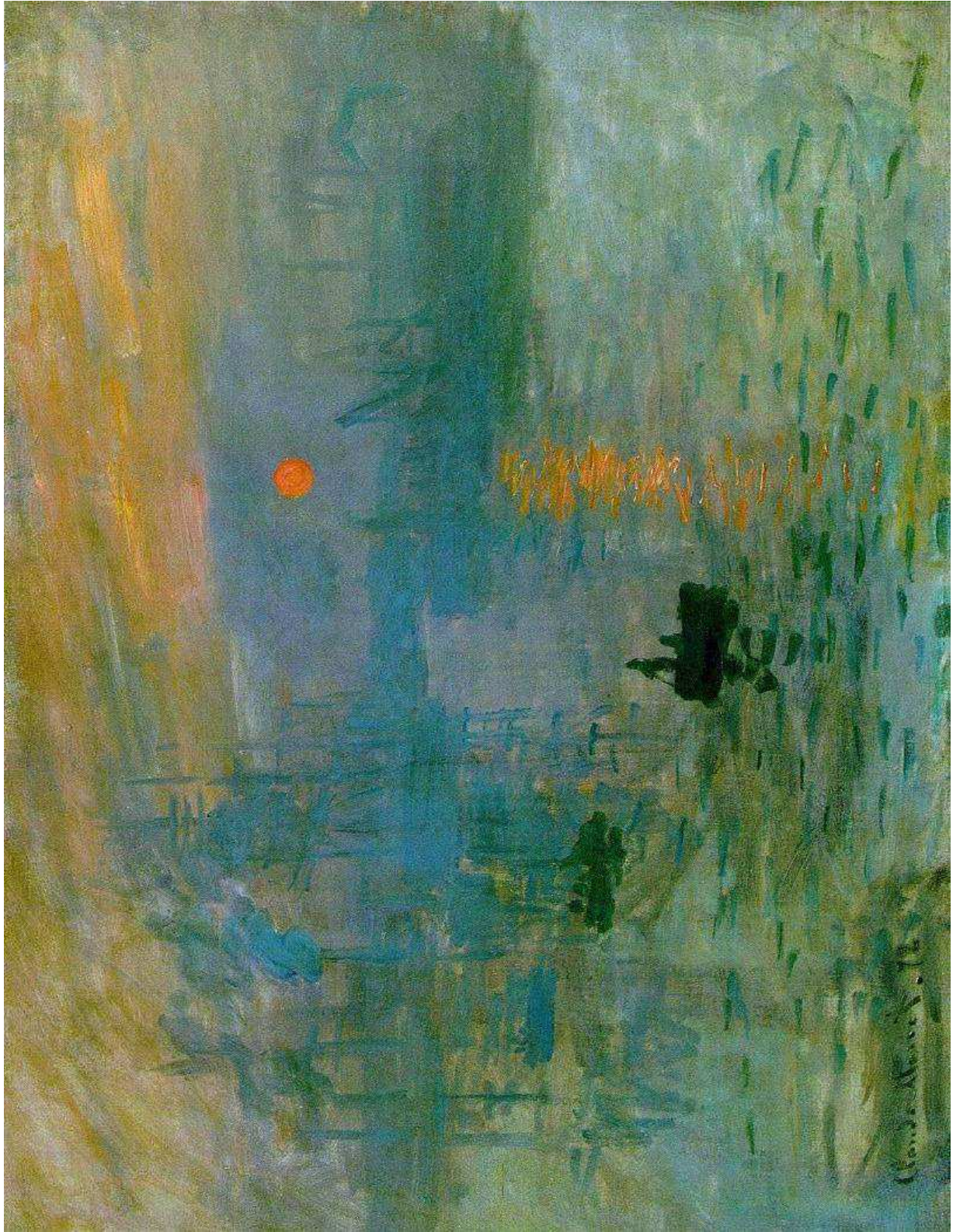
He explains his ideas on synesthesia most expressively in the “Introductory Essay on Coleridge” in which he speaks of Kubla Khan describing it a wonderful example of sensory harmony.

3.5 Impressionism

Swinburne constantly speaks of the ‘inner music’ in poetry and that intangible essence which he constantly seeks. To do that the poet must go beyond the material form to the living essence of life itself in all passion and fire. He believes a poet must be in communion with the soul of the world: with plants, animals, human beings and life itself and “on all likeness of time, and death, and good things and evil. His aim is to render the effect of a thing rather than a thing itself; the soul and spirit of life rather than the living form.”⁶⁰ This is the “soul within the sense” he constantly alludes to in his work. Ideas like this caused some to compare his works in poetry with impressionism in painting. Swinburne knew, met and admired many painters of different genres, among them Édouard Manet, an impressionist. Although Manet never really called himself an impressionist painter, he did nonetheless, support the group and was a type of father figure for the younger painters.

⁵⁹ Swinburne, *Poetical Sketches*, William Blake: A Critical Essay. 9.

⁶⁰ Connolly, Thomas E. *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry*. New York: State University of New York, 1964. Print. 72



Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant*

The name of the style comes from the title of a Claude Monet work, *Impression, soleil levant* (Impression, Sunrise) and some of its common features include: relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities (often highlighting the effects of the passage of time) and the inclusion of *movement* as a crucial element of human perception and experience. This is reminiscent of Swinburne's emphasis on the eternal "tidal throb" and never-ceasing return and echo of specific phrases. In relation to this, Roncato emphasizes on the impressionistic quality in his work in that "no single word in a Swinburne poem quite corresponds to a given thing"⁶¹; intending to "sever the link between the signifier and the signified"⁶², he creates his own language.

The Impressionists found that they could capture the momentary and temporary effects of sunlight by painting outside. They showed the overall visual *effects* instead of details, and used short "broken" brush strokes of mixed and pure unmixed colour—not blended smoothly or shaded, as was customary—to achieve an effect of intense colour vibration. These short brush strokes were also used to show the essence and "soul within the sense" of an object or scene.

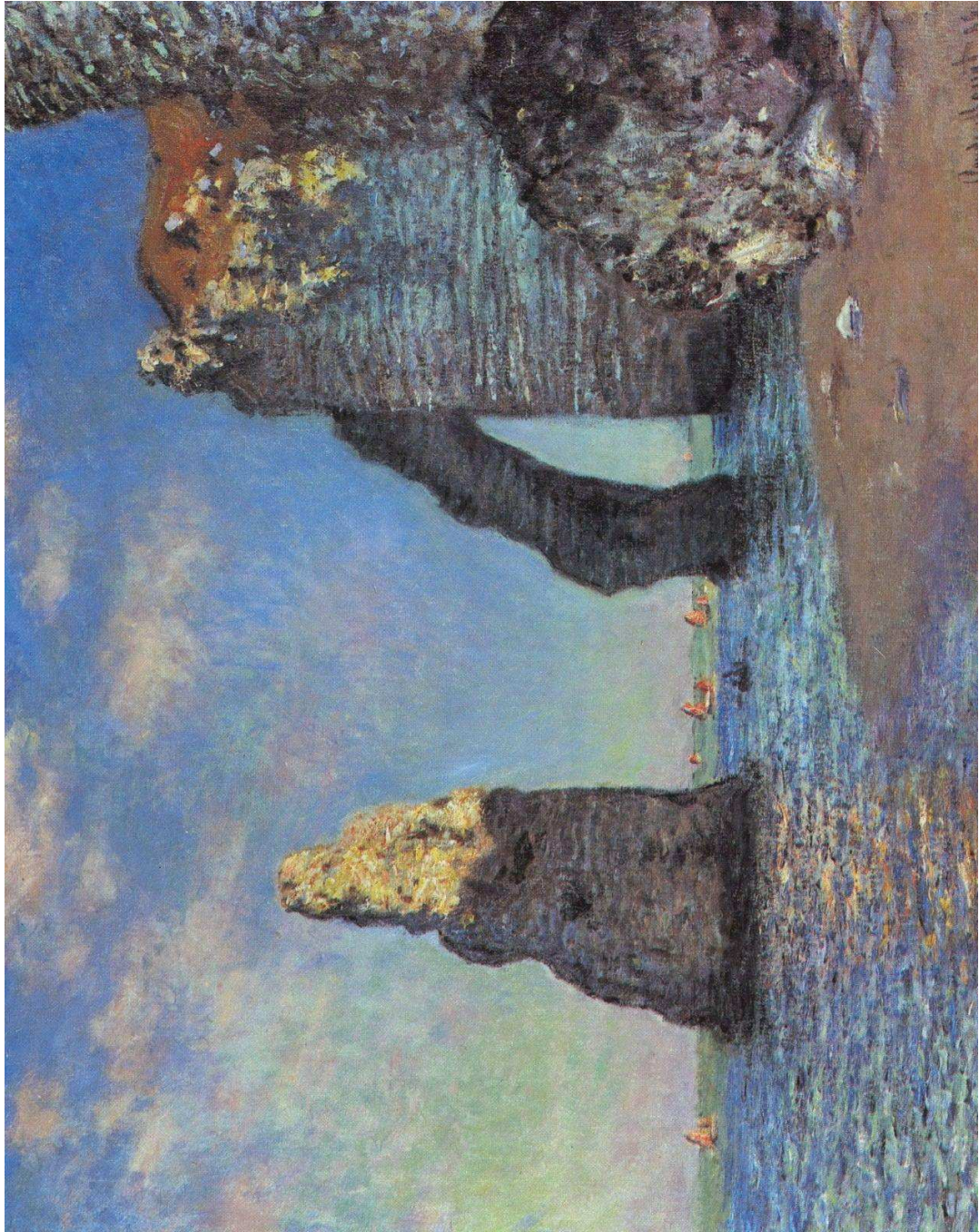
It is interesting to compare this section from "On the Cliffs" with "The Cliffs" by Monet.

But higher the steep green sterile fields, thick-set
With flowerless hawthorn even to the upward verge
Whence the woods gathering watch new cliffs emerge
Higher than their highest of crowns that sea-winds fret,
Hold fast, for all that night or wind can say,
Some pale pure colour yet,
Too dim for green and luminous for grey.⁶³

⁶¹ Roncata, Swinburne and France. 124.

⁶² Ibid. 124.

⁶³ Swinburne, On the Cliffs, The Complete Works, Vol 3, 304.



Monet, The Cliffs

4. Further Implications

4.1 Swinburne, Mythopoeia and Mysticism

Swinburne's unconventional style in poetry and criticism leaves room for much thought and reflection as to where the basis of his ideas comes from. After a detailed look at his idiosyncratic style of poetry and prose, we now turn to some of the other implications his words may have and what we are to make of them.

With the advent of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, many challenged the religious conventions and dogmas of the time. Harshly-disciplined Victorian morality which believed in upright ethical codes created a division between reason and emotion. Consequently, this led to a division between facts and life as opposed to value and religion. There were no exceptions or alternatives to what was considered good and just. With Romanticism also came romantic mythmaking which used the same principles to create myths of their very own.

A distinction should be made between mythology and mythopoeia; the former, traditional stories or sacred narratives that attempt to uphold a religious system usually placed before or outside human time. On the other hand, mythopoeia is a narrative genre in literature created by the writer; it is an act of *creating* mythologies. Through this, the writer can create gods of his own or elevate human beings to the stature of divinity. Here we speak not of a set of second hand convictions but of metamorphoses and creation. The language used will also portray this upheaval and change in the external world.

Mythmaking can only take place when the external world is seen as upheld by a *unifying* power. Whether they speak of a god or the imagination of the poet is questionable, yet, it can only take place when there is interaction between the inner and outer spirit of man. This reminds us of Swinburne's *soul within sense* and *sense within soul* so repeated throughout his works. This goes side by side with Nietzsche's words in "The Birth of Tragedy" in which he says mythmaking can only take place when there is a harmony between the intellect and imagination.

4.2 Swinburne: Heretic or Mystic?

In the Victorian era, deism saw God as outside and above man; human reason had no place whatsoever in the codes of morality as everything had been pre-determined for him. In mythopoeia man experiences God directly as an internal force; he no longer searches for what

he already has inside. Enthusiasm, meaning to have a god within the self, was used in a derogative manner to describe the deists of the time. Also, whereas the Victorians saw facts as untouchable truths, the Romantics and Swinburne saw them as only the external appearance of an infinite essence; man is at the center of the universe and can, therefore, change those realities.

The eighteenth-century thinkers were bound to strict rational thinking and could never overcome it through any means. This in turn, caused a downplay of emotion and feeling for the poets and writers whose worlds revolved around facts. How can one escape from what one believes to be absolutely true? In response to this, there came poets like Swinburne and his predecessors who rid themselves of all inherited dogma in order to experience nature and life directly and creatively. Not able to accept the religious ideals they saw as imperfect and demoralizing, they sought to remodel their own “religion” and to discover the life beyond their boundaries.

As with most thinkers of any time, they were accused of being heretics and nonbelievers and their poetry which portrayed the “lewd” and “obscene” was enough for most to agree wholeheartedly. In as much as they sought to stray away from conventional religious ideals they saw as stifling and corrupt, they were heretics. Yet, through agnosticism and a denial of what was, they actually paved the way for a recreation of new ideals and what could be. The myths poets like Blake and Swinburne created was not of one that happened out of their reach, they were not observers of any distant truth. Their myth was one in process, a living experience to be felt by each and every person. Coleridge’s infinite “I AM” and Blake’s original creation in his works are examples of what could be expected. Hence comes the notion of Swinburne’s prophet-poet living in us all. This is rebellion at its peak; a complete denial of religion and “God”, moral codes and a renewal of all.

Through *passion* and a fiery enthusiasm and longing for life, nature and humans are perceived in a completely fresh light and the language used is without a doubt highly original and figurative. As messengers of their time, these new poets believed that art has nothing do with

science and that it cannot set out to have a moral purpose; art is separated from society intentionally to speak out against suppressive structures and religious ideologies. Art cannot dictate opinion, it has to provoke things. Whereas nature was seen as the sole inheritor of the divine by the Romantics, Swinburne added that human beings as part of nature are divine as well. Hence Swinburne's famous statement: "God is no more than man; *because* man is no less than God."⁶⁴

If one denies the existence of a conventional "God" and yet redefines what that concept means, is he a heretic? Swinburne and Blake believed what was conceptualized as externally divine actually presided *in* them: the eternal essence; the *soul within sense*. This is no new concept; it goes back to an ancient time and place. Further clarification will be provided by the following famous short story in the history of Sufi mysticism.

One morning in tenth-century Baghdad, a poorly-dressed man named Husyn Ibn Mansur al Hallj went out into the street in a state of frenzy and exclaimed at the top of his voice, Ana al-Haqq "I am the truth". This is a literal translation of "I am God". The religious authorities were scandalized and he was imprisoned as a heretic. Given many chances to deny his supposed union with the divine, he refused, and finally, under pressure from religious authorities, was sentenced to death. As a demonstration of severity of his heresy; Al Hallaj was tortured, flogged, mutilated and crucified and his corpse decapitated and his remains burned and ashes scattered in the Tigris river.

This is a story about the revolutionary mystic, writer and pious teacher of Sufism most famous for his poetry, accusation of heresy and for his execution at the orders of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Muqtadir after a long, detailed investigation. In fact, in the history of mysticism, many have suffered at the hands of authorities due to their lack of faith in conventional religious ideologies of the time. Though there may be various differences between Swinburne's "religious identity" and those of mystics, the similarities are nevertheless interesting to note.

Just as Swinburne did, Sufis seek to eliminate the separation between subject and object. They believe in loving God to the extent that "Fanna" or self annihilation occurs. Once

⁶⁴ Riede, David G. *Swinburne A Study of Romantic Mythmaking*. 33

the ego vanishes, unity is achieved and the disciple achieves Fanna as the ego and identity is replaced by the divine. He does not become God, as Fanna is so commonly misunderstood, he is *drowned* in the *tidal throb* of divine essence so that the creator and creation become one.

According to Louis Massignon, Hallaj's method was one of "universalist mystical introspection: It was at the bottom of the heart that he looked for God and wanted to make others find Him. He believed one had to go beyond the forms of religious rites to reach divine reality. Thus, he used without hesitation the terminology of his opponents, which he set right and refined, ready to make himself hostage of the denominational logic of others."⁶⁵ As mentioned before, Swinburne too used the terminology existing in Christianity to create his myth and was criticized for using the same style of writing as those he was criticizing.

4.3 Songs of Midnight: Oblivion and Wakeful Rest

In his "Poems and Ballads" Swinburne looks at things from a new perspective. Seeing the diseased state of western man's psyche he recognizes three stages for a kind of salvation. The first which he called the "Dolores (painful) stage" is one of pure lust and bodily gratification. At this level the soul is excluded and a wanton submission to lust and carnal passions takes place stemming from weariness to life. In the second stage, there is longing for death and oblivion. The third stage symbolizes an attempt to reach love rather than lust. This is what Swinburne saw as the only way individuals could rise up out of the many pits of doubt western civilization had brought about.

Swinburne firmly believes that prevalent morality destroys the already existing unity of soul and body by seeing the body as sinful. His explicit portrayal of the flesh in the first stage is not an end in itself; through a total submission to the bodily needs one realizes that it is just a futile attempt. Nothing will be gained. Excluded from spirit and sense the only thing that will give comfort is death and oblivion.

Gilles Deleuze in "Nietzsche and Philosophy" explains how a nihilistic ideology is destroyed not from any external source but by its own inner workings. It happens when the individual loathes his body so much he wants to destroy it. It is at this time, when humans

⁶⁵ Louis Massignon. "Perspective Transhistorique sur la vie de Hallaj," in: *Parole donnée*. Paris 1983: Seuil, 76

want nothing but oblivion, that real metamorphoses can take place. He calls this transitory moment “Minuit”, a cataclysm that gives birth to real life and creativity. Swinburne refers to it as a deep longing for sleep and rest; a lack of all emotion and reason. This is similar to what Thomas Carlyle named the “centre of indifference”⁶⁶.

Likewise, Blake speaks of “vortices” which develop from a complete submission to the senses and brings about redemption. This leads to a “vortex” which allows the individual to be reborn free from everything tying him down and ending in the infinite. Swinburne is convinced that this oblivion is not to be ignored and that all western society should be encouraged to appreciate it. Human beings must recognize this death to be able to accept a true love for life.

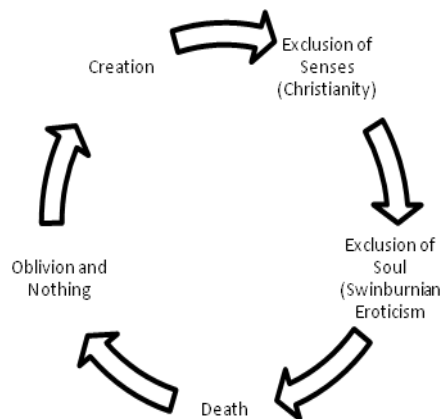
This, too, resembles many of the basic concepts in Islamic mysticism; denial of self and ego to the point where one is able to achieve “presence” or “being”. Though the two terms are very much up to debate and speculation, nonetheless, the process seems similar to Swinburne’s concepts and ideology on the divine presences depicted in his poetry. Another engaging aspect shared by both the mystics and Swinburne is the emphasis placed on emotion. Both saw the heart as the only observer to a reality the mind could never possibly understand. The similarity does not stop there; mutual symbols are apparent as well. Traces of the circle can be seen not only in Swinburne’s roundels or other poems but also in the ancient dance of the “swirling dervishes” of the mystics, making a pilgrimage around the heart. And as the dervishes swirl in states of frenzy and ecstasy, Swinburne too was like a man possessed when he read and wrote poetry. Both turning round and round in silent moving unmotion and returning to where it all began: the heart.

4.4 The Turning Tides for Creativity and Change

After one accepts death and life Swinburne prophesizes creation takes place. Out of the chaos of life and total submission to passion, individuals come to terms with what they truly desires and create their own myths.

⁶⁶ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*, 132.

Swinburne believes creativity is the most significant state of the individual and only arises from chaos. Organized rearrangement and reflection on pre-existing ideas does not lead to originality, it is just yielding to the myths of another time and age. Here he refers to Christianity which denies man's potential to create on his own. Contemplation is not creative by nature and true originality comes solely from a kind of nihilism. Below we can see this idea presented as the Swinburnean Cycle of Creation.



When nothing can be accepted as given, we are left with the choice of creating our own truths and Swinburne believes only art can help us. An artistic spirit leads us to live with the greatest possible intensity and to find consolation in the arts that result from intense pain and pleasure.

Essential in this matter is a constant change, not a finite passing from one stage to another. There is constant change without progression just as the gentle rise and fall of waves; moving yet not changing in essence, “as the turn of a wave should it sound.”⁶⁷ Just as the waves captivate us yet hide the depths of the sea, change and flux also hide but do not conceal the void of meaning man seeks. Without moral and religious purposes to obey, one can respond to the pulse of life and create meaning in complete freedom. In conclusion, change is the only constant and certainty in oblivion the only truth.

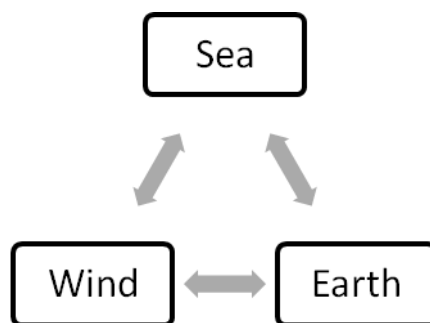
Speaking of ideals, Swinburne also reflects on the divine truth in the form of Apollo or the Sun God. In fact, natural elements play a significant role in showing his belief system and what he thinks about the essence of poetry. Everything is unstable in his eyes, except Apollo who he also refers to as the “singing god”. The worship of Apollo, the creative singing power

⁶⁷ Swinburne, *The Roundel*, Complete Works, Vol. 5, 46.

in human beings, is essential in comprehending much of what he wrote. In “The Last Oracle”, he sees the sun, song, and Apollo as one and asks: “Is the sun yet cast out of heaven?/ Is the song yet cast out of man?”⁶⁸ In “In the Bay” he even goes on to claim “All singing souls are as one sounding sea.”⁶⁹

His obsession for natural elements is also seen in “On the Cliffs” and “By the North Sea” in which he speaks of the poet and the divine forces he wishes to be united with. Yet, to say he only spoke of the eternal song would be a great injustice to the poet. “By the North Sea” describes the erosion of the Dunwich coast by the North Sea and speaks of the constant struggle between the land and sea. The land is a symbol of change and annihilation and of time, whereas death and the infinite sea are the immortal rulers of everything. Swinburne juxtaposes land, mortal life as process with death and the eternal sea; death is the only true ruler of all.

The coast being between land and sea it where destruction takes place and yet, also where hope it to be found. It is only through the shore’s “submission” to death and destruction that peace is found. It is brought into unity by other forces mutual to both, the sun and the wind. Messengers between the living and death, they too are all embracing. In harmony with the sea, they create what Swinburne believed to be the only true trinity.



If we refrain from creating hypothetical gods out of our fear of death and accept this new trinity and what it symbolizes, then we can commence a state of impassioned living. As long as we fail to do so we are denying not only our creativity but also our chance for living. This trinity is unified by the all-mighty god Truth, represented by Swinburne as the sun. The

⁶⁸ Swinburne, *The Last Oracle*, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, 4.

⁶⁹ Swinburne, *In the Bay*, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, 2.

sun is seen here as the supreme god which encompasses the three: “Sea, wind and sun, with light and sound and breath/ The spirit of man fulfilling-.”⁷⁰ In harmony with the three elements and in unity with ourselves, our spirit is left open to the universe and its offerings.

Truth does not only bring about honesty with ourselves and life, it also composes peace. Though the shore is a place of war and struggle, far out in the sea there is nothing but the unity of sun and water. Here enters the role of the poet-prophet who has access to the eternal truth only by mortal death. Paradoxically, the true poet only achieves immortality through death. Death in return gifts the poet with nothing more than an appreciation for beauty. No longer in separation from the universe and himself, the poet is “no more a singer, but a song.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Swinburne, *Thalassius*, Ibid, 302.

⁷¹ Ibid. 302.

Conclusion:

The Dark Dayshine of the Sea

Swinburne's poems are so profound and fiery that, his whole being seems to be very much alive. At times, setting his heart to sing, Swinburne ignores all language barriers and codes of decorum and sets his eyes only on the horizon. As a critic he is dissatisfied with what the Victorian conventionality offered and seeks to question all existing norms and conventions. Nothing is exempt from his critical eye and he probes and indulges in all matters of life; society, art, God and even himself. In all we see a genuine quest and unbridled thirst to probe into the very heart of things.

As a poet, Swinburne reflects on art and poetry and realizes that in the maze and haze of words one is always one step behind in reaching any sense of closure or stability. As a creation of the intellect, words are but arbitrary symbols and in many cases a futile attempt that hides more than reveals that which they point to. He constantly emphasizes on the superiority of emotion and intuition over reason yet sees words as incapable of expressing that which he most wishes to show. He faces this challenge and yet, unlike his contemporaries, is not disheartened or discouraged. Swinburne knew what he wished to say could not be put in words, all mind and logic fled from the bare mention of it. And yet, contrary to what one would imagine, he does not step back. Instead he faces the inevitable and attempts to challenge not only himself, but also language. Seeing music as the only true path to express that which cannot be expressed, he believes all art, including poetry, should aspire to the realm of music.

Swinburne emphasizes the harmony in music and reveals two levels: external music and inner music. Similar to his notion of *soul within sense* in poetry, he attempts to portray this inner quality by methods which are specifically used for music. By constant repetition and use of leitmotifs, one finds an eternal echo reverberating throughout his works. We can hear a light far off song, sounding out in the deep dark hollow of his words. His use of repetition is specific: a continual repetition of words or phrases which differ only slightly in degree with each use. He starts off and gently adds to the phrase in meaning, only to return to that which he started with. This is best exemplified in his roundels but each and every poem of his reminds us of this circular movement. His words move round and round and grow only slightly in size; a *tidal throb* of feeling and yielding to momentary passion.

Indeed, *passion* is a key word in comprehending Swinburne's poetry. Describing it as "that absolute fusion of the whole nature in one fire of sense and spirit"⁷², he finds it to be the most significant factor of the true poet-prophet. Alongside moral passion, he also claims creative *imagination* to be another vital aspect to the artist-poet. Imagination which he reveals as a kind of spiritual instinct and inner quality to the poet, merges with moral passion to elevate the poet to the highest possible state: a loss of selfhood in the elements and a responding to the call of the cosmos.

We also placed emphasis on repetition used to create a sense of closure in Swinburne's poetry. Barbara Herrnstein Smith speculates, that taken from a modern point of view, poetry is not an attempt to say something but do something: a piece of writing waiting for us to experience it as a performer. As a performer of Swinburne's symphony, what are we to experience? If the poet attempted to aspire to the state of music- which is the realm of the inexpressible- the realm of all that cannot be expressed in language, are we to expect any linguistically limited concept? We can ask then: what are we to make of his poetry? What are we to find? Is it meant to push language to its limits or to uncover a new world order or reality? Is it poetry for poetry's sake? Or is it meant to show the limitations of words by showing them as a mass of nonsense?

Marvin Minsky, who looks at the same concept in the musical field, and claims we come to our own networks of knowledge through music. This can help us to look at Swinburne's poetry in a new light. It is not a question of simply listening to music but of remembering something through it. Sonnet and sonata are teachers here, not to dictate but to reveal basic knowledge through repetition. Minsky says metric frames in music "are transient templates used for momentary matching."⁷³ Its rhythms are co-ordinated pulses used to match new phrases against the old to better contrast them with difference and change. As differences are sensed by us in the text, rhythmic frames fade from our awareness and we pay more attention to new ideas suggested in between the old ones. Interestingly, one can conclude that minor changes in view may best show an object's form or even show us whether it is there at all. In light of Swinburne's need to also question conventional concepts, this makes sense.

⁷² Connolly, Swinburne's Theory of Poetry, 58.

⁷³ Minsky, Marvin. "Music, Mind, and Meaning." *Computer Music Journal*. 5.3 (1981): n.

It is not music remaining in our mind but a *way* of hearing; something is meaningful only if we learn to process it. Seen in this light, it is a kind of thinking on thinking, a meta-awareness of all we know or claim to know. Thus enters Swinburne's poetry: as a never-ceasing form, growing only in slight shades of sound and returning to where it begins, we constantly think again on a similar topic. Our mind is not allowed to repose and confine to any boxed-in idea, it learns to be as moving as the waves themselves.

His love for the arts does not stop at music only; he also considers the visual world of painting and, through a constant use of very detailed imagery, shows the abstract concepts he wishes to portray. Swinburne evokes the inner feelings and effects, the *soul within sense* and, for that, his painting can be compared to the impressionistic styles of Monet and Whistler.

Swinburne puts particular emphasis on the overall harmony and unity in poetry. As notes in music merge and blend together naturally to come to a unique singular sound, so does the poet compose a rarely heard symphony of words. Emphasis is always placed on the perfect merging of *soul* and *sense*, *thought* and *word*: no phrase, no word and no sound is taken for granted in the melody of the moment.

As an artist-poet who is disillusioned with what life lay down in offering, Swinburne releases himself from the Victorian myth and through mythopoeia, redefines his role as a being at the center of the universe. He rejects a passive acceptance of any received ideology and encourages a reinterpretation of a tradition. This is achieved by a submission to what is, facing the truth in its entirety and allowing our spirit to ascend to a state above the material world. This process comes about not by retreating in any moral or religious lie but by embracing the sensual aspect of the world only to realize finally that it is futile in essence. The poet must be prepared to reject this world at any time and to find and turn away from illusions in art and life. In order to do so, one must accept death and oblivion by entering a transitory moment Gilles Deleuze called "Minuit". This point of indifference is a cataclysm of renewal and return which gives birth to creativity and originality. Such an act requires an act of pure will, the will of going into a preconscious state Swinburne referred to in "Thalassius" as "deep, divine dark day shine of the sea."⁷⁴ It is a state of creative spirit in which his soul

⁷⁴ Raymond, Meredith B. *SWINBURNE'S POETICS*. The Hague: Mouton 1971. 50

returns to the sleep of pre-birth, all the while preparing him to commune with himself and live in harmony with the universe.

In connection to the overall form of his poetry this sleep is brought about by a becoming, a fusion in which the identity is transformed into a new form by a process of blending for the most part with its opposites. Loss of selfhood takes place, and no longer a singer, as well as us, performers, become a song. With regard to this, similarities between Swinburne's ideology and those of Islamic mystics were found. The latter believe death and oblivion are the only response to our current state of living and this possible by a loss of self-hood (Fanna) and annihilation of the ego. Like Swinburne, they seek to submerge themselves in the *tidal throb* of being and to create harmony by severing the division between subject and object. Though the topic in question was dealt with very briefly, it can be seen as another engaging study; one which could shed more light on Swinburne and his poems.

In as much as we have discovered in this study, music sheds light on much of Swinburne's theories and ideas. Though the bulk of his thoughts requires much reflection, each further study will reveal yet another aspect of his poetry and life. For a poet, to attempt to describe that which cannot be described linguistically, is no small feat in itself. Loss of self-hood, annihilation of the ego, unity, harmony and immortality are but a few of the topics acknowledged by Swinburne. All put aside, one is left with nothing but sound and sense: a symphony of colours and scents and light, a gentle cascade of rhythm and motion and repetition. If we are willing to acknowledge the poet and his lifelong passion, we must pause for only a moment and do as he wished. To become the performers of our own mythical symphony and allow ourselves the freedom of choice, the gift of rebirth and the power of divinity. That by itself is no small feat.

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