Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature Programme

WRITING AGAINST THE CURRENT
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE'S POETRY

Ahmet Mesut ATEŞ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2022

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YAYIMLAMA VE FİKRİ MÜLKİYET HAKLARI BEYANI

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ETİK BEYAN

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ABSTRACT

Ateş, Ahmet Mesut. *Writing Against the Current: Algernon Charles Swinburne's Poetry*. Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2022.

Algernon Charles Swinburne is an enigmatic figure in Victorian poetry. He was associated with contemporary literary movements of his age, which challenged the conventional understanding of art, including the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, French Aestheticism and emerging English Aestheticism. Swinburne devoted his poetry and critical writings to bring about a change into contemporary poetry. He developed his own theories concerning the scope of poetry and the responsibilities of the poet. His critical writings helped develop the intellectual and practical aspects of *art for art's sake* movement and ushered the Decadent Movement. He experimented with form and the subject matter of poetry throughout his long literary career. Through his poetry, he aimed to communicate and excite passion in the reader. Swinburne believed that poetry should be free from any external authority and able to address all aspects of human experience. He was a marginal figure in that his conception of poetry was neither didactic nor shaped by the established social norms and moral values. By forgoing the morality of his age, Swinburne shifted the focus of his poetry on concepts such as liberty, passion, and sexuality. He called the poetic tradition of his age into question and aimed to improve the standards of contemporary literary criticism. Accordingly, this thesis aims to explore the strategies and methods Swinburne employed to challenge the poetic conventions of his age along with the critical arguments he put forward so as to ascertain his contributions to contemporary aesthetic movement and Victorian poetry. Chapter I analyses features of Swinburne's poetry and his experimentation in the form of poetry in relation to his search for a new form. Chapter II examines his poetry in relation to the morality of the Victorian period in order to demonstrate Swinburne's endeavours to set poetry free from the authority of conventions. This thesis ultimately provides an insight into Swinburne's critical and poetical ambitions and his contributions to the Victorian poetry.

Keywords

Algernon Charles Swinburne, Victorian poetry, Victorian poetic tradition, English aestheticism, art for art's sake, Victorian morality

ÖZET

Ateş, Ahmet Mesut. *Egemen Akıma Karşı Yazmak: Algernon Charles Swinburne'ün Şiiri.* Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, Viktorya dönemi şiir geleneğinde sıra dışı bir figürdür. Şair olarak, Ön-Rafaelloculuk, Fransız Estetikçiliği ve yeni gelişen İngiliz Estetikçiliği de dahil olmak üzere, geleneksel sanat anlayışına meydan okuyan çağdaş edebi akımlala ilişkilendirilir. Swinburne şiirini ve eleştirel yazılarını çağdaş şiirde bir farklılık yaratmaya adadı. Şiirin kapsamı ve şairin sorumlulukları hakkında kendi kuramlarını geliştirdi. Eleştirel yazıları, *sanat için sanat* akımının entelektüel ve pratik yönlerinin geliştirilmesine yardımcı olurken bir yandan da "Decadent" Hareketi'ne yol gösterdi. Uzun edebiyat kariyeri boyunca biçem ve şiirin konusu ile ilgili denemeler yaptı. Şiirleriyle tutkuyu aktarmayı ve aynı duyguyu okuyucuda uyandırmayı hedefledi. Swinburne, şiirin herhangi bir dış otoriteden bağımsız olması ve insan deneyiminin tüm yönlerine hitap edebilmesi gerektiğine inanıyordu. Şiir anlayışı öğreticilik prensibinden uzak olduğundan, aynı zamanda da yerleşmiş toplumsal normlar ve ahlaki değerler tarafından şekillendirilmediğinden Swinburne yaşadığı çağda marjinal bir figür olarak görüldü. Swinburne, çağının ahlaki değerlerini yadsıyarak şiirinin odak noktasını oluşturan özgürlük, tutku ve cinsellik gibi kavramlara yöneldi. Çağının şiir geleneğini sorguladı ve çağdaş edebiyat eleştirisinin standartlarını yükseltmeyi amaçladı. Bunlara bağlı olarak, bu tez Swinburne'ün çağının şiir geleneğine meydan okumak için kullandığı strateji ve yöntemleri incelemeyi, eleştirel görüşleriyle çağdaş estetikçilik akımına ve Viktorya dönemi şiirine yaptığı katkıları araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. I. Bölümde, Swinburne'ün şiirinin özelliklerini ve şiir biçemi üzerinde gerçekleştirdiği denemeleri şairin yeni bir şiir biçimi arayışıyla bağlantılı olarak analiz edilmektedir. II. Bölümde, Swinburne'ün şiiri, Viktorya dönemi ahlak anlayışıyla şekillenen geleneksel kurallardan kurtarmaya yönelik girişimleri incelenmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu tez, Swinburne'ün eleştirel görüşlerine, şiir konusundaki hedeflerine ve yaşadığı çağın şiir sanatına katkılarına ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler

Algernon Charles Swinburne, Viktorya şiiri, Viktorya şiir geleneği, İngiliz Estetikçiliği, sanat için sanat, Viktorya çağı ahlak anlayışı

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INTRODUCTION

Algernon Charles Swinburne is a captivating figure in Victorian poetry, whether the reason be his notorious volumes of poetry or the way he conducted his personal and professional relations with other men of letters. Born at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, Swinburne's personality inevitably came to be shaped by the conditions of the Victorian period. His literary goals were kindled by the very same conditions, albeit accompanied by an ambition to challenge and transform the conventions. Accordingly, he associated himself with the emerging literary movements of his day instead of fashioning his poetry under the shadow of previous periods. His knowledge of English literary history allowed him to experiment with traditional forms of poetry as well as compelling him to seek new forms and narrative resources for his poetry. Subsequently, his name was associated with aesthetic movements and pioneers of contemporary artistic movements who revolted against the traditional understanding of art and the artist. From the 1860s onwards, he became a constant in literary circles, arguing in support of aestheticism and fierce opposition to the dominance of morality within the domain of poetry. Being a lover of sea himself, Swinburne must have known that writing against the current of the past ages would be arduous but intellectually rewarding. While arguing for a new conception of poetry, Swinburne was also aware of the possibilities provided by conventional forms and subject matters of poetry. Composing poems in accordance with his modern aspirations and based on traditional models, Swinburne constituted a literary bridge between English literary history and the contemporary conditions of poetry. Moving from the comfort of literary history, he was set on seeking a new horizon for his poetry.

Swinburne was a member of the Swinburne family of Northumberland and the Ashburnham family of Sussex. Both sides of his family being trenched in the history of England, it must have been a great pleasure and matter of pride for Swinburne, as a Victorian, "to picture his ancestors as a fierce succession of border barons" (Nicolson 22). Indeed, in his circle of friends and literary acquaintances, Swinburne was known to boast about the French particles in his blood (Fuller 21). Swinburne's personal affinity with the French and French literature was partly resultant of his belief in European

ancestry. Both in his studies at Eton and literary efforts, Swinburne aimed to actualise this kinship with the French, thereby cementing a congenial connection to European culture and literature. Swinburne’s exaggeration of the significance of his family in the history of the country and insistence on having a lineage reaching beyond the borders of England was neither coincidental nor exceptional in the Victorian period. On the contrary, such behaviour was part of the contemporary strategies to react and respond against change and modernity.

England’s political and social structures had already been in a state of transformation when Victoria became the Queen of England in 1837. The emerging middle-class had recently gained a position of prominence in Parliament as the outcome of the first Reform Bill of 1832 and subsequently started to exert a strong influence on political, industrial and financial aspects of life in the country as well as imposing its moral values to the entirety of the society (Daiches 201). Henceforth, even though the Victorian period may initially resemble an extension of the previous period in terms of its cultural and literary qualities, the idiosyncrasies of the period were to gradually grow more profound. These were the products of the struggles among “religious feeling and the scientific spirit,” “mysticism and rationalism”, and what is deemed as proper and taboo (Legouis 310-311). By means of establishing a connection between the history and the current prosperity of the nation, the middle-class Victorians sought to solidify “inherited religious, social and political systems” further (Carter and Mcrae 8). Poets of the period, on the other hand, perused that connection to comment on and to perceive “the most pressing intellectual and personal concerns” of their age (Bristow 115). A sense of tradition, which came to be observed in the reading public and the poets of the age, “provided moral lessons and political guidance in the form of parallels and precedents” while offering “insights into the very meaning of modernity” (Bristow 116). As the middle-class Victorians pursued their moral values and attempted to impose them on society, Victorian poets relied on various traditional styles to respond to an age defined and challenged by the very traditional values. Victorian poetry is, accordingly, a product of tradition and modernity juxtaposed against each other by cultural, social and, above all, literary challenges of the age.

Poetry of the period was primarily characterised by the "traditional ideas of poetic beauty realised in rich imagery, evocative language, mellifluous sound and established forms" at the onset of the period (Carter and Mcrae 65). However, it evolved and grew to be associated with the "technical elegance" of later literary movements (Carter and Mcrae 66). The traditional understanding of poetry put an idea of hierarchy forwards in terms of poetry and poets in which emerging poets were obliged to evaluate their poetry in terms of their "affiliation with … [or] independence from" great poems in the history of English literature (Bristow 35). The task of Victorian poetry was, therefore, to achieve that impact of the previous generations during a process of redefining itself as a distinctly modern poetic tradition and addressing the problems confronting modern industrial society. Consequently, a tone of loss and nostalgia and a sense of the present are observed in the texture of the poetry of the period. The Victorian poetry, on the whole, was a production of shock – a shock of change, of the new, and of the struggle between what has become and was yet to become of the faith, the society, and the social texture that binds all of these different elements of life together (Wynne-Davies 254). A commitment to the historical past and tradition in the form of medieval poetry and values being imputed unto contemporary issues were observed in their most robust expression in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* (1859) (Bristow 131). Escapism, which was among the prevailing attitudes in literature throughout the century, became more profound and visible with the advent of industrialism and the resultant dichotomy of spiritual and material aspects of life (Daiches 205). In addition to escapism, poets of the period resorted to revolting in their works so as to overcome the emerging complexities of modern life and its effects on society. Industrialisation created a space between poetic expression and the experience of modern life, and both prominent and emerging poets of the period struggled to reconcile that space through the means of inventing new venues and possibilities for poetry.

The period encapsulates late-Romantic, early modern, and modern poetry, the principal characteristic of which is a multi-faceted approach to reality. As the outcome of change and transition, Victorian poetry gradually subsumed characteristics of all these periods (Cronin et al. 1). The reputation of emerging poets and the significance of literary works

were evaluated by their deference and difference to the traditional dictum of poetry (Armstrong 1). As the Victorian Poetic tradition inherited the entirety of English history, poets of the age felt no obligation to be bound by their immediate predecessors. They transitioned from repetition of Romantic poetry to repudiation of Romantic poetic tradition in their endeavours to define contemporary poetic values (Armstrong 4). Poetry of the period prioritised subjectivity and multiplicity of human experience instead of Romantics' prophetic and visionary expression. Subsequently, the poetry of the period stands apart from the earlier periods in terms of being a self-conscious product of the modern age and retaining the significance of a powerful poetic tradition.

Poets expected and aimed to foresee a paradigm shift in the social and literary atmosphere. As a result of that expectation, the poetry of the period remained in a state of transition without either reverting to the past values or completely adapting the values foreseen in anticipation of the coming century (Armstrong 3, 11). Another influential force on the development of Victorian poetry was the accessibility of classical literature due to the increasing numbers of public schools, travels books discovering distant corners of the globe, and easy access to continental literature such as German, Italian, and French (Cronin 1). Subsequently, the period witnessed a fundamental change in literature and culture as the poets found themselves surpassed by the novelists who seemed to grow more influential. That influence manifested itself in stories published in periodicals, magazines, and three-volume novels. English poets subsequently grew conscious of a broader literary sphere of the English language, which accentuated the need for a more cerebral and complicated content and style (Cronin 2). These developments are aptly demonstrated in the poetry of mid-Victorian period poets such as Swinburne, who wrote poems in Greek, Italian and French alongside English while searching for inspiration in contemporary politics of Italy and French literary movements. Moreover, Armstrong remarks that literary works evolved into secondary accounts of vocal performances of the poets due to the advent of industrial means of mass production (15). Armstrong's arguments imply that in addition to being self-conscious of its modernity, Victorian poetry was also self-conscious of itself as a linguistic product. Lacking a prophetic or theological vision, the poetry of the period

enabled criticism and evaluation of poetry on the grounds of investigation and representation of subjective experience.

The awareness of tradition and being modern resided not only within the literary endeavours of the age but also shaped the beliefs and attitudes of the people towards the education of children and adult individuals. In the absence of public schools and educational institutions accessible by men of lower classes and women of all classes, education started at home by force of circumstances. As it was customary in the families of the aristocratic class, Swinburne's education started at the nursery under the control of his mother, Lady Jane Henrietta, where he was exposed to French and Italian literature alongside a profound knowledge of the Bible (Nicolson 27). As Gosse asserts, Swinburne, whose features and character were of his mother's, inherited the love of European languages and literature from Lady Jane and was first introduced to epic in Italian by her (*Life* 5). Lady Jane introduced Swinburne to Charles Dickens, Walter Scott, Shakespeare and Moliere – as it was usual in Anglican families, "she made certain that it was the carefully expurgated Family Shakespeare of Thomas Bowdler, *the 'Victorianized' Shakespeare*" (Cassidy *Algernon* 20-23). Despite his access to the libraries of two households, Swinburne's writing efforts, if there were any, remained limited to his musings with his cousins and the literary works he was exposed shaped under the control of his mother as well as the Anglican and Evangelical values[1].

Swinburne started his studies at Eton in 1849, clutching his Victorianized copy of Shakespeare that symbolised his initial forays into literature being carefully controlled since Lady Jane had restricted him to an expurgated list of books. Immersing himself in books such as Charles Lamb's *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets* (1849) at the library of Eton, Swinburne became acquainted with English, French and Italian poets and classics (Nicolson 35). Only at Eton, he was finally able to read an unexpurgated version of Shakespeare alongside the works of other dramatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is evident that Swinburne's plight for unrestricted poetry in his

[1] Cassidy suggests that Swinburne's first writing endeavours followed his introduction to Shakespeare, after which "he began to write and, with his sisters and cousin, to act out extravagant dramas" (23).

later life, which resulted from his late acquaintance with more serious poems of English and French literature, was a reaction to the traditional methods his mother followed in his initial education in literature. Swinburne's realisation of the restricted nature of nursery education remarks a moment of disillusionment with regard to his literary education as well. For many Victorian readers, there existed an innate relationship between education, poetry, and religiosity. From the earlier part of the period onwards, arts had gradually come to be regarded as a manifestation of "moral health" and a powerful medium to dissipate social values of the dominant classes (Moran 10). This relationship grew more profound as many clerics regarded themselves responsible for the moral well-being of the public and chose to function as literary critics as a part of their mission to shepherd their flock. Subsequently, the reading public equated poetry with religious duties, which constituted at least one underlying reason for the high expectations of morality from the poets. Accordingly, the literary criticism of the period was shaped by moral values and suggested an expectation of the artists to have a didactic purpose. In other words, "Victorian criticism served as a regulatory mechanism … [as a result of which] works that challenged favoured beliefs and traditional forms ... were denigrated as artistic failures" (Carter and Mcrae 127). Moreover, the lack of patronage from the ruling class compelled men of letters to rely on the income provided through their publications which further accentuated the financial power the reading public held over poets (Bristow 165). Swinburne's early education was shaped under such conditions as a result which he acquired a formidable knowledge of the Bible and English morals in addition to English and European literature. By the time Swinburne decided to pursue a literary career in a professional capacity, poets were robbed of their principal source of income and were burdened with more responsibility concerning the edification of the public.

At Eton, Swinburne never neglected pillars of English literature such as Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, and Coleridge even though he delighted in the works of the Elizabethan dramatists (Cassidy *Algernon* 28). His passion for Victor Hugo was

kindled during this period after he read *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1852 (O'Gorman xvi)[2]. Reciting poetry in the time allocated for the studies turned into an exhilarating feat of performance for Swinburne. He read aloud poems, sometimes at the top of his voice, driving the passers-by into the fear of delirium (Gosse *Life* 14). Despite all his endeavours in reading and writing, Swinburne's poetry remained in a state of germination during this period of his life and his passion for Elizabethan dramas or drama, in general, remained unvoiced until the end of the decade. After a period of preparations following his departure from Eton, Swinburne matriculated at Oxford in 1856, where he enjoyed "the stimulus of sun, light, Sophocles, Sappho, youth, boyish mutiny and adventure" (Nicolson 17). He was not without the company of a small group of men of letters, among which John Nichol was primarily instrumental in his transformation into a poet because it was the Old Mortality Society founded by him through which Swinburne produced the first fruits of his literary musings (Nicolson 44). The society was founded in 1856 "for the purpose of affording its members 'such intellectual pastime and recreation as should seem most suitable and agreeable", which was aptly named since none of its founders and immediate members were "completely sound in health" (Fuller 35). The society was somewhat akin to Tennyson's Apostles regarding their efforts to understand and respond to contemporary works of literature and the culmination of their views in reviews and essays. They reacted "against the predominant ascendancy of Tennyson" in a manner not unlike Tennyson's Apostles did with Byron and favoured, as a group, the poetry of Browning and Ruskin (Gosse *Life* 47). Alongside Nichol and other members of the Society, Swinburne found ample opportunity to explore new fronts of literature and philosophy.

The year 1857 was of historical significance for Swinburne at Oxford and his poetic career since he met with the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the fall term. Swinburne quickly established professional connections with William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti to the extent that Morris would ask Swinburne's assessment of his new poem, *the Defence of Guinevere* (Nicolson 48). The world of art introduced by

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[2] He also started writing plays after the fashion of Elizabethan and Jacobian dramatists and explored the works of Sappho and Aeschylus, which were to exert a strong influence on his career as a dramatist (O'Gorman xvi).

the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Morris's final publication of *the Defence of Guinevere* excited the young Swinburne (Gosse *Life* 55). By the time he met Swinburne in 1857, Rossetti had already entered the orbit of the notion that "art had nothing to do with morality or moral didacticism and should be evaluated only on its merits as art" (Cassidy *Algernon* 43). Rossetti acquired this doctrine from Edgar Allan Poe, whose assertions concerning poetry's "ability to excite and elevate the soul" prompted Theophile Gautier to *l'art pour l'art* (Cassidy *Algernon* 43). Cassidy reminds that this new movement was opposed to the moralistic view of art and followed the same arguments contemplated by the late Romantic Thomas Carlyle and art critic John Ruskin (*Algernon* 48). The group of thinkers, also known as the aesthetes, stood against the ugliness of industrial modernity, seeking a more harmonious and aesthetic life. Legouis states that, recognising Carlyle as his master, Ruskin devoted his life and studies to denounce the ugliness of the industrial age in support of the aesthetes and emergent Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood thereby introducing the notion to the wider public (314). This new aesthetic criticism prioritised "the subjective nature of our apprehension of the art object" and prefigured the phenomenology of reading (Tucker 442). Accordingly, two primary sources of inspirations observed in the poetry and the other forms of art from the middle of the century onwards were the desire to replicate the medieval condition of art as observed in the poetry of Tennyson and Morris, and the emphasis on "beauty … [and] the pleasurable" as exemplified by the Aesthetic movement and the Decadent movement, respectively celebrating pure beauty on its own and "commitment to excess … [and] marginal sexualities" (Steinbach 234). Swinburne gravitated towards the Aesthetic movement and made it the central focus of his defence of contemporary poetry, eventually acquainting with other aesthetic artists during his career and becoming a member of the aesthetes. These tendencies of the emergent aesthetic movements were, inevitably, positioned against the reserve of the Victorian middle-class. Under the influence of various literary movements exemplified above, Swinburne experimented in numerous branches of poetry, and literature became of primary importance to him. He also met Tennyson in Farringford at the closing of 1857 on his vacation in the Highlands (Nicolson 50). Although his initial poetic career coincides with anti-authoritarian movements, Swinburne's pleasure in meeting

Tennyson in-person points to his ensuing passion for history and conventional forms of English literature even after he became committed to *art for art's sake*.

The essential stimulus for Swinburne's poetry was gained from the sun, the sea and the literature he absorbed at Eton and Oxford alongside his literary explorations until that period; Nicolson argues that the stimuli provided after that point in his life became "either decorative or … mere artificial" in comparison (22). Nicolson's observations concerning Swinburne's creative stimuli are relevant to Swinburne's attitude towards the academic endeavours in that he devoted most of his time to writing, thereby dismissing his studies[3]. Swinburne's eventual departure from Oxford is the beginning of his professional career, seeing that his attempts with various forms of verse during his Eton and Oxford period are, in essence, experimentations based upon the poetry he absorbed from the books much as his musings. From that point onwards, his primary aim seems to be establishing himself as a poet. Therefore, the evaluation of his poetry should be set after 1859. As such, it is imperative to revisit under which conditions Swinburne set out to be a professional poet in London.

There was an aversion to every aspect of sexuality in Victorian Britain. As Steinbach argues, sexuality was a taboo subject and one of the most discussed issues at the same time, and it constituted a central conflict in the period from scientific experiments and studies to legal cases and laws. At the same time, the family as the founding unit of the larger society necessitated this issue to be addressed in some capacity. Consequently, the ideal male was attributed with sexuality which was allowed only in relation to propagation since sexual desire, even towards their wives, had a corruptive influence on people (240-242). Steinbach further states that sexual experience outside the socially sanctioned limits of the family, such as masturbation and extra-marital affairs, was seen as a cause for infertility and mental incapacitation while sexuality within the female body was a completely different conflict for the Victorians as they believed women to

[3] The success of Swinburne in composing in French and Italian and being awarded with the Taylorian scholarship for French and Italian in his second year were due to his interest in the republican politics of Italy and French which was kindled after reading *Les Chatiments* rather than his involvement with his studies (Gosse *Life* 54).

feel no sexual desire nor need any form of sexual passion even for the purpose of reproduction. In other words, men were obligated to constrain their sexuality within the confines of reproduction, while women were conceptualised as entirely devoid of sexuality (242-243). This emphasis on controlling physical urges would result in didactic magazines targeting women, men and even children that pursued dissemination of secular and religious moral values (Steinbach 272). During the mid-Victorian period, these efforts transformed into legal regulation of sexuality represented in the works of art and sought to portray sexuality as "a cause of social disorder" (Dawson 4). The underlying reason for these social, religious, and eventually legal precautions against sexuality was the belief that representation of sexuality would result in mental, physical and moral depravity on behalf of the reading public.

Another primary concern of the Victorian period was the fact that the church as a social institution faced the risk of losing its significance in society and culture. At the close of the eighteenth century, the French Wars had transformed England into an insular nation and shaped its morality. By the time Victoria became the queen, "social disapproval [became] a force which the boldest sinner might fear" (Young 4). The 1851 religious census revealed that a significant portion of the population shied away from the Sunday service of the church, but religious commitment and devotion to Christian values continued to be the dominant characteristic of Victorian England (Sanders 398). A smaller group of educated people fostered concerns relating to the relevancy of the Christian teachings even though these teachings were still the cornerstones holding the society together as well as informing the reading public on the matters of good and bad works of literature (Sanders 399). The number of authorities vying for the spirituality of the individuals mounted up to three: the Anglican High Church, Evangelical Broad Church and the Low Church. Accordingly, Queen Victoria's reign witnessed the struggle among these three parties of the church despite the fact that all three were threatened by the body of scientific studies such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) (Wynne-Davies 255-257). Agnosticism was widespread within the intelligentsia of the period which was symptomatic of the phenomena such as the Oxford Movement, John Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism, and Darwin and T. H. Huxley's studies on the theory of evolution and the wave of "disintegration" kept

its pace during the period (Daiches 232). As a result, the period stood at the threshold of a blissful image of the past and uncertainties of the coming age. It was natural, therefore, for Swinburne to develop his own arguments on the matter. In one of his earliest critical writings, which he wrote for the Old Mortality Society, Swinburne asserts that religious ideas are imposed upon rather than acquired through experience and conscious learning (Cassidy *Algernon* 35). This opinion was commonly held by the Victorian intelligentsia, who averted all forms of religious belief in fear of atheism (Cassidy *Algernon* 36). Later in his life, Swinburne, too, strove to subsidise the sense of loss by conceptualising new interpretations of the past and native traditions, which echoed primarily within his Arthurian poetry.

The dominant influences on English poetry during the period coinciding with the beginning of Swinburne's endeavours in London were Tennyson, who guided his peers well into the 1860s and Browning, whose poetry has just begun to be appreciated by the reading public (Armstrong 36). However, beginning from the late 1850s, poetry and the intellectual atmosphere were disturbed by younger poets such as Morris and Rossetti, who engaged with the poetry of sensation, among whom Swinburne can be included. Accordingly, Armstrong asserts that poetry produced by Tennyson and Browning after this point are, in fact, "a reaction to that of younger poets … [and] the centre of interest lay elsewhere" (372). Bristow recognises that "elsewhere" as scientific discoveries relating to the evolution of the human species, offering radical concepts of change as an alternative to the repetitive narrative provided by classical literature (47). Therefore, the change Swinburne desired would occur gradually as the poets of his age composed their literary works with the sustained effort of variation. Out of this cautious wave of experimentation, dramatic monologue emerged as a popular form due to its innate capability to address "the intricacies of desire, sexual or otherwise," as demonstrated by the poetry of Tennyson, Browning, and the young Swinburne himself (Bristow 84). The Victorian poets felt a necessity to distance themselves from the poetic voice through the dramatic monologue. As to the reason, Tucker argues that as a by-product of the emergent mass media culture, the poets were transformed into "cultural capitals," hence their success and the reverence in the eyes of the reading public was dependent on "their work ethic, and their domestication as responsible citizens" (285). This resulted in a

tendency towards a monolithic, moralistic understanding of poetry outside the Romantic tradition. However, contemporary developments in science and philosophy evaluating the significance of religion, morality, and the individual as the constituent of society necessitated a versatile and protean understanding of poetry (Bristow 26). As a result, the Victorian Poetic tradition spreads along a spectrum of tendencies that range from Late Romanticism to a Tennysonian approach to modernity until the mid-1860s and later develops into Aestheticism and the Decadent Movement. Bristow observes that the Victorian Poetic tradition endeavoured to resolve dilemmas such as the function of the art and the significance of literature while trying to offer definitions for the concepts such as language, representation, gender and sexuality (29). All these concepts were symptomatic of modernity and constituted significant problems for the intellectuals of the age, even for those who avoided self-identifying as modern. Bristow points at Graham Hough and John Heath-Stubbs, who underline the similar issues in *The Last Romantics* (1947) and *The Darkling Plain* (1950), which give way to a new perspective about the later Victorian poets, including Swinburne, and recognise their intellectual and social distancing from society as attempts to seek solutions to overcome the current state of affairs (29).

The years between 1859 and 1865 were a period of culmination and prolific literary output as Swinburne laboured on his poems and dramas. All the while, Swinburne sustained his companionship with the members of the PRB and threw "himself into the writing of poems and dramas" in the manner of both Rossetti and Morris (Cassidy *Algernon* 49). He published his first book, *The Queen Mother and Rosamond,* shortly after his grandfather's demise at the end of 1860. The book received no critical acclaim and proved to be a literary failure for the young poet, who was "never much of a play-goer," which meant that, all things considered, he was out of touch with the current taste and trends of the stage (Gosse *Life* 69). Turner argues that although he had initially written poems imitating the style of Morris and Rossetti, Swinburne's real interest resided in "verbal and rhythmical spell-binding and a taste for sensational subjects" (135). In opposition to the demands of public and publishing houses from the poets, Swinburne was everything a poet should not be: "In religion he was a pagan, and in politics he wanted to see the overthrow of established governments" (Carter and Mcrae

250). Moreover, the artistic distance between the restriction imposed by the reading public and his poetic aspirations must have further exacerbated Swinburne's frustration. Between April and September of 1862, he contributed lyrics and articles on Victor Hugo and Baudelaire, thereby trying to establish himself as a prospective literary critic and aesthete. Turner argues that Swinburne was the leading poet defending the teaching of *art for art's sake* in Rossetti's circle (138).

Swinburne started working on *Atalanta in Calydon* early in 1863, which successfully realised his dream of breaking out of his cocoon when it finally reached its audience. The general reception of the play was laudatory in recognition of its quality of antiquity, which was yet to be accomplished since Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* at the beginning of the century (Gosse *Life* 99-117). The verses of *Atalanta in Calydon*, into which Swinburne managed to infuse all the historical pieces of literature he admired, were so "bewitchingly original" for its time that it became one of the reasons for Swinburne's belief in "his own words as conjuring life" (O'Gorman xvii). Accordingly, the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon* constituted a paradigm shift, for Swinburne and the Victorians, from the influence of the first half of the century and Romanticism to a poetic tradition essentially orbiting around modernity.

The poems constituting *Poems and Ballads* were under the process of composition, revision and approval by Swinburne's circle of friends, and this process had an advert influence on Swinburne's health and built up his infamy as an electric figure in every meaning of the word (Nicolson 102). By March 1866, Swinburne completed his volume and set upon correcting the proofs of his labour of nearly ten years. *Poems and Ballads* burst like a bombshell into the respectabilities of England as it received adverse criticism on the grounds that it promoted excess sensuality. Dawson argues that "aestheticism was widely connected with various forms of societal and sexual transgression" from the perspective of the Victorian reader (16). Accordingly, Swinburne's poetry was, indeed, evident of the critics' suspicions being correct as his poems were full of men and women motivated by passion and sexual desire (Steele 5). One of the reasons why Swinburne insisted on including these poems despite the

warnings and apparent risks of publishing such poems was the fact that he believed it was hypocritical of his fellow artists and critics to be proclaiming modernity and intellectual liberty while abiding by conventional morals of the previous periods (Steele 5). Therefore, the criticism against *Poems and Ballads* had the opposite influence of motivating Swinburne to maintain his efforts to challenge and shock his readers.

Criticism of Swinburne's paganism, or anti-theism, in *Poems and Ballads,* was also directly resultant of the period. The sectarian conflicts and the struggle for Anglicanism to retain its spiritual significance brought pressure upon beliefs outside the dominion of Christianity, namely paganism and anti-theism (Dawson 86). The "wild burst of disapprobation" echoed in literary magazines and gazettes in a much similar tone to that of Mr John Morley, who described Swinburne as "an unclean fiery imp … the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs" and accused him of lacking "judgment and reason … counterfeiting of strong and noble passion by mad intoxicated sensuality" (Hyder *Critical Heritage* 39). The subsequent scandal "reverberated throughout England and beyond" (Nicolson 113). O'Gorman argues that *Poems and Ballads* proved, for better or worse, Swinburne was standing far above his contemporaries (xiv). Swinburne had a "genius almost beyond limit", and his eclectic education, which compassed "Old French, the chthonic deities of ancient Classical religions, the Marquis de Sade, the Risorgimento, Baudelaire, the Christian liturgy", was exceptional (O'Gorman xx). Swinburne's recitals gained him "a semicircle of worshippers, who were thrilled by the performance to the inmost fibre of their beings" and who pressed upon him to publish his poems (Gosse *Life* 133).

Impressions underlying *Poems and Ballads* were actually reflective of Swinburne's life in London. It should be taken into consideration that both the celebrated and despised elements of the series were closely related to that fact. For instance, Legouis argues that Swinburne's success was based on dithyrambic passages related to the frenzied, impassioned choric hymn and dance in honour of Dionysus Swinburne might have experienced in parties (350). After he left Oxford, Swinburne made a series of acquaintances that would exert artistic and social influences on him, such as Richard

Milnes, Richard Burton, Charles Howell, Simeon Solomon and Theodore Watts (Levin 9-10). He joined the Hogarth Club where he met with Milnes and Burton (Fuller 54). Milnes was famous for his collection of obscure literature, while Burton, who was interested in sexual practices around the world, had translated *the Kama Sutra* and *the Arabian Nights* (Rooksby 68). Cassidy depicts Milnes as an adverse influence on Swinburne's poetry partly because of the introduction of Sade and partly because he enabled Swinburne to "give full vent to aberrant sexual tendencies … for the joy of such abnormalities" (*Algernon* 71-72). Notwithstanding, Swinburne seems to be interested in such works, particularly Sade's works, before his acquaintance with Milnes from what can be surmised from his letters. He once wrote to Milnes on the subject that he was intent on reading "the mystic pages" of Sade (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:46).

Poems and Ballads can be recognised as the culprit of Swinburne's infamy and his primary apparatus for poetic success. Although the poems in the collection were, in essence, "hymns of defiance, gestures of liberation, paeans of revolt", Swinburne's subject matter was perceived as pornography (Nicolson 104-105). In an article entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry", penned by Thomas Maitland, who was later proved to be a pseudonym for Robert Buchanan, Swinburne was attacked on the grounds of his overt sexuality alongside an implication of homosexuality (Cassidy *Algernon* 128-129). In his revolt against the parallelisms drawn between morality and "sexual purity", Swinburne became the *de facto* spokesman of the "cultural avant-garde" thinking and "claimed moral autonomy for his poetry through the sexual audacity of its subject matter, which included incest, necrophilia, homoerotic desire, and a consistently sado-masochistic rendering of pleasure in terms of domination and pain" at the expense of raising doubts about his homosexuality on the grounds of celebration of ancient Greece culture (Tucker 130). Due to his knowledge of the history of English literature and interest in contemporary literature, Swinburne was sympathetic towards both the traditional and current trends underlying the Victorian Poetic tradition and intended to force his vision of modern poetry onto the period. Embracing the ideas put forward by the members of the PRB, French poets and Sade, Swinburne "shocked the Victorians ... [with his] sadism, sexual enchantment, and anti-Christian outlook … [and unearthed] a spirit of luscious sensuality which was both a moral and spiritual challenge to the ethos

of the day" (Carter and Mcrae 274). Swinburne's choice of forms and subject matters taken from French poetry found no supporter among his critics as well since Britain's empirical success guided poets and critics of the age towards a more nationalistic attitude overall. Furthermore, Swinburne had attacked the established Christian values and teachings and tried to replace these values with "paganism and instinctive libertarianism" (Sanders 429-430). Swinburne must have initially seemed irresponsible and unethical to the public harbouring high expectations of respectability from the writers. From that point of view, he was prefiguring Decadence and Aestheticism of the 1880s with the moral shock of *Poems and Ballads* (1866). He subsequently became recognised among the chief literary influences of later generations and had a profound effect on the *fin-de-siécle* literature.

Concerning the success of *Poems and Ballads*, it depended on experimentation with the form and subject matter of poetry. The Victorian period was an age of poetic experimentation and works of Tennyson and Browning, the Pre-Raphaelite poetry, Swinburne's dithyrambic *Poems and Ballads*, and later developments observed in poetry exhibit numerous aspects of this historical epoch (Wynne-Davies 261-262). Swinburne's main contributions to the poetry of the mid-1860s were his "invitation to transgression," his attempt at subverting the seriousness of the 1860s, and his theories concerning the form of contemporary poetry (Armstrong 377). Articles Swinburne published on *the Fortnightly Review* after becoming a regular contributor constitute a milestone in literary criticism of the period as he imported "a new class of writing", high criticism, in the manner of French critics (Nicolson 123). His efforts were the first step to "produce a concrete and almost plastic conception of the work of an author, not minutely analysed or coldly condensed, but presented as if by an inspired neophyte, proclaiming a religion in an ecstasy" (Gosse *Life* 169). Held in high esteem by the young aesthetes of the age, these contributions were also instrumental in establishing Swinburne's reputation as an intellectual poet in the aftermath of *Poems and Ballads*. Subsequent to the critical uproar of *Poems and Ballads*, he fashioned his *Notes on Poems and Reviews* during the summer of 1866. According to O'Gorman, in the event of objections to his poetry, Swinburne resorted to resistance even though he harboured a dislike for "being challenged" (xix). He considered these negative judgements as

"scurrilous and foul" and restrictive of "uninhibited speech" to which he was entitled, he believed, due to being a poet (O'Gorman xxii). His unwillingness to submit to the criticism of the public and literary critics resulted from his belief in *art for art's sake* and his political views.

A group of Swinburne's friends who recognised the negative influence of the reviews and the ensuing dispute on Swinburne's literary reputations and health, including his old schoolmaster Benjamin Jowett came forward to help Swinburne find a new idol to engage the young poet (Gosse *Life* 166). Mazzini agreed to take Swinburne as his political apprentice to guide him away from aestheticism and demanded that he "abandon 'songs of egotistical love and idolatry of physical beauty' and turn out 'a series of Lyrics for the Crusade'" (Cassidy *Algernon* 122). Swinburne, who had believed in Mazzini's political ideas since his Oxford days, immediately set on studying for a series of politic verses (Gosse *Life* 177-179). His intensive study continued between 1867 and 1868. It is evident that Mazzini's request successfully saved Swinburne from the state of mind which produced *Poems and Ballad* only to throw him into another fervour. Swinburne published *Songs Before Sunrise* early in 1871. His political poetry constituted an attack on "English beliefs and institutions – with the exposition of Pantheism ... and the envisagement of Christianity as a cruel superstition" (Mackail 10). *Songs Before Sunrise* marked the beginning of a more stable and reputable period in his London life in which Swinburne experimented with various forms of verse. O'Gorman observes that even though Swinburne still refused to silence his poetic impulses, an order was seen in his poetry of the 1870s, and his literary reputation was in a sustained elevation of fame and adulation (214). He held the belief that he surpassed his "competitors in English poetry except for Milton and Landor, neither of whom, moreover, was master of French composition" and was satisfied with the reception of his French poems in the continent (215). He ceased to be an aspiring young poet and came to be regarded as "the Messiah of a new poetic age" by the younger generation of poets who perceived him to be the embodiment of an aesthete poet –conscious of poetry as a linguistic product, pursuing pleasure in the verbal structure and subject matter of poetry (Nicolson 144). His insistence on the freedom of the poet and the doctrine of *art for art's sake* readily appealed to the younger

generations whose preoccupying tendency in the last decades of the century would become Aestheticism and Decadence. As Pollard argues, the main reasons underlying this tendency are a realisation of the waning of the conventional "intellectual and moral and social certainty" and the need to address "new attitudes in life and art" (460). The emerging attitude, especially among the young poets of the period, was to treat art and morality as "separate realms", autonomous and independent from each other, thereby falling in line with the idea of *art for art's sake* (464). These poets often employed different strategies to overcome alienation from the society exhibited in the subjectivity of aesthetic poetry.

In a fashion akin to poets of the Decadent movement, Swinburne "remained an outsider and a rebel" to the ornate and elaborate style of his peers and focused on his works (Sanders 429). His intoxication with language, republicanism and drama resulted in a period of prolific and diverse literary works in the following years in his career. During the period stretching from *Atalanta* to *Poems and Ballads, Second Series*, Swinburne was regarded as "a poet of amazing promise", whereas, in his remaining life, he came to be recognised as "a great man of letters" (Nicolson 141). *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* was published in 1878, which Nicolson regards as "the highest level of achievement" in Swinburne's poetic career (56). Reflecting on the losses he had suffered during the last decade, the predominant notion in *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* is death. Swinburne offered a way to mourn the dead, which was "not Christian but which at the same time recast Christian hopes into the synaesthetic vocabularies of fame, of perpetuation among the stars, of music that would not fade" (O'Gorman xxxiii). In terms of style, the texture of the poems in the series proved Swinburne's metrical knowledge complete and "his judgement nearly faultless" (Mackail 12). Swinburne entered a phase of calm in his life as a mature poet, revered for his contributions to the Aesthetic movement. The general impression Swinburne left on people was that of a discrepancy between his maturing appearance and youth-like energy. Swinburne's contemporary reputation was built around his physical appearance, poetry recital, "verbal beauty of his writings", and "his defiance of the intellectual and religious prejudices of his age and generation" (Gosse *Portraits* 4). Even in his old age, Swinburne's poetry remained in possession of "the fire, the imagination, the supreme

and intuitive genius with rhythm and rhyme" (O'Gorman 154). His time at The Pines is a prolific period in his poetic career in which he continued his intellectual investments in diverse subject matters and literary forms (Gosse *Life* 273). Swinburne started labouring on the last volume of *Poems and Ballads* in 1888. *Poems and Ballads, Third Series* was subsequently published in 1889.

Swinburne's efforts in *Poems and Ballads* is the persistent vehicle of improvement in aesthetic movements of the middle and later periods of the Victorian age. Westland compares Swinburne's success in the entirety of *Poems and Ballads* with Shelley and concludes that "Shelley's music is the music of the lute, Swinburne's the music of a full orchestra; his melodies are rich and complex with a sweeping grandeur that no other poet equalled, much less excelled" (76-77). Gilmour recognises Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* as one of "the landmarks" of the history of Aestheticism (237). From the 1880s onwards, English Aestheticism evolved into the Decadent movement, manifesting itself in terms of its "style and idiosyncrasies of sensation" in addition to its primary occupation with perversity, artificiality, curiosity, and a search for "a disembodied voice" (Jackson 55, 68). The movement was the fruit of a long process in the making, indeed, stretching back to the Pre-Raphaelites and Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* of 1866. It maturated in the aftermath and as a result of Swinburne's revolting poetry of sensation and irreligion. Accordingly, Swinburne had played a significant role in this process. It should be emphasised that the poetry of Swinburne exhibited all the elements as mentioned above and, in that sense, prefigured and anticipated the Decadent movement. However, Swinburne retired from his active involvement with such movements after 1889. His published poetic output came to a halt and became limited to his contributions in the thematic collections of poetry. Retaining his mellifluous voice despite his deafness, just like his power of rhythm, music and language in poetry in his old age, Swinburne remained committed to English Aestheticism as he imagined and helped develop (Beerbohm 68). His literary career and personal existence became a testimony of his passion for literature as the time passed at his final retreat. Even his final hours were defined by this passion seeing that he passed away reciting Aeschylus

and Sophocles in a state delirium as if he was ascending into the history of English literature (Nicolson 198)[4].

There is no doubt that Swinburne is one of the most divisive poets of the Victorian period. Studies of his poetry tend to either elevate his status as a master craftsman or disregard his poetry and critical writings as periodical literary curiosities. From the perspective of the twentieth century, Swinburne's manner of treatment in poetry can be misunderstood as "wholly pathological" and his personality as "half-epileptic, half-dipsomaniac" because his Victorian sensibilities cannot be easily penetrated by modern readers (Nicolson 2). Swinburne's body of work, especially those relating to Elizabethan drama, deserved the highest level of appreciation of his age – he discovered and promoted the intricacies of both Blake and the Elizabethan dramatist (Nicolson 182). In terms of his place in this particular historical epoch, Swinburne stands between the traditional and the modern sensibilities and values. He has the utmost command of the history of English literature and continental poetry, which he aptly demonstrates in his studies of dramas, dramatists, poets and various forms of poetry. Swinburne refuses any attempts to infuse utilitarian approaches to poetry; for him, the only acceptable approach to poetry and art was Aestheticism and *art for art's sake*. Throughout the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, academic studies have revealed the immediate reception of Swinburne's poetry to be biased and reactional and started to acknowledge him as a pioneering figure in the English aesthetic movement. Accordingly, this thesis aims to explore the strategies and methods Swinburne employed to challenge poetic conventions of his age along with the critical arguments he put forward so as to ascertain his contributions to contemporary Aesthetic movement and Victorian poetry. It tries to establish a coherent understanding of Swinburne's approach to poetry through an analysis of his aesthetic principles, his questioning of moral values of the age and his conception of literary tradition. Therefore, Swinburne's critical writings relating to the teachings of Aestheticism, morality, and literary criticism are included to constitute a sound evaluation. This thesis ultimately provides an insight

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[4] The path to Swinburne's ultimate defeat had been revealed in 1903 when he suffered from pneumonia. During the Easter of 1909, all residents at The Pines caught influenza and Swinburne's delicate health condition would not survive this time (Gosse *Life* 281).

into Swinburne's critical and poetical ambitions and his artistic design of contemporary poetry.

Chapter I analyses features of Swinburne's poetry and his experimentation in the form of poetry in relation to his search for a new form of poetry. Swinburne believed traditional forms of English poetry had become inherently associated with moral values of the society; therefore, his poetry demonstrates a constant struggle to move beyond the limitations of these forms through adopting new forms from English literary history, continental literature or classical literature. The chapter concentrates on Swinburne's aesthetic principles with particular reference to the *Poems and Ballads* series published in 1866, 1878 and 1889. Subsequently, the chapter evaluates Swinburne's efforts to find a new form for contemporary poetry through his conception of the gathering form. Swinburne put forward this new conception of form in order to address infinite meaning in poetry and interpret possibilities revolving around that meaning. The chapter scrutinises the development of the Aesthetic movement in English literature in the nineteenth century with the intention of exploring the significance of Swinburne's poetry for the concurrent movements. The chapter also evaluates the connections among emerging Aesthetic movements and juxtaposes Swinburne both as a participant and a leading figure in transfusing the shared notions and attitudes.

Chapter II examines Swinburne's poetry in relation to the morality of the Victorian period in order to demonstrate Swinburne's endeavours to set the poetry free from the authority of conventions. The chapter focuses on *The Flogging-Block*, *Poems and Ballads* series, and *Songs Before Sunrise* to present Swinburne's thoughts on the issue of morality. The chapter provides an insight into Swinburne's ideas concerning the established religion, middle-class morality and gender roles in society. The chapter's argument extends from the Christian values of the society to the phenomenon of flogging as a form of punishment and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, Swinburne's poems about Arthurian legends are evaluated concerning the dominance of and depictions of female characters. Primarily concentrating on different depictions of Queen Yseult, Swinburne's treatment of the subjects of love, passion, and sexuality is

evaluated with regard to *Queen Yseult: Poem in Six Cantos* (1918) and *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882).

To recapitulate, Swinburne's efforts to challenge the poetic conventions of the Victorian period will be examined through a study of the strategies he employed in his poetry and his critical writings. The two chapters of this thesis aim to prove that Swinburne's poetic experimentation aimed to create a new form for the poetry of his age with the gathering form and endeavoured to subvert the morality of the period through problematisation of primarily religion, sexuality and gender roles. Accordingly, the thesis will locate the discussion of aestheticism within the poetical and critical body of writings of Swinburne. In this context, after providing critical and social context in each chapter, particular poems will be analysed in relation to their formal features and subject matter. Swinburne's contribution to aesthetic movements and the poetry of the period will be included as a conclusive argument.

CHAPTER I
SWINBURNE AND THE RISE OF ENGLISH AESTHETICISM

The poetry of the Victorian period addressed a larger readership than any of the previous historical periods and consequently seemed to have sacrificed the common language and sentiments of the Chaucer epoch. Accordingly, it was the novelists of the period rather than the poets who had been successful in addressing a "notoriously confused" population (Davis 469). The Victorian society, which had been steadily becoming more secular and materialistic, adhered, therefore, far less importance to the poetry than their Romantic predecessors. In the emerging age of mass media, two dicta predicated the significance of poetry: that "thought … [and] feeling for feeling's sake, was poetry" and that "the truth of poetry was to paint the human soul truly" (Davis 459). Falling apart from the prevalent sentiment of the wider public, the poetry of the period consequently turned to experimentation in form, subject matter, and style of expression. Considering the fact that Victorian poets had in their command the whole history of English and continental literature, Victorian poetry was well qualified to re-evaluate, reform and refashion the endless variety of expressions with an abundance of differing voices (Davis 482). Carter and Mcrae argue that the Victorian men of letters aimed to anchor themselves to the reality in this milieu of transformation by means of "giving of absolute values to such abstracts as art, beauty, and culture" (252). Their endeavour brought about an emphasis on aestheticism, which was inspirited by Romantic assertions of Blake, Keats and Shelley and would afterwards be consolidated by the critical writings of Arnold, Pater and Swinburne (Carter and Mcrae 252). After Arnold denounced the poetry, Ruskin and Morris took over his mantle in rejecting religion and middle-class values in the society where the general reading public was "befogged … [by] moral tales and ludicrous edifying verses" of mass media (Daiches 239). The values and teachings circulating in these publications, which were "didactic" and "inculcating … cheap and sentimental emotions," set the tone of morality and, as a result, the expectation from the poets in society (Daiches 240). As a consequence of that middle-class attitude, intelligentsia, among whom Swinburne can be included, exhibited a tendency towards revolt and insurrection against the mass media culture even at the expense of being cast to the fringes of the society. Swinburne led the way for the men of

letters who, acknowledging "art" and "beauty" as essential aspects of life, reacted against the didactic approach to literature and can be categorized under the title aesthetes (Daiches 244). Accrodingly, this chapter analyses the development of Swinburne's understanding of Aestheticism, the underlying influences contributing to his aesthetic principles, and his experimentation in the form of poetry.

Loesberg conceptualises aestheticism as a "vague synonym for imagining a realm of art entirely separate from social or historical effect" (3-4). On the other hand, Osborne insists that aesthetics is primarily concerned with "the notion of beauty as the distinguishing feature of the works of art and … valid principles which underlie all aesthetic judgements" with the intention of revealing the intrinsic meaning of such abstract concepts (24). Elaborating upon the seemingly unfavourable inception of aesthetics, and by extension of aestheticism, Osborne asserts that "premature speculations about the cosmic significance of beauty" lacked an intellectual maturity on behalf of the literary audience and particularly the critics who principally were to comprehend such an argument since criticism and aesthetics "must venture hand in hand" (26). He postulates that "in every judgement of criticism lurks implicit an aesthetic dogma" as to emphasize the innate interdependence of criticism and aestheticism (42). Osborne defines a work of art as the result of "consciously directed human endeavour" and perceives it as "a form of self-expression" as well as a manifestation of individuality and characteristics of the artist (140). Aesthetics, therefore, accentuates the significance of appealing to the sensations of the addressee through a work of art rather than the original aim of the artist (Saville "Cosmopolitan" 699). Accordingly, the promise of the aesthetic movements in Victorian poetry should be broadly defined as the transformation of form, themes and expressive style to create an intelligible medium, an artefact, to translate the sensations of beauty from the artist to the audience.

The historical precedent of the perception of a work of art as the artist's manifestation can be traced to the emergence of individualism in the Renaissance era. That perception persisted and eventually turned into a postulate due to significance conferred upon by

German philosophers and the German Romantic movement, which relocated the focal significance on "the creative process in the mind of artist" rather than the artefact itself (Osborne 141). This artistic concept was later assimilated by the French and English Romantic movements. Turquet-Milnes asserts that an aesthetic movement in England was inaugurated by Shelley, who was profoundly influenced by the French Symbolist movement (219). Moreover, it was Shelley who gave priority to the creation process and perceived the aesthetic universe as separate from reality. Turquet-Milnes traces Shelley's influence parallel to the French poet Charles Baudelaire and recounts Swinburne, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, Oscar Wilde, and Aubrey Beardsley as the later proponents of the Aesthetic Movement (20).

Although the ascension of English aestheticism might seem expeditious and straightforward from continental Romantic movements to Victorian poetry, George Saintsbury calls attention to the importance of the exact period in which the movement gained momentum. He contends that the Victorian aesthetic movement was as much a product of the historical period as it was of artistic inspiration (337). He highlights the legacy of the Romantics along with the poetic achievements of Tennyson and Robert Browning in the first half of the nineteenth century as contributing factors to the literary and intellectual atmosphere of the historical moment which paved the way for the experiments of English Parnassism (or Parnassianism), Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and aestheticism of the 1860s onward, which can be henceforward collectively categorised under the title of English Aesthetic Movement (337).

Swinburne was among the leading figures of the English Aesthetic movement during its development throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. As a literary critic and poet, he aspired to popularise an autonomous conception of poetry, which is justified through its own devices and principles. His contributions can be broadly categorised: his involvement and role in contemporary literary issues, his role in establishing the aesthetic theories of the age, and his conception of aestheticism, which prioritised the performative aspect of poetry. All three aspect of Swinburne's literary

career are intricately connected as each build on and effectuates one another and interacts with the period.

1.1. SWINBURNE AND CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ISSUES

In parallel to the immediate impression invoked by the publication of *Poems and Ballads* that depicts Swinburne as a "comet" plunging into the literary scene out of the workshops of Rossetti and Morris, Patricia Clements declares Swinburne as "the begetter of the modern in English literature" (4). Clements's use of "modern" emphasizes Swinburne's ability to distance himself from the preceding literary movements and create a new conception of what poetry should aim to achieve. Her assertion proves to be precise considering the fact that from the publication of his first poems onwards, Swinburne would continue to be a powerhouse of poetic creativity with a fervent affinity with transpiring English aesthetic movement. The prevailing impression of Swinburne as a poet has remained that of a literature and language connoisseur into the twentieth century. From the very beginning of his poetic career, he has remained a poetic phenomenon and will probably continue to do so henceforth. John Drinkwater argues that Swinburne's poetry, as well as his poetic material, is archetypal in the sense that it corresponds with the history of people and boldly claims that among many great poets in the history of English literature, Swinburne is the only poet who proves to be *quintessentially* English in character (58). The length and breadth of Swinburne's learning reached forth to French literature and languages prevailing on the European continent. Turquet-Milnes interpolates that Swinburne's literary learning also encapsulated the literary conventions of Greek with its celebration of "beauty which is 'noble and nude and antique'" (225). Similarly, Swinburne introduced the Victorian readers to French literature and that his understanding of painters and sculptors was rivalled only by that of John Ruskin's (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 22). Accordingly, it can be claimed that Swinburne intellectualised the poetry of his time in terms of his aspirations from continental literature and the relationship of poetry with other forms of art and that his critical writings are precursors of seminal texts of English aestheticism penned by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and William Butler Yeats.

All the features of Swinburne's poetry mentioned above arguably put him in an ideal position to shape the modern poetry of English. The power of expression is the essential criterion of the aesthetic value of an artefact for his conception of poetry. The poets translate and excite "inner life or experience" upon the addressee by means of appropriate expressions (Osborne 141). From this point of view, Swinburne's gravitation towards Charles Baudelaire and French literature indicates not a repudiation of his native traditions but an enlargement of the sphere of his literary domain. The emerging modern poetry benefitted profoundly from the vocal utilities of poetry such as rhyme and rhythm, which helped invoke the exact "sensual and imaginative immersiveness" of emotions on behalf of the audience due to its reliance on performance (Saville "Cosmopolitan" 699). Since Swinburne's poetry aimed at a self-justifying form of creativity as well as the sensuous beauty, the French influence acting upon Swinburne's poetic disposition served his endeavours of bringing the continental and English literary traditions closer (Turquet-Milnes 22). The image of the artist thrust forward both by Baudelaire and Swinburne is that of a poet who relies on his commitments and principles, thereby becoming "his own king, his priest, his God" as Baudelaire envisioned (qtd. in Osborne 172). As much as the poetry is, at the same time, bound to its historical period, the society, and the nation but also independent of such constraints, Swinburne was bound to his predecessors and the literary tradition. Even though his conceptualization of modern poetry was intricately intertwined with the English literary tradition and the aestheticism of his period, it was in no way restricted by his reputation as an aesthete. Swinburne's poetry aimed to transcend both the conventions of his predecessors and his milieu.

The prevailing understanding of poetry in the Victorian period posed several conflicts for the contemporary men of letters. One of the more significant concerns was the biographical existence of the poet in that while some poets favoured objective poetry, which was decidedly "independent of their personalities," other poets regarded poetry as "expressions of those personalities" (Cronin 9). Another difference of opinion arose on the matters of time and place of poetry between those preferring the contemporary period and those who chose to write poems in a historical, often mediaeval, setting (Cronin 17). As the representative voice of the poetics of his time, Tennyson seemingly

offered a modus vivendi through *the Idylls of the Kings* that reflected upon contemporary events whilst using mediaeval times as the setting of the narrative. Swinburne, on the other hand, remained an eclectic artist and poet: He preferred Greek and historical settings in the drama along with some of his poems and chose contemporary settings and subjects in his poetry, thereby embodying “the odd collisions … between the present and the past, between the modern world and those vanished worlds,” as Cronin expresses (25). Such an inclusive approach toward the subject matter of poetry could be observed as early as the presence of the Old Mortality society in his life, where he had cultivated the critical impressions concerning the entire history of English literature, albeit with an emphasis on the contemporary (Monsman 369). As a result of his ardent study of the history of English literature in his early career, Swinburne turned to literature for the subject matter as well as prosodic models of his poetry, which eventually incurred an inundation of criticism. By doing so, Swinburne sought to put a poetic detachment between his biographical existence and his subjects in poetry. Peters explains that Swinburne confronted the opprobrium of *literalism* by blaming “rampant detail and purely ornamental surface richness” exhibited in contemporary art (“Integral Detail” 290). Swinburne sustained his efforts to thwart contemporary fashion by adopting stricter, earlier models of Chapman, Spenser, Milton, and Dryden for his dramas. Swinburne further diverged from the mindset of the age with his assertion of imagination and science as separate spheres of life.

Swinburne progressively expanded the scope of his literary studies to continental literature, especially into contemporary French literature. Mazel distinguishes Swinburne as “the most French of Victorian poets” and asserts that from his undergraduate days at Oxford onwards, Swinburne’s poetic aspirations had been shaped by French forms such as *ballade*, *rondeau*, and *triolet,* as well as the works of French poets Théodore de Banville and François Villon (“Ends of Rhyme” 163). Tracing the emergence of English Parnassianism to Swinburne, Mazel claims that he was inspired by French poetry to the extent of proposing Rossetti to translate the entire body of works of Villon into English so that English readers may acquaint themselves with the continental literature (163). In a similar way to Mazel, McGann suggests that Swinburne could compose poetry in English and French along with Greek, Latin and

Italian with almost equal ease and was unsurpassed except for Tennyson and Alexander Pope with regard to his literary competence and command of prosody ("Swinburne's Radical Artifice" 205). His admiration of Charles Baudelaire in general and of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) in specific was a crucial element in his personal and professional life. The profound ecstasy of Baudelaire's immediate effect on himself would later be professed in one of his letters to Theodore Watts in which he reminisced his introduction to this notorious volume of poetry as follows: "How well I remember *the rapture of receiving* the two volumes of the first part of it in the early autumn of 1859 … one might almost make a poemet on that" (*The Swinburne Letters* 3:293-294; emphasis added). Swinburne always promoted the "'mutual and reciprocal influence' of French and English literature" and perceived himself as a brother-poet with many influential French artists (Clements 24). He focused his studies on French Romantics to internalise their influence on their English peers and the French Decadents and followed the literary models and convictions put forward by Gautier, Hugo, and Baudelaire (Clements 24). Accordingly, a rudimentary understanding of the contemporary French literary movements and influential figures seems beneficial to comprehend Swinburne's aspirations and contribution to Victorian poetry and literary theory.

1.1.1. Contemporary Literary Movements in France

There were numerous influential and emerging literary movements and theories relating to the responsibilities and functions of art and the artist in society in France during Swinburne's lifetime. However, Swinburne's studies remained principally limited to Romanticism, *l'art pour l'art* and Symbolism. He perceived these movements as innately connected in terms of the autonomy of the poet and the elevation of beauty.

In *Poem and Symbol: A Brief History of French Symbolism*, Fowlie describes Romanticism as the first artistic movement to simultaneously revolutionise literature and painting, thus focusing on the artistic connection between Romanticism and *l'art pour l'art* as both movements promote the union of poetry with other forms of art (1). Prettejohn asserts that although the motto "*l'art pour l'art*" and the aesthetic movement became synonymous with Théophile Gautier, the phrase was first used in a lecture

series by Victor Cousin in 1818 (97). Gautier must have chosen Cousin's motto to demonstrate the autonomous nature of art. Gautier emphasized his position as distinct from formalism and contended the essence of art as "form for the sake of the beautiful, apart from any extraneous idea, from any detour to the profit of some doctrine or other, from any direct utility" (qtd. in Prettejohn 98). Prettejohn suggests that such a conception of art was conceived with the intention of repudiating "commercialism of the markets for literature and art … [and] complicity with the profit-making ethos of bourgeois society" (Prettejohn 99). Gautier had professed this new theory of art early in 1835 in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin,* subsequent to which *l'art pour l'art* gained significance in the 1850s with Baudelaire's dedication of his new volume of poetry, *Les Fleur du Mal*, to Gautier (Fowlie 3). Following his dedication, Baudelaire further demonstrated his support for the movement that proclaimed the independence of art from morality and science with his essay "L'artiste Moderne" in *Salon de 1859*. For Baudelaire, beauty can take the shape of "strange, grotesque, sinister, or macabre. But it cannot be reduced to subservience … [and] the generative condition of works of art … is to say the exclusive love of the Beautiful" (qtd. in Prettejohn 101). The theories of art relating to *l'art pour l'art* continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century though there was slight innovation after 1870. Fowlie argues that the aesthetics of modern art is still based on those developed by Flaubert, Baudelaire and Goncourts (4). Concurring Fowlie and Prettejohn's abovementioned arguments, D. J. Mossop further expounds on the development of French Romantic poetry into *l'art pour l'art* in *Pure Poetry: Studies in French Poetic Theory and Practice 1746 to 1945* (42). Mossop argues that the Romantic movement advanced a pre-existing "tendency to confuse poetic value with non-artistic values", upon which Gautier's theories sought purity in poetry (43). He discusses that Gautier's theories suggested purification of poetry "by exhortation rather than by explanation" while providing no clear prescription of beautiful: "it was outside art as well as in it" (Mossop 45). With regard to Baudelaire's theories, Mossop claims that although Baudelaire had a well-developed theory of aesthetics, it was essentially individualism of Romanticism which "placed the essential value of art in expressive harmony … artistic treatment of any aspect of life" (66, 72).

It can be argued that *l'art pour l'art,* as theorised by Gautier and Baudelaire, conceptualised art and the artist as independent of morality, science, and preceding literary aspirations. They advocated the expression of beauty and beautiful as the ultimate goal of modern art (Porter 18). The word *Parnassien* later came to be applied to the proponents of the *l'art pour l'art* movement. Moreover, there was another artistic movement concurrent with *l'art pour l'art*: Symbolism. It was a literary movement based on the premise of "the autotelic nature of poetry, its detachment from social and intersubjective concerns" (Porter 18). Incorporating the views of both philosopher Immanuel Kant and Baudelaire, the movement put into question the communicative capacity and competence of language and argued the impossibility of meaningful communication. French Symbolism, or the Symbolist Movement, was a "crisis" of conventional language in modern art that added a linguistic aspect to French *l'art pour l'art* (Porter 20).

1.1.2. From *L'art Pour L'art* to Art For Art's Sake

For the period of time Swinburne got acquainted with these French theories of modern art, there is a flood of terminology in England – *l'art pour l'art*, symbolism, pure poetry and Parnassien. Arthur Symons's analysis of such theories would be instrumental in providing more apprehensible terminologies in succeeding years. Throughout the middle and late Victorian periods, *art-for-art's-sake*, aesthetic, Parnassian, decadent, and symbolist were all used interchangeably with no clear distinction in theory and practise (Fowlie 7). However, excellence in form and technique had always been esteemed high in England, the underlying reason of which was seemingly the "hatred of successful mediocrity" (Fowlie 9). Therefore, English poets such as Swinburne chose to adapt craftsmanship rather than imitation in appropriating these theories. As the fading image of the great age of Romanticism, with towering figures such as Blake, Keats and Byron, disappeared further into the sunset of the eighteenth century, the intellectual atmosphere of the mid-Victorian period seemed at liberty to explore new depths of artistic creation.

The distinguishing feature of the period proved to be a keen interest in art and pursuit of beauty, endowing the aesthetic "an attention it never before commanded," as Chester remarks (39). Re-evaluating the significance of the historical moment, Fowlie postulates that "[s]uch a doctrine as *l'art pour l'art* can be born and develop only in a blatantly materialistic age (10). The prosperity of Louis Napoleon's era, when Gautier, Baudelaire and Flaubert wrote their best works, was not unlike the Victorian atmosphere of austerity," in which aesthetic theories were advanced by Rossetti, Morris, Swinburne and Ruskin (Fowlie 10). Fowlie claims that "English origins for this cult of beauty" rooted in Romanticism and developed into Victorian poetry through the abovementioned poets and critics (14). However, the critical writings of later figures such as Ruskin and Pater were more influential in cultivating an opponent of tradition. That being the case, it is evident that the French *l'art pour l'art* movement was brought into England by means of accessions of movements and critical notions even though, at the onset of these movements, there was an apparent confusion of terms that were used interchangeably at will.

French aesthetic movement initially admitted itself into English literature under the name of Parnassianism, or *Parnassien*. In their study of Parnassian poetry in England, Hall and Murray characterize it as a "revival of ornate French forms, often archaic language, and the nostalgic tropes," with a reaction against the social affinity of Romanticism, which prioritised craftsmanship and strict adherence to form (65). Parnassians preferred archaic over modern while viewing the form and craft of the poet in opposition to the baseness of productions of the manufacturing machines (Hall and Murray 71). On the other hand, McMullen suggests that Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood transformed these characteristics of Parnassian poetry (28). Furthermore, McMullen specifically recognizes Dante Gabriel Rossetti as the cornerstone of the Pre-Raphaelites and traces his inspirations back to medieval Italian poetry and Keats's conception of beauty. Rossetti supplanted the aesthetic movement with an ideological repudiation of life's extraneous – theological, political, social, and financial – aspects in poetry (28). The Pre-Raphaelites believed that "the didacticism and conventionalism of art" were unable to keep up with the fast pace of transforming nature of the age and that only a minority of people had an intellectual aptitude to distinguish genuine art from mass-

manufactured imitations (Kayıhan 4). Accordingly, it can be surmised that they opposed both the conventions and "the condition of art" in the Victorian age while asserting their conception of art as modern and superior (Kayıhan 4). The critical position and theory put forward by the Pre-Raphaelites were analogous to those declared by Gautier and Baudelaire in France. Baudelaire, too, sought an "intrinsic beauty" in poetry. According to Fowlie, Baudelaire perceived this intrinsic beauty to be a musical quality and evaluated his poetry in terms of its "incantatory power" (32). This emphasis on musical quality is the primary reason why Swinburne, as a proponent of the aesthetic movement, revered Baudelaire as an idol. However, Chester interpolates that it was Swinburne, the youngest poet in the group, whose spirited poetry was able to engage a wider audience (50). In due course, Swinburne sprawled out of the workshop of the elder poet into the streets of the Victorian intellectual world.

The conceptual poetry of Parnassians had to be improved by Baudelaire with "a metaphysical conception of the same universe" alongside Banville and Gautier (Fowlie 29). The Symbolist poets, on the other hand, aimed to "see beyond the flux of appearances [and] abandoned both Neo-classic tradition and Romantic opposition" to create modern poetry (Porter 9). Subsequently, the French *l'art pour l'art* movement, which consisted of these two strains of modern poetry, was brought into English literature as *art for art's sake*. Distinguishing *art for art's sake* from its French counterpart, Prettejohn argues that, Swinburne and Pater had a more vigorous concept of emergent movement which repudiated sublimity of "pure poetry" and focused, instead, on the craftsmanship and irreligious temporal nature of art (129). They established the contemporary poetic movement, which was initially named *art for art's sake* and would eventually be described as *Aestheticism* (Prettejohn 129). Accordingly, it was Swinburne who fundamentally transformed the condition of poetry from the staleness of the early nineteenth century and set the scene for the Decadent movement in the succeeding decades of the nineteenth century.

1.2. Swinburne and Early Aesthetic Movements

In his essay on Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire had reiterated Poe's distinctive conceptions of truth, beauty and morality, and the same distinctions later echoed in Swinburne's essay on William Blake:

> This old war … between *the imagination* which apprehends the spirit of a thing and *the understanding* which dissects the body of a fact … was for Blake the most important thing.…
>
> The betrothal of art and science were a thing harder to bring about and more profitless to proclaim than "the marriage of heaven and hell." … *To art, that is best which is most beautiful; to science, that is best which is accurate; to morality, that is best which is most virtuous*. Change or quibble upon the simple and generally accepted significance of these three words, 'beautiful,' 'accurate,' 'virtuous,' and you may easily … demonstrate that the aim of all three is radically one and the same … [but] you have merely reduced an affair of things to an affair of words – shifted the body of one thing into the clothes of another – and proved actually nothing. (*William Blake* 97; 98-99; emphasis added)

Interpolating Poe's and Baudelaire's ideas, Swinburne stipulated "a total divorce" of morality and art, postulating that among human endeavours, only art "contains its value entirely within itself [and] does not depend on prior purposes or future consequences" (Prettejohn 126). Despite his fervent support for the movement, Swinburne's perspective of aestheticism remained under constant evaluation until the late 1870s, when Swinburne's poetry became finally liberated from endeavours to improve its own value. According to Connolly, Swinburne was able to harmonise his political aspirations with his interest in poetic forms, which allowed him to move away from strict aestheticism (288). The real intensity of Swinburne's poetry had its origins in his radical and republican convictions, and *Songs Before Sunrise* displays the political potency of Swinburne. Swinburne came to believe that aestheticism was not the defining characteristic of his poetry although it was essential to liberate art from any ideological influences.

Notwithstanding, Swinburne's conception of aestheticism is removed from strict formalism and beyond the notions proposed by the PRB and *l'art pour l'art*. He continued to defend the independence of art from the extraneous influences in the remaining parts of the century while relieving his poetry from subservience to morality, social values, and politics. The aestheticism theorised, advanced, and upheld by Swinburne is best defined as English *art for art's sake* movement (English Aestheticism). The emerging movement encompasses the former aesthetic movements and advances it further by mediating on social values, religion, and prosodic features of English poetry. Hence, it is appropriate to analyse Swinburne's aestheticism in phases of the early influences and his critical development following the publication of *Poems and Ballads* (1866).

1.2.1. Swinburne and Early Influences on His Poetry

The group of poets known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood represented the germination of art for art's sake in England. All members of the group pursued the same "revolutionary act of transforming the society's expectations from artist" despite their differences in poetic aspirations (Carter and Mcrae 120). D. G. Rossetti's enthusiasm for Italian art and antagonistic views against Christianity, William Morris's interest in Arthurian legends and Gothic, Christina Rossetti's adoration of Anglican piety and Christian purity, and Swinburne's infatuation with classical and French literature found their ways into the revolutionary agenda of the PRB (Carter and Mcrae 120). The group established an artistic relationship between painting and poetry which hailed the Middle Ages and Italian painters before Raphael; therefore, their role models were old Italian masters, old French poets, and continental verse-romances (Legouis 346-347). They also established a magazine to provide an outlet for their literary works and critical writings. The PRB sought freedom of choice for the artist in opposition to the authority of the Royal Academy and maintained that everything that stimulated the artist's creativity could be the subject matter of art with no deference to the social institutions. Jerome Buckley argues that PRB's understanding of modern poetry was immature, and their idea of art was limited with its ability to provide a meaningful, more resounding "criticism of life" (164).

Swinburne's relationship with Rossetti was that of a master to and disciple of Rossetti as both were inspired by each other's works of art (Morse 462). The influence of the PRB on Swinburne was distinctive from his last year in Oxford until the publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. During this time, Swinburne was acquainted with Villon and Gautier, which diverted his attention to contemporary French art and eventually with *l'art pour l'art* movement (Robinson 736). Swinburne gradually turned to producing new poems according to French aspirations. The influence of the PRB on Swinburne was, therefore, only characterising concerning his interest in continental literature and experimentations in rhyme and style.

Swinburne witnessed a search for pure poetry in French literature with Parnassianism, which centred on the significance of style. Contemporary theories deemed necessitated a new conception of poetry which seeks the poetic value in "concrete units of expression," wherefore existed an innate connection between the form and matter in poetry (Mossop 9). Similarly, Symbolist poetry urged poets to explore "the affinities existing between the world of sound and the world of thought," disputed the centrality of the form and concentrated on suggestive imagery as a result (Raymond 46-47, 49). Swinburne's primary role in aestheticism in England was, accordingly, that of an arch helping English men of letters absorb and adopt contemporary poetic conventions. He wrote the first English review of Baudelaire's infamous *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1862, applauding his arguments on the independence of art. In praise and awe of Baudelaire's mastery of the craft, Swinburne asserts:

> The critical student there, as well as here, judging by the books they praise and the advice they proffer, seem to have pretty well forgotten that *a poet's business is presumably to write good verse, and by no means to redeem the age and remould the society*. …
>
> From [Gautier], to whom the book is dedicated, [Baudelaire] has caught the habit of a *faultless and studious simplicity*; but, indeed, it seems merely natural to him always to *use the right word and the right rhyme*. … *Only supreme excellence of words will suffice to grapple with and fitly render the effects of such material*. ("Charles Baudelaire" 998-99; emphasis added)

Swinburne’s review unifies the essential aspects of the earlier aesthetic movements. He substitutes didacticism with freedom from all *extraneous matters* and celebrates the excellence of language and rhythm. The review summarises Swinburne’s conception of English aestheticism in essence and depicts poetry as autonomous and self-sufficient. Swinburne’s comprehension of the need for a new horizon beyond the restrictions of what has been taught so far sets the scene for his poetic success.

Concerning Baudelaire’s influence on Swinburne’s poetic principles, his belief in an intrinsic musical quality of poetry as its “incantatory power” remained substantial (Fowlie 32). In addition, Connolly concedes that Swinburne came to realize that “although art does not directly seek a moral effect, it is indirectly productive of a moral effect”, which was in contrast with his absolute refusal of the morality of his PRB days (280). Swinburne introduced Baudelaire as “an antithesis” to English literary tradition and opened the way for poetic developments of the late nineteenth century (Clements 8). Clements, accordingly, declares Swinburne as a “powerful originator” for modern English poetry and holds him responsible for “the long conversation” that would stretch to T. S. Eliot’s criticism of Baudelaire and modern poetry (10). The influence of Baudelaire was further sustained by Swinburne’s insistence on disregarding moral values in his poetry and its potential impact on his literary reputation, as well as his complete refusal of preaching national grandeur.

1.3. SWINBURNE AND ENGLISH AESTHETICISM

To argue that Swinburne’s entire theory of aestheticism is borrowed from contemporary French poetry would undoubtedly be unfair to the poet’s genius. As Thompson suggests, the tendency to rely on strict forms was, indeed, resultant of “teachings on technical experimentation and intense word-painting” (16). For the English, who valued craftsmanship, this tendency intensified and evolved into an obsession with form, sound, and the relationship that intertwines both; therefore, it can be claimed that this obsession with the form motivated Swinburne to conceive his own views (Thompson 20). Concerning the French influence on Swinburne’s poetry, Jerome McGann contends that both Baudelaire and Swinburne’s respective concepts of “correspondences” and “harmony” originated in Mallorné’s assertion of correspondence within the language

(*Swinburne An Experiment* 66). McGann asserts that the French are not the originator of Swinburne's poetic theories; instead, they are the intermediary between Swinburne and the literary student who enquires into the creative mind of the poet (*Swinburne An Experiment* 66). Swinburne's efforts to remould the poetry of his age was not, accordingly, the co-occurrence of a French influence. He maintained a conscious effort to find, and produce if needed, a revolutionary act of transgression of tradition and convention from the early stages of his career.

Swinburne was often vocal about this revolutionary mission in his correspondences. He expressed the need for a change in the understanding of poetry and art on many occasions. In his letter to Matthew Arnold in 1868, Swinburne states: "I, and my betters, are athirst for a larger and clearer draught in these Tennysonian times" (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:303). Here, Swinburne's "betters" might be his elders in PRB. The same notion can also be seen in his letter to D. G. Rossetti: "[W. Morris's] Muse is like Homer's Trojan women … drags her robes as she walks … It is better than Tennyson's short-winded and artificial concession … especially, *my ear hungers for more force and variety of sound in the verse*. It looks *as if he purposely avoided all strenuous emotion or strength of music* in thought and word" (*The Swinburne Letters* 2:68; emphasis added). In both letters, Swinburne acknowledges the impact of Tennyson on the poetic voice of his age and laments a lack of expressive power and range. He recognises Tennyson's effort to vitalise English poetry as artificial due to a lack of intensity. According to Swinburne, Tennyson's unwillingness to break free from his Victorian values impairs his poetry and voice. He seems pessimistic about the condition of poetry in that he depicts a withering image of the artistic realm of Victorian England. He confers art the utmost significance in life and explains his reasoning to D. G. Rossetti in his letter as follows: "the importance of the question whether we are all to be the richer or the poorer by one more treasure of art: of art which always was and is to me the highest, deepest, most precious and serious pleasure to be got out of life" (*The Swinburne Letters* 2:47).

Swinburne's efforts to translate French aspirations into modern English poetry was not limited to his personal concerns, an imitation of fixed forms, the subject matter of poetry. On the contrary, his theory of aestheticism remained in a constant revision to correspond to his ideas on prosody, sound, and rhyme and rhythm, as well as contemporary theories of poetry across and beyond the English Channel. His principal works on the theory of English aestheticism are his 1862 review of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the Spectator, *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866) and his study of William Blake, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868). The arguments expressed and responses he put forward in these writings constitute Swinburne's conceptualisation of English Aestheticism and demonstrate a linear progression towards poetry which is essentially grounded on the eloquence of style and harmony. His aim in poetry was harmony in particular: Opposing the conception that the poetry should be moulded into shape by the poets and argued that poetry should be fashioned by its intrinsic quality and rhythm.

1.3.1. Swinburne's Critical Writings

Although Swinburne contributed occasional reviews and poems on the periodicals, he initially acquired literary distinction through his dramas *Atalanta and Calydon* and *Chastelard*. In the space between his studies and the final departure from Oxford and the publication of these dramas, Swinburne sporadically worked on and revisited his poems. He also started developing his theory of English aestheticism which gradually reached its sophistication in the early 1860s. *Poems and Ballads* published in 1866 was the product of his intensive poetic labour that permeated through ten years. The immediate reaction came in response to Swinburne's repudiation of moral and social conventions of his age when, in his evaluation of the volume, Alfred Austin wrote: "Mr. Swinburne may thank Mr. Tennyson's imperfections and Mr. Browning's shortcomings for the reception he has met with … Mr. Swinburne's poetry were a genuine revolt against that of Mr. Tennyson, and as though he had struck a distinct and even antagonistic note (qtd. in Hyder *Critical Heritage* 98-99). Swinburne's poetry stood in stark contrast with Tennyson's and, therefore, was acknowledged as the herald of a new movement which, at the time, seemed to have disturbed the common decency of the public (Hyder *Literary Career 87*). At the same time, a diversified response by the prominent poets of the time confronted Swinburne: Tennyson, who had acquainted with

the poet earlier, praised the expressive potency of the poet and would later remark that "He is a reed through which all things blow into music" while Robert Browning characterised Swinburne's poetry as "a fuzz of words" (qtd. in Hyder *Literary Career* 87). His circle of friends, on the other hand, conceived the much-expected reaction of the public as an indication of Swinburne's power to disturb and challenge the conventions of Victorian poetry.

In an effort to thwart the emerging body of harsh and ill-disposed criticism, Swinburne published an introductory essay, *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. The essay illustrates the impact of theories on the development of the volume. Connolly identifies the main arguments of *Notes on Poems and Reviews* as Swinburne's refusal of morality as "the critical standard of art," Swinburne's repudiation of didacticism and the prominence of the form in Swinburne's understanding of aestheticism (279). Conceived as a defence against the critiques, *Notes* communicates the disparity between Swinburne's intentions and the reception of his poems, illustrating the capacity of poetry as a medium of expression. Swinburne constructs the larger part of the essay in response to criticism of his poems, notably "Anactoria," "Dolores," "Faustine," and "The Garden of Proserpine." Regarding the accusation of the corruptive influence of these poems and himself as a poet, Swinburne posits a distance between the craftsman and the works of art and postulates that:

> … the book is dramatic, many-faced, multifarious; and no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed as the assertion of its author's personal feeling or faith. Were each poem to be accepted as the deliberate outcome and result of the writer's conviction, not mine alone but most other men's verses would leave nothing behind them but a sense of cloudy chaos and suicidal contradiction. (*Notes* 6)

Swinburne's assertion emphasizes poetry as separate from its originator. By interpolating such an argument, Swinburne attempted to resolve one of Victorian poetry's challenges, namely the biographical imprint of the poet within the confines of his poems. For Swinburne, the domain of the poet was constricted by the society to the extent of reducing it to a single patch of literary tradition eventually. He identifies this monolithic tradition with Tennyson and pursues his attack on the Laureate as follows: "… the idyllic form is alone in fashion. The one great and prosperous poet of the time

has given out the tune, and the hoarser choir takes it up. … We have idyls good and bad ugly and pretty; idyls of the farm and the mill; and idyls of the dining-room and the deanery; idyls of the gutter and the gibbet" (*Notes* 21-22). The voice of the poetry, he claims, has come to be that of slumber and quiescence. Swinburne articulates the lack of intensity of the poetry of his age and demands for virility as exhibited by the French:

> When England has again such a school of poetry, so headed and so followed, as she has had at least twice before, or as France has now; are included within the larger limits of a stronger race; when all higher forms of the various art then, if such a day should ever rise or return upon us, it will be once more remembered that the office of adult art is neither puerile nor feminine, but virile. (*Notes* 23)

In the space of a few pages, Swinburne aimed to displace what he thought to be the chains of the conventions in poetry. Moreover, he presented a space between the poet and the craft wherefore he could freely operate with little to no deference to religion, common sense, and the moral values of the public.

Swinburne's poet in *Notes on Poems and Reviews* holds the responsibility of conjuring the "unimagined or forgotten beauty" and thinking beyond a monolithic picture of human life and emotions, argues Julia Saville ("Cosmopolitan" 700). Bizzaro states that Swinburne was not a pioneer in the pursuit of being relieved of morality and convention; the deterministic spirit of the nineteenth century, which extended from materialistic to the religious aspects of life for the ordinary people, as well as the artists, made him understand that "though art should not seek a moral effect, it is indirectly productive of one" (190). Bizzaro postulates that "in the process of exhibiting his autonomy as artist [poet] is really attempting to self-determine his artistic orientation to the world" (194-195). Accordingly, Swinburne's inception of aestheticism is independent of but at the same time reactionary against the Victorian understanding of what should poetry be. The only possibility of achieving a sense of autonomy for Swinburne was repudiation – of moral values, religious postulates, and poetic conventions (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 28). As a matter of fact, Swinburne believed in the transcendental nature of art and foregrounded his theory on the priority of beauty in anticipation that aestheticism would consolidate beauty with the truth (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 56). For Swinburne, art was essential and "aesthetic was always the support for

social and ethical ideals … [and] the whole domain of human engagement", explains Robert Peters (*Crowns of Apollo* 66). Swinburne's theory also foresees a distinction between art and science, thereby drawing an intellectual connection between *Notes on Poems and Reviews* and *William Blake: A Critical Essay*.

William Blake: A Critical Essay re-evaluates the Romantic tradition from the perspective of creative power and seeks to relocate religion and morality. In terms of aestheticism and poetry, Swinburne maintained the dictum that "[t]o art, that is best which is most beautiful" and focused on concepts of beauty and truth (*William Blake* 98). *William Blake* was the product of Swinburne's persistent endeavour to refine his theory of English aestheticism which stretches to William Blake's conception of art and religion. As Prettejhon states, Swinburne depicted Blake as an uncompromising figure who amalgamated "the demands of his art … and those of either morality or scientific accuracy" (124). McGann asserts that *William Blake* "carries on [Swinburne's] first serious conversation about art with two of the most important figures in the Romantic tradition: Blake and Baudelaire … few remembered that Swinburne was the first to make the connection" (*Swinburne An Experiment* 51-52). He further expounds on the relationship between religion and the poet from the perspectives of Blake, Baudelaire, and Swinburne to demonstrate the influence of Swinburne in the following decades and subsequent literary movements (*Swinburne An Experiment* 52). Furthermore, the essay directs "the phrase 'art for art's sake' at the artist, rather than the audience … [Swinburne] uses the term 'art' to describe a mode of perception on the part of the artist … [and] the power of the romantic imagination" (Loesberg 13). The crucial assertion of the essay is its pursuit of creating a distinct perception of reality that is not restricted in any way. In other words, *William Blake* elucidates the potency of Swinburne's conception of art at this stage of his poetic career.

It can be concluded that Swinburne's theory of English aestheticism reached its maturity in 1868 as its primary principles were being communicated and recognised by a circle of his close friends and literary critics. Application of these principles and propagation of aestheticism to the reading public, on the other hand, proved to be a

slower and less successful enterprise for Swinburne. He continued to publish essays, reviews, and responses in support of the movement for a long time. As for the poetry, Swinburne published the succeeding volumes of *Poems and Ballads* along with other smaller books of poetry, all of which included elements of aestheticism. Reading and evaluating these poems as aesthetic artefacts or poetry of English Aestheticism necessitates addressing stylistic features in Swinburne's poetry and his tendency for literary devices.

1.4. *POEMS AND BALLADS* AS AESTHETIC ARTEFACT

In *Aesthetics and Criticism*, Osborne examines the relationship between art and beauty as the means of artistic expression and creation, defining a work of art as "the expression of the artist's uniqueness" and locates beauty in the expressive nature of art (141). In his assertion that "scientific language is communication of thought; art-language is expression of mood", Osborne echoes Swinburne's arguments in *William Blake* (141). For explicating the significance of expression for Romanticism and Expressionism, Osborne defines artefact as an expression of experience through which "other men are enabled to duplicate in their own minds the experience of the artist" (143). According to the theory of Expressionism, Osborne extrapolates, "prose interpretation paraphrasing the 'meaning' of a poem does not explain the poem but destroys it. … Poetry and the arts attempt to express the element in human experience which is ineffable, of logical and scientific discourse" (155). Osborne argues that even though a poem "obviously can produce in the mind of any reader" an expression of the artist's state of mind, it cannot include any para-lingual or personal elements beyond the linguistic confines of the verse (157). Furthermore, Osborne asserts that "the moment of creation proper is never completely introspectible", nor it can be duplicated precisely in any poem because it is characterised by "excitement," "an inrush of life and energy," and "strong specific emotional tone" (159-60). It is important to mention that these features are inherent to Swinburne's poetry, especially his rendition of them. Consequently, the reader of the poem should be able to hear or perceive the most similar if not the same tones of the poet's experience (Osborne 161). Swinburne's theory of English Aestheticism also demonstrates some characteristics of Expressionism: Swinburne focuses on the process of creation, the concepts underlying artistic inception

and the idiosyncrasies of his poetry, while the theory of Expressionism locates the significance in response and on behalf of the reader. As Osborne states, however, "only discernible common element … is a desire and determination to get the work of art 'right'" (158). Despite being an ambiguous criterion, getting the artefact right explains Swinburne's yearning for virility as a solution for the quiescence of Victorian poetry. In order to achieve energy and excitement, Swinburne tried to impose recital of poetry as the measure of criticism as well as quality. The corollary to his lines being read aloud was to render the same energy he felt at the creation moment, which would act as a measure to avoid the same shortcomings with PRB's poetry. In other words, Swinburne sought to invoke an intellectual state of mind or consciousness through the means of sounds, rhymes, and rhythm of his poems.

Swinburne's conception of beauty was fundamentally materialised in the expression of his poetry. He conceived poetry as something to be heard and regarded eloquence and diction in his poetry as the crux of its expressive strength. Swinburne was fully aware of this tendency and parodied himself later in the anonymously published *Specimens of Modern Poets: The Heptalogia,* the contents of which parodied the styles of prominent poets such as Tennyson, Browning, and Whitman in seven dramatic monologues (Fuller 239). His study and application of literary devices and figures of speech were exhaustive – to the extent of becoming a parody of a rhymester (Fuller 239). Swinburne parodies himself in the last poem, "Nepheledia," with exaggerated alliteration that borders on nonsense:

> From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine,
> Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that flickers with fear of the flies as they float,
> …………………………………………….
> Only this oracle opens Olympian, in mystical moods and triangular tenses—
> …………………………………………….
> Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory, melodiously mute as it may be,

> While the hope in the heart of a hero is bruised by the breach of men's rapiers, resigned to the rod; (*PW* 655)[5]

The most dangerous aspect of this dependence was that the meaning could be lost in the flux of the words, thereby transforming Swinburne's poems into nothing more than nonsensical song pieces. Swinburne objected to this criticism arrogantly and declared that the meaning would only be lost for those whose "ears as should always be closed against poetry" (qtd. in Hyder *Critical Heritage* xxxiv).

Along with his tendency to overuse literary devices, Swinburne attributed significance to the form of poetry. He explains his reason as follows in *William Blake*: "Strip the sentiments and re-clothe them in a bad verse, what residue will be left of the slightest importance to art? Invert them, retaining the manner or form (supposing this is feasible, which it might be) and art has lost nothing" (134). Swinburne perceived poetry as a distinct form of music which "can profoundly alter the way listeners think and feel" through the means of harmony, rhyme, rhythm, and formal devices (Kay 278). Accordingly, the literary devices pertaining to acoustic features of the language were elemental in Swinburne's poetry. Therefore, Swinburne's conception of aestheticism was shaped around these features of verse and poetic forms in his eternal pursuit of transcendental harmony.

1.4.1. Acoustic Devices and Harmony

Swinburne foregrounded his rule of art and form of poetry around the concept of harmony. Harmony is the intelligible medium, the artefact, through which he aimed at translating the sensations of beauty. There are two aspects of Swinburne's harmony: it is the overall musical effect of a poem, it is also the poem's ability to communicate the inspiration, or the creative excitement, of the poet (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 151). Peters

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[5] The primary source used in the present thesis is *The Poetical Works of A. C. Swinburne. Complete edition. Including also the most celebrated of his dramas, etc*. This source will be abbreviated as *PW* throughout the thesis. Since the book provides no line numbers for individual poems and uses double-column layout on pages, the parenthetical references are for the page numbers. All the references are from this source unless stated otherwise. Swinburne's critical writings and some of the poems analysed here are not included in *The Poetical Works*. These works will be referenced from the extant copies of the original publications.

postulates that this conception principally resulted in "a controlled technique balanced by emotion" and makes a distinction between "external" and "internal music" in Swinburne's poems (*Crowns of Apollo* 151). The external music relates to the acoustic features of the form, while internal music relates to ideas, intuition, and the communication of emotional state to the listener. The external music is subsequently evaluated in terms of inner and outer form. The inner form is the abstract quality of the poem as a whole and overlaps with the notion of internal music, while the outer form is firmly based on literary devices and verse forms (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 151). Peters comments that "'inner' music always transcends 'outer'" and the outer form emphasises the role of discipline and order (*Crowns of Apollo* 152). Swinburne's efforts to articulate his ideas and organise his lines prompted a tendency to repetition. The most apparent strategy exhibited by Swinburne is the repetition of sounds, words, phrases, and concepts or ideas. His poetry, therefore, is replete with alliteration, assonance, and rhyme.

Swinburne uses an abundance of repetition in his poetry, which can be manifested in the form of a single word or idea throughout a poem and sounds. This strategy aspires to meditate on the intended meaning and reinforce an imprint of the poet's state of mind. He primarily made use of alliteration, assonance, and consonance. The emphasis, here, is not on the sounds but their affinities to meaning within the line. Swinburne employs alliteration to create an acoustic flow. Similar to alliteration, assonance creates an effect of flow, rapid succession between the words and, thus, is able to reflect harmony and the vibrancy of Swinburne's poetic diction. Moreover, alliteration and assonance introduce an organisational order in verse. In contrast with the former devices, consonance is essentially used to instigate a disorder. The linguistic disorder or the interruption of harmony subsequently signals a disruptive state of mind and emotion. All three figures of speech affect the rhythm of the poem and, therefore, overwhelm the overall expression of experience. The web of interconnection among these literary devices demonstrates Swinburne's attention to the formal unity.

"Faustine" is an expository example in which Swinburne builds his stanzas on the repetition of a single word and the monosyllabic end-rhyme. The poem includes 41 quatrain stanzas with regular ABAB rhyme structure. It starts with the salutation to Empress Faustina in Latin: "*Ave Faustina Imperatrix, morituri te salutant*." The repetition of "Faustine" as the poem's refrain transforms the poem into a chanting song. Considering the Latin salutation, which is a form of salutation often used by Roman gladiators, the incantatory quality of the stanzas is a commentary on the grim reality of death:

> She loved the games men played with death,
> Where death must win;
> As though the slain man's blood and breath,
> Revived Faustine. (*PW* 50)

The poem places Faustine in comparison with kings, queens, Greek gods, Satan and the Christian concept of God in ever-elevating praise and fear of her existence: "Even he who cast seven devils out / Of Magdalene / Could hardly do as much, I doubt" (*PW* 50). Swinburne comments on the subject matter of the poem as "the reverie of a man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face" and Faustine as "the transmigration of a single soul, doomed as though by accident from the first to all evil and no good, through many ages and forms, but clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty" (*Notes* 15). "Faustine" was one of the poems criticised for its religious and moral statements, but Swinburne's actual intent seems purely poetic. He meditates on the process of transformation from a queen to a vampiric being which sometimes reflects on the language of the poem:

> Curled lips, long sine half kissed away,
> Still sweet and keen,
> You'd give him – poison shall we say?
> Or what, Faustine. (*PW* 51)

In his efforts to maintain refrain and rhyme, Swinburne occasionally resorts to archaic words such as "ween," "wean," "mien," "din," and "epicene" (*PW* 50-51). This strategy linguistically echoes the historical aspect of Faustine and builds a connection between the acoustic and thematical structure of the poem.

The musicality and the length and quatrain stanzas of “Faustine” enable easy and quick reading of the poem. However, Swinburne forgoes using a refrain in his longer and more intricately formed poems and focuses on acoustic devices. He employs these devices to reflect excitement in his poems. His poems “To Victor Hugo” and “Ave atque Vale” can be categorised as twin poems in terms of their subject matter, the tone of excitement and their uses of such acoustic devices. “To Victor Hugo,” the less famous of the pair, is a poetic manifestation of Swinburne’s admiration for Hugo. It is foregrounded on the concepts of power in the form of God, gods, King, and poet, all of which Swinburne perceives in the personage of Hugo. It shows Hugo as a guiding principle for Swinburne and lays down the path for Hugo’s elevation to the status of a poetic god. Similar to the former in nature, “Ave atque Vale” is an elegy composed in memory of Baudelaire. McGann characterizes “Ave atque Vale” as “one of Swinburne’s most characteristic poems” on account of its concern with “death,” “transience,” and acceptance of “natural cycle of birth, life and death” (“Ave atque Vale” 162). On the other hand, Harding interpolates that the poem “bears the marks of superior workmanship” in which Swinburne “seize[s] upon the best elements of Baudelaire’s erratic genius and interpret his spirit” (35). Swinburne goes to great length to associate *Les Fleur du Mal* with his poem in its juxtaposition of flowers of nature and evil. Harding draws attention to the language of the poem and comments that “it falls on the ear with a lovely and ever-changing cadence; the lines modulate from one liquid harmony to another” (36). Swinburne’s meditation on inner and outer music seems to have climaxed in “Ave atque Vale” as “the poem holds us with a certain spell, because of the sweep and cadence of the sound” (Harding 36). In terms of repeating concepts, McGann praises Swinburne’s “extremely precise use of the words ‘spirit,’ ‘heart,’ and ‘soul.’ … Whenever Swinburne uses these words in his poem he adheres strictly to the meanings which are implicitly assigned to them here” (“Ave atque Vale” 160). Swinburne’s efforts to reach harmony are accordingly realised in his poems to bid farewell to Baudelaire.

Both “To Victor Hugo” and “Ave Atque Vale” use interwoven rhyme schemes. “To Victor Hugo” consists of 24 stanzas, each including eight lines and using AABCCBDD rhyme scheme, while “Ave atque Vale” consists of 18 stanzas, each including ten lines

and using ABBACCDEEDE rhyme scheme. Both poems oscillate between long and shorter lines. In “To Victor Hugo”, shorter lines express excited emotions followed by a longer explanatory line that elaborates or explicates the speaker’s emotional state. In “Ave atque Vale”, long lines are followed by a shorter statement at the end of each stanza. Occasionally, the shorter line is semantically dependent on the previous line.

In “To Victor Hugo”, alliteration can be observed almost in all stanzas. For instance, the line “High hopes and unknown flying forms of power” utilizes alliteration in H and F sounds (*PW* 63). Swinburne uses the O sound in the following line for assonance: “As thou, remission of the world’s old wrong” (*PW* 63). The relationship between the acoustic and the semantic elements can be more easily observed in the entirety of the stanza:

> We ask not nor wait
> From the clenched hands of fate
> As thou, remission of the world’s old wrong
> Respire we ask not, not release;
> Freedom a man may have, he shall not peace. (*PW* 63)

The repetition of the O sound invokes Hugo’s name on an acoustic level and calls out to the speaker’s master. Alliteration and assonance are also employed within the same lines:

> Nor waxed for winter cold,
> Nor changed for changes of the worldly wind;
> Praised above men of men be these,
> Till this one world and work we know shall cease. (*PW* 64)

The alliteration of W and CH sounds is complemented with the assonance of O and E/I sounds. The harmonious effect created by these acoustic devices enables a spirited flow of lines as if Swinburne is reciting poetry in front of Victor Hugo himself.

Shorter lines in “To Victor Hugo” enables an animated rendition of the poem, while longer lines and the elegiac nature of “Ave atque Vale” requires a more sombre flow of

harmony. The subject matter of the poem is narrowed down to the close relationship between Baudelaire and his influence on Swinburne's maturing as a poet and critic. The intensity of emotion, therefore, seems more immediate and genuine. The poem starts with Swinburne's depiction of his bereavement:

> SHALL I strew on thee rose or rue or laurel
> …………………………………………….
> Or simplest growth of meadow-sweet or sorrel,
> Such as the summer-sleepy Dryads weave,
> Waked up by snow-soft sudden rains at eve?
> Or wilt thou rather, as on earth before,
> Half-faded fiery blossoms … (*PW* 234)

Swinburne employs alliteration of S and F sounds and assonance of O sound. The combined acoustic effect echoes the feeling of calmness and stuttering discomfort of having lost a brother. It can be argued that alliteration of labio-dental F and alveolar S sounds resemble the effect of whispering as if the speaker is hesitant, at this stage in the poem, to use his full voice to articulate his emotional collapse. The emotional tone of the speaker subsequently evolves into a longing in the proceeding stanzas:

> Alas, but though my flying song flies after,
> O sweet strange elder singer, thy more fleet
> Singing, and footprints of thy fleeter fleet,
> …………………………………………………
> Some dim derision of my mysterious laughter
> From the blind tongueless warders of the dead,
> …………………………………………………
> Thou art far too far for wings of words to follow,
> Far too far off for thought or any prayer. (*PW* 235)

The hushed tone of the speaker is sustained with S and F sounds throughout the poem. Moreover, the assonance of A and O sounds arguably mimics the muted cries and sustained disbelief of the loss. As mentioned above, the poem is inter-textually connected with Baudelaire's *Les Fleur du Mal*; therefore, the poem's tone sometimes shifts from the loss of a friend to the calming yet invigorating notions of flowers. The whispering tones of S sounds eventually give way to the alliteration of M sound in the lines "Or through mine ears a mourning musical / Of many mourners rolled" as if to explain that as the mourners consolidate each other's grief, the disbelief turns into silent

mourning. Consequently, it can be concluded that Swinburne employed these acoustic devices precisely to control the flow of harmony in his poetry. He enforces a quick accession of sounds and words in “To Victor Hugo” while slowing down the flow of words in “Ave Atque Vale” to leave space for consideration of death beyond the feeling of loss.

The three volumes of *Poems and Ballads* shared a common poetic force despite being published in the space of twenty-three years. Alliteration, assonance, and consonance are the devices Swinburne used to create order and harmony. To sustain this formal unity within a stanza and in a poem in general, Swinburne relied on rhyming to bring about harmony in his poetry. However, there is an observable development of complexity in terms of the craftsmanship of Swinburne. The poetry of the first volume expresses complex thoughts in relatively short lines and has the quality of a song. The second volume expresses more profound thoughts in more intricate forms. The form is complex, and poems tend to consist of long lines; yet, this complexity does not obscure the meaning nor obstruct the recital of the poems. However, the poetry of the third volume improves on the complexity of thought and form while the lines of the poems become too long to retain their expressive nature in rendition. The diction of the lines obscure meaning, and as a result, the harmony often collapses. In addition, the use of consonance becomes most visible and disruptive in the last volume of *Poems and Ballads*.

This collapse can be easily observed in “March: An Ode.” The poem is an ode for winter in essence, and the central idea is the passing of March and winter before the coming of April. It consists of 7 stanzas, each made up of 7 long lines. The length of the lines transforms stanzas into a never-ending flux of words. Swinburne chooses the AABBABA rhyme scheme in the poem. By using consonance, Swinburne forces the speaker, and the listener, to consider each word not in relation to the other words and sounds but on their own: “The ways of the woodlands were fairer and stranger than dreams that fulfil us in sleep with delight” (*PW* 270). The consonance of W sound interrupts the flow of words in the first half of the statement in order to highlight a sense

of strangeness about the woodlands. The same interruption can also be seen in the following lines: "And now that the rage of thy rapture is satiate with revel and ravin and spoil of the snow, / And the branches it brightened are broken, and shattered the tree-tops that only thy wrath could lay low" (*PW* 270). Alliterative words in the line accentuate the disorder introduced by the consonance in "rage," "rapture," "revel and ravin", and "branches it brightened are broken." Oscillation among the EI, A, I and O sound slows down the pace of the line. The articulation of these vowels compels the reader, or the reciter, to manipulate the articulation on a physical level. Similarly, in the lines "Are thy feet on the ways of the limitless water, thy wings on the winds of the waste north sea? / Is it March with the wild north world when April is waning? The word that changed year saith, …" the consonance of W, WH and F sounds exerts significant difficulty for fast articulation and disrupts the harmony of words. It can be argued that Swinburne endeavours to hold off the spring with the articulative features of the language. The passing of March, on that account, is being suspended through the means of disrupted harmony of the poem.

Swinburne composed his poems in numerous forms, and this diversity in form was naturally matched with his experiments with rhyming extending from rhyming couplets to poems with intricate rhyme schemes. "The Interpreter" demonstrates Swinburne's ease with simple forms of rhyming. Swinburne was particularly fastidious regarding the textual layout of his poems on publication. "The Interpreters," for instance, is organized in the form of quatrains with ABAB rhyme. However, the poem can be articulated with a rhyming couplet in recital. Swinburne breaks down the semantic structure of the sentences on the page, which does not hinder the flow of sentences in performance. It is evident that Swinburne is exploring the interplay between rhyme and the meaning in this poem, as it can be observed in the following lines:

> But thought and faith are mightier things than time
> Can wrong,
> Made splendid once with speech, or made sublime
> By song. (*PW* 293)

The poem comments on the nature of a poem and defines itself in reference to the subject matter and song-like quality. Similarly, Swinburne uses a traditional couplet in the second section of "A Lamentation", which is actually constructed in Socratic dialogue and uses different stanza forms in each section. Swinburne employs rhyming couplet in the second part:

> Lo, what hath he seen or known
>   Of the way and the weave
> Unbeholden, un-sailed-on unsown,
>   From the breast to the grave? (*PW* 46)

The speaker questions the nature of pain in human life, and asks "Who hath known, who knoweth, O gods? Not we" (*PW* 46). The rhyme, subsequently, enables a cadence through short and long lines and brings about a harmonious appeal.

Swinburne also balances simplicity in rhyme with profound thoughts and poetic statements. "Monotones" in *Songs Before Sunrise* reflects on itself in the form of a simple song. The poem consists of 7 stanzas of 6 lines and uses an ABC rhyme scheme. The central idea in the poem is oneness which emphasises the importance of harmony and unity:

> One chord, one word, and one way,
> One hope as our law, one heaven,
> Till slain be the great one wrong;
> Till the people it could not slay,
> Risen up, have for one star seven,
> For a single, a sevenfold song. (*PW* 213)

Considering the fact that *Songs Before Sunrise* is probably the most political volume of poetry of Swinburne, it can be surmised that he accentuates the concept of political concord through the means of formal harmony. Gotwalt argues that "repetition of theme and uniform purpose throughout" the volume illustrates this political accord while "the unexpected progression of the ABCABC rhyme scheme suggests the diversity through which this uniform effect is expressed" (123). Moreover, McGann argues that despite its formal uniformity, Swinburne's sevenfold song "permits a wide range in pitch and

tempo" (*Swinburne An Experiment* 60). Oneness in ideology, political action, passion, and speech is repeated throughout seven stanzas and the final stanza comments on itself as a sevenfold song. Therefore, the poetic diction of the poem transforms into a poetic statement throughout the poem.

Along with rhyme, rhythm has a significant place in Swinburne's poetry. It is innately related to the meaning of lines and stanzas as it introduces a subjective connection to the speaker. A failure of rhyme or rhythm, in parallel, demonstrates a failure in expression. This failure can be a disruption of harmony or a poetic statement on its own. Swinburne disrupts the rhythm of his poems by introducing intricate or interwoven rhyming schemes and long stanzas. In the first section of "A Lamentation," he uses a fourteen-line stanza form that shifts between orderly ABC rhyme to DEFFDE rhyme. The rhythm is exceptionally disrupted in the last lines of the section where the lines "And another law for the dead. / For these are fearful and sad" are interrupted with "Vain, and things without breath" (*PW* 46). Although the rhyming sounds are similar, Swinburne momentarily breaks out the rhythm. Interruption of harmony is more evident in "Hendecasyllabic", where Swinburne maintains rhyme in lines "Till I heard as it were a noise of waters / Moving tremulous under feet of angels / Multitudinous, out of the heaven" only to disrupted by the following two: "Knew the fluttering wind, the fluttered foilage, / Shaken fitfully, full of sound and shadow" (*PW* 82). In both poems, Swinburne disrupts rhyme and rhythm to contain his thoughts. The longer stanzas prolong the communicated emotion and thought at the expense of harmony. By introducing interwoven rhymes, similar to the EFEEEGH rhyming section in "Hendecasyllabics," Swinburne compels the reader and listener to engage with the poem intellectually. He employs this strategy in his longer or more intricate poems rather than shorter, more organized poems.

1.4.2. The Gathering Form

The acoustic devices, rhyme, and rhythm serve to create unity and harmony with regard to the outer form, which embodies Swinburne's endeavours to bring a strict discipline of form into aestheticism. The remaining half of the external music is the concept of

inner form, which deals with the abstract and more ambiguous quality of poetry. Primarily defined in *William Blake* as a gathering form of verse, this aspect of poetry is symbolic of seas and the rising waves. In his evaluation of Blake's "The Land of Dreams," Swinburne describes the form of the poem as follows:

> The *verse pauses and musters and falls always as a wave does*, *with the same patience of gathering form*, and … throwing upon the tremulous space of narrowing sea in front, like a reflection of lifted and vibrating hair, the windy shadow of its shaken spray. *The actual page seems to take life, to assume sound and colour, under the hands that turn it and the lips that read;* we feel the falling of dew and have sight of the rising of stars. (134; emphasis added)

The realisation of the gathering form is "a moment of synesthesia undergone by the reader in the act of chanting the poem aloud … a coming-together of reader and text" (Kay 283). The gathering form underlies beauty in a work of art and, as a concept, is essential to create "art forms whose inner configuration and sound mimicked the complex patterns of the external world it described" (287). Peters conceptualises "the gathering form" as the crux of the inner form of poetry (*Crowns of Apollo* 137). According to Swinburne's description, the poem gathers its expressive strength in the procession of lines, stanzas or cantos until the external and internal music reveals the excitement of the poet (Peters *Crowns of Apollo* 137-138). The notion of gathering is associated with the autonomy of a poem as an artefact and its relation to the external world. The gathering form is the communicated articulation of the experience contained inside the poem, not the poet's subjective mind; hence, it is dependent on the harmony created by acoustic devices of poetry.

The gathering form attempts to capture the essence of poetry and associate external music with internal music. It is, in a sense, an illustration of tangible harmony and the capacity of the poem as a medium of expression. It is the corollary effect of literary devices, metaphors and poetic statements projected upon the reader and the listener. Subsequently, it lies at the very centre of Swinburne's conception of form in modern poetry. Swinburne tries to solidify this obscure quality of poetry by meditating on a central idea from different impressions of his own experiences. "The Year of the Rose" aptly exemplifies his efforts to achieve a gathering poem. The poem narrates the life of

a rose in the span of four seasons, which echoes Swinburne's impressions of love from its birth to death. Alliteration and repetition of words are employed as usual to call attention to the rose and time:

> FROM the depths of the green garden-closes
> Where the summer in darkness dozes
> ……………………………..
> To the stones and sea-grass on the strand
> How red was the reign of the roses
> Over the rose-crowned land! (*PW* 230)

The image of the rose is intensified through the introduction of a set of related concepts, which include "reign of the roses," "rose-crowned land," "red-rose land," smile of a goddess, "rose-red name," music of doves and lovers, "rose-red maze," "roseleaf days," "warm wild kiss," "the white-rose leaf," "grey garden-closes," and "the bloom and the gloom." Swinburne embodies the fleeting nature of love in the image of the rose and comments: "The year of the rose is brief; / From the first blade blown to the sheaf, /From the thin green leaf to the gold" (230). The dichotomy between youth and old age is reflected in the green hues and the withering golden leaves of the rose. The shift from the rose to the lovers accentuate their similarities:

> Of the meadows from stile to stile,
> Of the valleys from stream to stream
> But the air was a long sweet dream
> …………………………………….
> That with one swift smile of her mouth
> Looked full on the north as it yearned, (*PW* 230)

The harmony accumulates through acoustic devices and images and seeks to achieve the gathering form. The impressions of rose, lovers and time culminate with the intention of suspending the listener's emotional response. The penultimate stanza replicates the second stanza in terms of structure and statements, thereby unifying the narrative of the rose and the lovers:

> The time of lovers is brief;
> From the fair first joy to the grief
> That tells when love is grown old
> From the warm wild kiss to the cols
> From the red to the white-rose leaf,

They have but a season to seem (*PW* 230)

Swinburne brings the image of rose and love together and relates their helplessness against time. Time as an emerging concept underlies Swinburne's intention to demonstrate the temporal nature of love. "The Year of the Rose" utilises all the necessary literary devices and modes of expression; however, it fails to embody the gathering form at its most effective. The story of lovers and the rose fails to compel the poet and excite the listener as Swinburne focuses on Time as an antagonistic force of nature. As a result, the expression fails, and the poem collapses into an experiment of sound and mind for Swinburne.

The actualisation of the gathering form is aptly demonstrated by "The Triumph of Time." The poem is about Swinburne's early ventures of a romantic relationship and his subsequent disappointment (McSweeney 673). The poem includes forty-nine stanzas that use ABC rhymes in an alternating fashion, and each stanza consists of 8 lines. As Thompson argues, the progression of events and the narrative is given in a non-linear way in which the speaker often looks back to past events for avoiding the bitter end of the relationship (25). The concept of time, which is introduced in the first stanza, is evaluated in relation to the love affair across the poem and emotionally mirrors the events:

(Time, swift to fasten and swift to sever
Hand from hand, as we stand by the sea
I will say no word that a man might say
Whose whole life's love goes down in a day;
For this could never have been; and never,
Though the gods and the years relent, shall be. (*PW* 22).

The speaker's pain is depicted as a "dull red fruit" that decays and poisons: "It will grow not again, it is ruined at root" (*PW* 22). The image of growth is accompanied by the sensory images of daily life as the focus of the expression oscillates between life and the lovers: "… in the coil of things / In the clamour and rumour of life to be / We, drinking love at the furthest springs" (*PW* 22). The movement of the narrative is further slowed down by the minute details of despair impaired upon the listener, and the length

of the poem accentuates the emotional experience of loss. This slow and growing despair retrospectively falls in contrast with the accelerated sense of time excited by the speaker's affection: "The loves and hours of the life of a man, / They are swift and sad, being born of the sea" (*PW* 23). Swinburne employs the image of the sea as a metaphor for escape and the search for security through which the speaker seeks refuge from the burden of his life. The sea also symbolically represents the form of the poem and the emotional state Swinburne tries to communicate. The speaker falls into a trance where the emotion of love becomes replaced by the reality and inevitability of death:

> Sick dreams and sad of a dull delight;
>   For what shall it profit when men are dead
> To have dreamed, to have loved with the whole soul's might,
>   To have looked for day when the day was fled? (*PW* 24)

McGann argues Swinburne's intention as showing "the continuous process of death which is the human world" as the diction of the poetic movement is overtaken by the idea of death (*Swinburne An Experiment* 235). As Swinburne's feeling moves from infatuation to despair, the unavoidable reality of death and the power of Time become the dominant idea expressed in the poem.

The progression of lines mimics the passing of time and the speaker's journey towards the final destiny of human beings. Accordingly, the speaker announces submission in the following lines:

> But none shall triumph a whole life through:
>   For death is one, and the fates are three.
> At the door of life, by the gate of breath,
> There are worse things waiting for men than death;
> Death could not sever my soul and you,
>   As these have severed your soul from me. (*PW* 24)

The only thing worse than death, the speaker implies, is to have not loved at all and to be out of sight and mind. The speaker draws an analogy between the departure of his lover and the departure of his soul from life. The following stanzas subsequently meditate on the deeds and sacrifices of the speaker and evolve into an appeal.

The intensity of Swinburne's personal feelings is communicated in his sustained efforts to portray the state of helplessness. The speaker turns to the sea as "fair white mother" and Nature as "fair green-girdled mother" (*PW* 25-26). The notion of death transforms into an emotional haven in the following lines: "Find me one grave of thy thousand graves, / Those pure cold populous graves of thine, / Wrought without hand in a world without stain" (*PW* 26). The lover as the recipient of the appeals is replaced with Nature and sea – both addressed as mothers. The harmony of the poetic movement is sustained with the acoustic devices and through the imagery relating to tenderness, warmth, and safety of a mother. However, the passing of time is the underlying idea of every image introduced throughout the poem. The speaker's emotional state is revealed only through the juxtaposition of the past and the present. The speaker's appeal to Nature and sea emphasises their respective relation to death and time; the form of the poem accumulates its expressive power through succeeding appeals to lover, mother, death, and, eventually, time. Furthermore, Swinburne occasionally interpolates self-reflective commentary identifying himself as the speaker of the poem such as "Have I not built thee a grave, and wrought / Thy grave-clothes on thee of grievous though, / With soft spun verses and tears unshed," and "I shall never be friends again with roses; / I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong" (*PW* 25, 27). His arguments highlight time as an influencing force upon his convictions. Finally, the speaker acknowledges the loss of love and perseverance of time in shaping the experience of life for humans:

> We shall live through seasons of sun and of snow,
>   And none be grievous as this to me.
> We shall hear, as one in trance that hears,
>   The sound of time, the rhyme of the years; (*PW* 26)

As the poem progresses from the pain of love to the surrender to Time, the harmony of the poem culminates and elevates into the gathering form. Time triumphs both over the style of expression and the rendition of the poem as the length of the poem transport the listener from a personal experience to a song beyond the temporal boundaries of the hours of the man. Swinburne translates his romantic despair into a song of the human experience of the course of time, seeking to transcend the limits of his biological existence.

1.4.3. Experiments in Verse And Roundel

Swinburne pursued discipline and order in the form of his poetry and aimed to achieve harmony with the gathering form. However, this pursuit did not necessarily withhold him from experimenting in poetry. Both in terms of subject matter and the formal features of his poems, Swinburne was, first and foremost, an enthusiastic innovator. Even in his imitations of the early stages of his career, he resolved to create change and difference. He experimented on stanza forms, metre, and even fixed forms of French poetry from the beginning of his poetic career. This richness is a testament to his intense studies and subsequent mastery of arts. Hoffsten states that the effect of such experiments in stanza form and metre is aptly realised in the recital of poetry, which was Swinburne's critical measure of good verse as reiterated above (56-60). Swinburne explored old and new verse styles, which can be observed, at a glance, in the diversity of forms in his poetry books. His studies focused on repeating structures and rhyme structures in poetry. He investigated different rhyming schemes and numerous forms of refrains in his poetry. In "Felise," for instance, Swinburne uses two alternating rhymes and occasionally uses B rhyme as the fixed refrain. Similar to "Faustine," he arranges the refrain to rhyme with the name Felise, which can be observed in the following lines: "Ends in a laugh, a dream, a kiss / A song like this." and "I found you fairer once, Felise, / Than flowers of seas" (*PW* 78). The refrain is used only sporadically in the poem, which serves to disrupt the flow of harmony. Swinburne seems to have been intent on developing the use of refrains in his poems as he progressed to use complete lines as the refrain. In "To A Seamew," he repeats the first two lines of each stanza as the refrain and creates an effect of cyclical movement:

> Our dreams have wings that falter;
>   Our hearts bear hopes that die;
> For thee no dream could better
> A life no fears may fetter,
> A pride no care can alter
>   That wots not whence or why (*PW* 284)

The first two lines being subsequently repeated encloses the stanza in terms of linguistic structure and expression. The use of refrains and other repeating structures may impose

limitations on the poet in terms of expression. However, Swinburne considered discipline and order as exercises for the craft of poetry; therefore, he was keen on fixed forms that could illustrate the cycle of birth and death in human lives. Accordingly, he reintroduced the roundel form in his poetry.

The French roundel, or *rondeau*, is a type of *form fixé,* which restricts the number of lines and uses a strict form of the refrain (Turco 241). Roundel uses a thirteen-lined structure, but the number of lines may exhibit variations in the forms of *rondel supreme,* which has fourteen lines and *rondelet* that has only seven lines (Turco 241-243). Due to the lack of interest in writing roundels on behalf of other Victorian poets, English roundel might be sometimes acknowledged as an invention of Swinburne even though it was first introduced into English poetry by Geoffrey Chaucer, who imported numerous French forms and literary terms in the fourteenth century (Burnley 237). Chaucer chose the French forms for their sophistication, perceived high status, and as an "acknowledgement of aristocratic French culture" (Burnley 237). Chaucer used roundel in the conclusion of *The Parlement of Foules* as a "rhetoric of closure, rhetoric that underscores the necessity of Nature's authority and the submission to it of the diverse groups of birds" (Machan 438-439). Chaucerian roundel remained a fixed form of little notice until it gained popularity in the nineteenth century with its potential to highlight "the link between poetry and song and dance, for the returning phrase is very much like the culmination of a series of movements which brings the dancers back into the position from which they began" (Lewis 119). Swinburne drew attention to this old Chaucerian form and revived English roundel. Although he was opposed to imposing any restriction on the form or content of poetry, he perceived roundel as a feat of mastery in composition.

Swinburne's first roundels were the two poems included in *Poems and Ballads First Series* which were plainly entitled as rondels. The rondel "Kissing her hair" exhibits a cyclical movement on the phrase. The subject matter of the poem seems to be the depiction of funeral service where the speaker braids and kisses the hair of a woman: "What new sweet thing would love not relish worse? / Unless, perhaps, white death had

kissed me there, / Kissing her hair?" (*PW* 57). The speaker's perception of the woman intensifies as he "… sat against her feet, / Wove and unwove it, would and found it sweet / Made fast therewith her hands…" (*PW* 57). The action of weaving the hair is the affectionate memory that turns into an outburst of emotion in the current state of the woman. The poem is structured around the repetition of sounds and concepts as well as the repeating structure. The cyclical movement of the roundel is realised on the acoustic and semantic aspects of the poem. Unlike Chaucer, who used the form as a symbol of status, Swinburne uses roundel as an exercise in craftsmanship that accentuates the communicative capacity of the art of poetry. With regard to the restrictions of the form, Swinburne's two roundels in the book upheld only the cyclical movement of the individual stanzas. "Kissing her hair" consists of twelve lines while the other roundel, "These many years," includes eighteen lines. Swinburne further experimented with roundel form and published his volume of roundels, *A Century of Roundels,* in 1883. The poems in this volume were more refined in terms of their adherence to the formal characteristics of the roundel.

Apart from fixed forms and repetition, Swinburne also experimented with rhythm and the internal structure of sentences. "Choriambics" and "Hendecasyllabics" of *Poems and Ballads First Series* demonstrate his inquisitive approach to poetry in terms of technique. Both poems are simply named after the techniques they exemplify. "Choriambics" uses metrical choriambus foot, consisting of two long and two short syllables. The poem is composed of rhyming couplets and consists of twenty-two lines. In terms of subject matters, it concerns with death and contrasts the warmth of love with the coldness of death: "Sweet, the kisses of death set on thy lips, colder are they than mine; / Colder surely than past kisses that love poured for thy lips as wine" (*PW* 248). "Hendecasyllabics" means consisting of eleven syllables, and it is a technique Swinburne adopted from ancient Greek literature (Baldick 110-111). The poem consists of thirty-eight lines and uses six alternating rhymes. It resorts to the repetition of sound for building the outer music. The speaker's tone mimics grandeur and profoundness despite the modest nature of the poem. The subject matter of the poem is the passing of summer and the withering of nature: "All the flowers are dead, the tender blossoms, / All are taken away; the season wasted, / Like an ember among the fallen ashes" (*PW*

82). Manifestly, Swinburne wanted to highlight the experimental nature of both of these poems by using established subjects. Death, love, seasons, and nature are among his habitual themes; therefore, he was able to focus primarily on the structure and techniques of the poems. Moreover, the fact that he never revisits these two forms in the proceeding volumes of *Poems and Ballads* indicates that he was not satisfied with the resultant harmony and expression of his experiments.

To summarise, when Swinburne began his literary career, there were many aesthetic movements in Victorian England. These movements were inspired by European literature as much as they were from English literary history and traditions. However, the shared characteristics of all these movements were that they considered art to be independent of external authority and the belief that the principal purpose of literature was the expression of beauty. As a supporter of French literature with his critical writings, Swinburne wanted to apply the *l'art pour l'art* movement in English literature of his time. This literary movement, called art for art's sake or English Aestheticism in the broadest sense, had been influenced and inspired by many literary trends, including Swinburne's critical views. Regarding the style of the poem, Swinburne's concern was that traditional forms were innately aligned with the moral values of the society from which they emerged. Consequently, Swinburne implies that the style Tennyson used had an impact on the form of *Idylls of the King* as well as Tennyson's literary vision following the prevailing political ideology. Swinburne sought to remove such dependency from poetry using poetic forms from classical literature, medieval English literature, and French literature. More importantly, he defended his own concept of style, which he defined as "gathering form," in his critical writings. The defining feature of this form is that it imitates the destructive power of the sea created by the culmination of waves. Each line, sound, word, emotion, and idea repeated in the stanzas and the poem's entirety eventually culminates into a rich harmony. According to Swinburne, this style, which takes its power of expression from its internal features, would have the power of expression to challenge and subvert the literary tradition regarding the form of poetry. This is the main reason underlying the poet's attempt at such a variety of styles in *Poems and Ballads* series. Moreover, the emerging aesthetic movement's creating a new conception of form by using existing forms could

metaphorically foresee that the emergent movement would also be able to subvert the dominant literary tradition.

CHAPTER II
CHALLENGING THE VICTORIAN MORALITY

Swinburne emerged into the literary atmosphere of England in his early twenties. As an upcoming poet, his association with the aesthetic movement was evident in his reviews and writings. The distinctive feature of young Swinburne was the force of his poetic expression and his distinctive use of sounds in poetry. His poetry sometimes seemed detached from contemporary life due to the distance between the poet and his potential readers. For Victorian readers, Swinburne was just one of the enthusiastic young men experimenting with the forms of poetry. However, a more substantial, and maybe the more significant aspect of his understanding of poetry was its rebuttal of Victorian morals. He constantly stressed how the morality of the society unnecessarily restricted artists in their expressions; therefore, his artistic perception of aesthetic poetry emerged in direct opposition to the morality of his age. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the aspects of Victorian morality Swinburne problematised in his poetry so as to confront and shock the reading public. The chapter argues that by means of upsetting the conformity to dictums of religion and socially sanctioned boundaries of gender roles, Swinburne tries to excite a revolt upon the reader. This argument is explicated through analyses of poems from *The Flogging-Block*, *Poems and Ballads* series, *Songs Before Sunrise*, *Queen Yseult: Poem in Six Cantos* and *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

Swinburne’s early contributions in literary magazines and his responses to the critics of his poems illustrate an incessant focus on the independent nature and function of poetry: that it should be free from all restrictions and have no justification beyond its own existence. Swinburne expressed his principles of poetry sporadically. There exists no well-formulated and explanatory account of his views concerning the relationship between morality and poetry. He was, undoubtedly, a product of the cultural conditions he was born into. However, he yearned to move beyond his time and the order of society. He expressed his views in his reviews, responses to his critics, and on the occasions of contemplating on the artistic works of others – while occupying the position of spectator rather than the originator of art. Launching his campaign for the

liberation of arts long before his volumes of poetry with his review "Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*" in *The Spectator* in 1862, Swinburne sustained a body of critical work until his article "The Suppression of Vice" in *Athenaeum* in 1875. Afterwards, he continued to support the same principles but saw no necessity to reiterate them to the public. He also wrote a great deal of literary criticism in his correspondence with other poets and critics, some of which would later be incorporated into his public writings. Accordingly, his arguments seemed incomplete from the public's point of view. He appeared to be championing the supremacy of art without explaining the necessary means to achieve that goal. For Swinburne, on the other hand, the entirety of his principles and arguments was a continuous dialogue between the contemporary poetic theory and his counterarguments for the shortcomings of that theory.

Swinburne published the first English review of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1862. In his review, his approach to morality is cautious, as he writes that critics of the day "seem to have pretty well forgotten that a poet's business is presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society. … moral side of the book is not thrust forward in the foolish and repulsive manner of a half-taught artist; the background, as we called it, is not out of drawing" ("Charles Baudelaire" 998-99). Although he rejects any moral responsibility on behalf of the poet, he hesitates to reject morality as a constituent of good poetry. Instead, he states that morality is part of the artist's creative process, but it has no essential value for the reader. Herewith, Swinburne highlights the function of poetry outside morality and demotes its indispensability. His early caution against denying any role for morality wanes further in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*. Published following the critical uproar of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866, the critical essay aimed to put a distance between the artist and artistic work. Swinburne asserts his decision to defend his poetry as follows:

> … [not a] way of apology or vindication, of answer or appeal. I have none such to offer. … it is of equally small moment to me whether in such eyes as theirs I appear moral or immoral. Christian or pagan. … the book is dramatic, many-faced, multifarious; and no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed as the assertion of its author's personal feeling or faith. (*Notes* 6)

Swinburne posits poetry outside the poet's authority and moral values, thereby giving poetry a self-sufficient existence. His concept of poetry is in suspense, outside the reach of any influence. Swinburne comments on the subject matter of poetry and argues that limiting the aspects of life the poet can express is an obstacle to good poetry because it restricts creativity into a narrow sphere of human experience governed by religion and morality. He demands a more mature concept of poetry, as he argues that the matter at hand is beyond the scope of a single poet or individual poem, but, he argues as follows:

> …[it is] *whether or not all that cannot be lisped in the nursery or fingered in the schoolroom is therefore to be cast out of the library;* whether or not the domestic circle is to be for all men and writers the outer limit and extreme horizon of their world of work. …We, meanwhile, who profess to deal neither in poison nor in pap, may not unwillingly stand aside. … *No one wishes to force men's food down the throats of babes and sucklings*. The verses last analysed were assuredly written with no moral or immoral design. (*Notes* 20, 14; emphasis added)

Swinburne argues that there is no direct connection with the inception of his poetry and his moral values and that the primary measure of poetry should be poetry itself. As Victorians were obsessed with the corruptive effects of unsavoury literature, the poetry of the period rarely paid attention to the experiences deemed taboos such as sexuality, homoeroticism, or any provocative depiction of the human body. Notwithstanding, Swinburne believed that "Literature to be worthy of men, must be large, liberal, sincere ... 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" (*Notes* 21-23). Swinburne regarded the critics who expected moral guidance from poetry as "seek[ing] for sermons in sonnets" (*Notes* 23). These early writings were primarily concerned with putting a distance from morality in order to free the poets from the burden of indoctrinating their readers.

Swinburne's efforts in these early critical writings were limited to morality; afterwards, he expanded his rejection of religion as an authority. He saw no distinction between the morals of the society and religion as the influence of the established religion on the public was thoroughly internalised. In *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868), Swinburne studied how Blake's poetry eclipsed the bounds of religion by creating his

own mode of mythology. He ascribed Blake's success to poetic form and argued that "[t]he work done may be … of supreme value to art; but not the moral implied" (*William Blake* 87). He tried to justify the form of poetry as a strategy to avoid moral criticism, asserting that insistence on the moral meaning of poetry effectuates a failure in poetry while retaining form preserves artistic quality. Opposing the critics who accused him of being a pagan, Swinburne reiterated the dramatic nature of poetry, that there is and should not be a parallel between poet's faith and depictions of faith in poetry:

> Priest and poet … That magnificent invention of making "Art the handmaid of Religion" had not been stumbled upon in the darkness of [the previous periods]. … Handmaid of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, [art] cannot in any way become … Art for art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her. (*William Blake* 91)

The essay marks Swinburne's complete rejection of religion and morals in his poetry. He no longer saw the necessity of explaining his beliefs and moral values to literary critics and stated that his poetry was *the handmaid of none*. Swinburne's resolution did not waver, and he did not give in to his critics, as evidenced by his review "*L'année Terrible*: Victor Hugo" in 1872, where he courageously announces that "art of the highest kind may not ally itself with moral or religious passion, with the ethics or the politics of a nation or an age" (*Essays* 42). Even though he believed that every aspect of life should be included in poetry, he refused any authority other than the art itself: "Art is one, but the service of art is diverse" (*Essays* 44).

Swinburne's most explicit principle for art is that it should be diverse in subject matter and form. By stating that he saw no inhibition for what art can communicate, he relocated to focus of poetic creation on the idea of beauty as he stated in "Notes on Some of Pictures of 1868:" "Exclusion and suppression of certain things in the range of art are not really possible to any academy upon earth … Beauty may be strange, quaint, terrible, may play with pain as with pleasure" (*Essays* 371, 379). Furthermore, he criticised and ridiculed any form of authority that attempted to exert pressure on literature. In his diatribe "the Suppression of Vice" in *Athenaeum*, he postulated that the society should look for vice in classics of every period rather than contemporary

literature and suppress the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and even classics of Greek poetry as these writers were influential than men of letters of the age (720). In opposition to society's arguments, he argued that the timeless essence of good literature is the praise of beauty regardless of moral or religious quality.

Swinburne's principles of poetry regarding the significance of morality focused on the rejection of taboo subjects and religion as an authority. They concentrated on praising beauty, which was supposed to be achieved by the aforementioned strategies of aestheticism. Swinburne demonstrated these principles in his poetry within three categories: 1) poems meditating on the significance of the established religion which seek to subvert and replace that authority, 2) poems engaging gender-specific attitudes and the urge to control, which was inherent in moral values of the period, and 3) poems re-evaluating the conventional narrative of Arthurian legend. The poems in the third category employ Swinburne's principles to reframe the traditional legend to impress aestheticism onto his contemporaries.

2.1. CHALLENGING THE AUTHORITY OF RELIGION

Educated in a High Church atmosphere at home, Swinburne grew up as religious as any ordinary Victorian child. His first public performance was his Scripture recitals to his family and relatives. At Eton, he conserved his faith as it echoed through his letters – writing to his father in 1854, Swinburne confesses that "I get the church again, which I am very glad of. I mean never if I can't neglect going, as I feel sometimes I did before" (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:1). The following year, he visited Cologne Cathedral and the Basilica Church of Saint Ursula in Cologne, Germany. As the cathedral and the church were Catholic establishments, he had to wait outside for the ending of the service. Swinburne described his feeling to his mother as follows:

> … he said I could see S. Ursula's tomb if I waited till the service was over, which I did, and *I felt quite miserable, it was such a wretched feeling that while they all were praying, old men and tiny children kneeling together, I was not one of them, I was shut out as it were.* I could have sat down and cried, I was so unhappy. How I do trust that *some day all will be able to*

> *worship together and no divisions and jealousies keep us any longer asunder*! (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:4; emphasis added)

The incident in Cologne was his first real experience with the schism in the Church. His repulsion at his exclusion from the service as opposed to his awe of Christian relics housed at the Basilica illuminates his dislike of the division of denominations in Christianity.

The sectarianism Swinburne witnessed at Cologne was also felt in England, particularly by the intellectuals. The necessity to side with a denomination or being shamed as an atheist forced many aspiring artists, such as Swinburne, to shy away from religion altogether (Cassidy *Algernon* 36). It is believed that Swinburne renounced his faith before leaving Oxford due to the influence of his close friend John Nichol (Louis "His Gods" 10). As Louis comments, Swinburne and his firends held the belief that indoctrinating the children with religion at a very young age was an imposition on their intellectual faculties and personalities (10). Although Swinburne continued to use concepts, images and notions provided by religion, he employed them as a subversion of religious language. Swinburne renounced religion entirely after a year of tragedy in which he lost his sister and left Oxford as a result of which he grew unable to come to terms with his losses, he no longer believed in the might of God and the spiritual protection of the church (Levin 9-18). His decision was not a momentary reaction to the mishaps in his life; neither it was an excuse for revolting against the establishment.

In order to compensate for and replace religion, Swinburne turned to poetry and adopted Apollo as a divine figure. However, as a poetic divinity, even Apollo was an authority and would possibly impose restrictions upon the poet (Levin 236). What Swinburne needed was a system free from any authority, rules, and restrictions. He did not oppose Christianity or any denomination in particular, but opposed the religion as a hierarchical power structure. Swinburne believed gods of all religions and sects would prevent artists from realising their highest potential. He had acquired the habit of thanking something instead of God during his twenties (*The Swinburne Letters* 2:61). In his thirties, he asserted that "I express hope that yet, when we have quite regained sight of

the God, we may know him... *for how, my beloved brethren, without the destruction of God, can Man be healed*" (*The Swinburne Letters* 3:144; emphasis added). As the years passed, Swinburne's aversion to religion came to dominate his daily life even more. Pater-Downes draws attention to the fact that Swinburne did not attend the funerals of many of his contemporaries due to his dislike of funeral service and his criticism of religious influences on art became sharper (141, 162). In one of his letters to his cousin in 1882, he wrote: "Cardinal Newman, whose genius and character I admire as much as I detest the creed to which he has (in his own phrase) 'assented' by becoming a Papist. ... I converted Watts (who did not know his verses in the Lyra Apostolica) to enthusiastic belief in the Cardinal as a poet" (qtd. in Leith 106). Swinburne's insistence on seeing Newman as a poet rather than a cardinal shows his sincerity in the idea that the poet and poetry are distinct and separate from the individual. In 1896, in his letter to W.M. Rossetti, Swinburne wrote: "I send you a number of the Rappel containing an important article on the Anti-Catholic council of Naples … [for] all who, sympathising with their aims and views … As I presume this is your case as well as mine" (*The Swinburne Letters* 2:35). His antagonism towards the Catholic Church, in particular, persisted and was illustrated in his correspondences along with his literary works.

In parallel to Swinburne's experience with religion, his poetry thematised religion in an evolving manner. The first group of poems are more sympathetic towards Christianity and includes "Dolores," "St. Dorothy," and "The Armada." The second group calls into question the actual functions of religion and its current condition. This group includes "Hymn to Proserpine," "The Garden of Proserpine," and "Before A Crucifix." The third group of poems aims to entirely repudiate religion from human life and replace it with the man as the divine being. This group consists of "Genesis," "Hymn of Man," "Hertha," and "Christmas Antiphones." Regardless of their dates of composition, these poems show how Swinburne's relationship with religion moves from confirmation to rebuttal.

2.1.1. Swinburne's Christian Subjects

"St. Dorothy," "Dolores," and "the Armada" share commonalities as these poems do not directly attack or repudiate Christian virtues but instead subvert the images of St. Dorothy, an impious woman, and the Catholics. They are based on the common sentiments of Victorian society. St. Dorothy is the angelic image of graceful Christian subjects whose life is dictated by principles of religion. Dolores is the weak persona of the female who gives into her bodily sensation and becomes corrupt. Swinburne subverts these two figures to shock his audience and turn religious images inside out by representing their flaws as their positive features.

In *Notes of Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne commented on "Dolores" as follows: "I have striven here to express that transient state of spirit … seeking refuge in those 'violent delights' which 'have violent ends'… hither also the huntress follows her flying prey, wounded and weakened, still fresh from the fangs of passion; the cruel hands, the amorous eyes, still glitter and allure" (12-13). Her physical beauty is intensified because of the pain she endures which alludes to sadist inspiration of the poem. As he expressed elsewhere, Swinburne believed that only art could "condense the whole agony of a life into one exquisite and bitter drop of distilled pain" (*Essays* "L'homme" 11). Accordingly, Swinburne shows the union of pain and pleasure from the poem's epithet onwards in his account of "Our Lady of Seven Sorrows." Condé draws attention to how Swinburne depicts Dolores as "a figure which is at once holy and devilish" through religious discourse (85). Swinburne employs the number seven further in the poem, which holds a religious significance for Christianity, to express the grandiose of Dolores's fall from grace:

> Seven sorrows the priests give their Virgin
> But thy sins, which are seventy times seven,
> Seven ages would fail thee to purge in,
> And then they would haunt thee in heaven: (*PW* 66)

Dolores is a mirror reflection of the Virgin Mary as a lady of worship, and rather than spiritual grace, sin emanates from her image: "What milk fed thee first at what bosom? /

What sins gave thee suck?” (*PW* 66). She signifies eternal pain since she is described as the daughter of Libitina, the Roman goddess of death, and Priapus, the Greek god of fertility: in the cycle of birth and death, Dolores becomes the image of sustained suffering. Swinburne evidently focused on painting her in revolting scenes and with notions of obscenity with no alteration of her original state of wrongdoing. He describes Dolores as “monstrous and fruitless,” “splendid and sterile,” and “having death in his hands”, thereby illustrating the punishment of giving in to her lust and sexual urges. She is punished with infertility and juxtaposed with the Virgin Mary as the mother of Christ. Her children are punished as well, as the poem asserts: “thy people, thy children, thy chosen, / Marked cross from the womb and perverse!” (*PW* 67). Her sins are accordingly visited upon her own body and her children.

Another religious motif Swinburne used is his depiction of Dolores as the representative figure for idealised woman, shaped by the restrictive roles imposed on women by Christianity. Dolores is described as “O my sister, my spouse, and my mother,” and

> A mother, a mortal, a maiden,
> A queen over death and the dead.
> ………………………………..
> Most fruitful and virginal, holy,
> A mother of gods. (*PW* 70)

Apart from reigning over the dead, all these roles were ascribed to women in the Victorian period. Swinburne chooses familiar roles of women to illustrate that Dolores could be any woman in society, which amplifies the shocking effect of the poem. She is not a divine or holy figure; she is just an ordinary woman with emotions and mundane conflicts. Condé affirms Swinburne’s strategy and asserts that “this is an impossible set of positions to inhabit in relation to one man; rather ‘Our Lady of Pain’ is a phantasmagorical figure, representative of these values, but not a true embodiment of them” (86). Accordingly, by provoking the concepts and images which are usually directed at pious figures of the church, Swinburne emphasises the fragility of religious constructs. He paints an affronting portrait of a woman without manipulating the religious evaluation system and brings about a conflicting view of the Virgin Mary.

“St. Dorothy” is a temperate poem that retells the story of Theophilus’s conversion to Christianity. The poem is Christian from many aspects: the story is conserved, depictions of Dorothy confirm a chaste understanding of beauty, and she does not turn away from her belief. As to the reason for the composition of the poem, Swinburne explains it as follows: “I have done a lot of work since … one on St. Dorothy and Theophilus (I wanted to try my heathen hands at a Christian subject” (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:38). Therefore, his aim seems to shock his audience by virtue of him not subverting or perverting any part of the story. He aims to use his reputation as an anti-theist to invalidate the expectations of his critics. The poem, which opens up with a Biblical portion, depicts Dorothy as Greek beauty but signals her faith through her actions and behaviour:

> Clothed softly, with sweet herbs about her hair
> ………………………………………………..
> Eyed like a gracious bird, and in both hands
> She held a psalter painted green and red. (*PW* 95)

Her graceful existence is contrasted with Theophilus’s lust for her and his worship of Venus. Fricke states that Swinburne made Theophilus responsible for Dorothy’s execution as his lust is the poetic action of the plot (161). Theophilus reflects the contrast between Christian and pagan value systems and confirms the former. Accordingly, Theophilus occupies Swinburne’s concept of a poet deciding between a passionate and a subdued voice in poetry. Similar to Swinburne, then, Theophilus first turns to Venus and tries to persuade Dorothy as well:

> I will that you make haste and holiday
> To go next year upon the Venus stair,
> Covered none else, but crowned upon your hair,
> And do the service that a maiden doth. (*PW* 96)

Efforts of Theophilus fail as Dorothy reveals herself as a “Christ’s maid” (*PW* 96). This revelation manifests Swinburne’s frustration against society’s resistance to his conception of poetry. He draws an analogy between the gap of faith between Theophilus and Dorothy and the moralist approach to poetry and his aesthetic conception of poetry:

> It was God’s doing, and was marvellous.
> And in brief while this knight Theophilus

> Is waxen full of faith, and witnesseth
> Before the king of God and love and death, (*PW* 99)

Here, Swinburne criticises himself as the poet of being tactless in parallel with Theophilus and hopes for a reaffirmation similar to Theophilus' discovery of the afterlife.

"The Armada" commemorates the third centennial of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and Swinburne uses this poem to attack the Catholic authority. In contrast to "Dolores" and "St. Dorothy", "The Armada" has a clear goal of criticising Rome and the Papacy. He utilises a historically significant event to draw a contrast between Anglicanism and Catholicism. The sectarian schism he witnessed in Cologne is aptly demonstrated in his depictions of Catholic God. In the second stanza of Part IV, Swinburne calls to Catholic God: "For now shall thy horn be exalted, and now shall thy bolt strike home; / Yea, now shall thy kingdom come, Lord God of the priests of Rome" (*Poems* 214). He likens God to Greek gods, thundering on humanity with no regard to their innocence. His depiction of the cruelty of God elevates in the following lines:

> And the streets and the pastures of England, the woods that burgeon and yearn,
> Shall be whitened with ashes of women and children and men that burn.
> For the mother shall burn with the babe sprung forth of her womb in fire,
> And bride with bridegroom, and brother with sister, and son with sire; (*Poems* 215)

Swinburne transforms the quaint scenery of his country into a pit of fire, swallowing everybody inside. Moreover, he depicts Catholic God as the responsible party. His depiction draws an analogy between the classical depictions of hell and what he believed the Catholics aimed to achieve in conquering England. Therefore, the Papist God is closer to Satan disguised than an all-forgiving conception of Christian God. In the remaining lines, he emphasises the Spanish's belief in their "omnipotent, infinite God" (*Poems* 217).

In Part VII of the poem, Swinburne particularises his attacks to "Sixtus, Pope of the Church whose hope takes flight for heaven to dethrone the sun," and "Philip, king that

wouldst turn our spring to winter, blasted, appalled, undone," (*Poems* 230). He depicts England and the Anglican Church as an ambient source of light, goodness and mercy while ascribing diabolic features to the Catholic Pope and king. Swinburne describes Catholic God as "God of Hell," "thou as the dead gods now, whose arm is shortened, whose rede is read?" and "the condemned, the abhorred, sinks hellward, smitten with deathlike swoon" (*Poems* 230-31). He tries to create a stark contrast between the English and the Popish powers and remoulds the battle into a war between Heaven and Hell. There is, undoubtedly, an imprint of jingoism in the poem. However, it manages to communicate Swinburne's dislike of religion by defining Anglicanism as the true religion and perceiving Catholicism as an antagonistic institution. "St. Dorothy," "Dolores," and "the Armada" are limited in their criticism of established religion and search for an alternative to the established religion. Nonetheless, they exhibit subtleties of Swinburne's craftsman with regard to using the conventional values for his own artistic goals.

2.1.2. Death of Religion and The Church

The poems in this group focused on the demise of religious authority in contemporary society. They depict religion as losing its former glory and aim to come to terms with its inevitable disappearance. All three poems draw a comparison between Jesus Christ and pagan gods. "Hymn to Proserpine" and "The Garden of Proserpine" both take Proserpine, the goddess of death, as the central figure. Proserpine is the Roman name for the Greek goddess Persephone, and although she is not the goddess of death, Swinburne conceptualises her as the embodiment of the barren atmosphere of the afterlife. For Swinburne, Proserpine brings destruction and replaces the concept of a benevolent God with an all-consuming force of time.

Swinburne likens the realm of Proserpine to "when the spirit, without fear or hope of good things or evil, hungers and thirsts only after the perfect sleep" (*Notes* 13). "Hymn to Proserpine" and "The Garden of Proserpine" dwell on the subject of death – the death of men, gods and everything. "Hymn" compares Christ and Proserpine in terms of their service to men:

> O Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day!
> From your wrath is the world released, redeemed from your chains, men say.
> New Gods are crowned in the city; their flowers have broken your rods;
> They are merciful, clothed with pity, the young compassionate Gods. (*PW* 36)

Proserpine is depicted as a god dethroned while the crown of thorns distinguishes Christ. Swinburne emphasises that Christ's message of liberation and mercy has failed and draws attention to the concept of pity as a garment rather than a permanent quality. On the other hand, Proserpine is associated with the rod – an image Swinburne extensively uses in his poetic words to signify the oppression of any authority. The poem creates an atmosphere of slumber as the speaker reiterates the idea of sleep and memory: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath; / We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death. / Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day;" (*PW* 36). The binary opposition of Galilean and Lethean puts forward a criticism of society because it forgot the pagan beliefs and is being consumed by Christianity. It is also a criticism of Christianity as the Christian religion necessitates a virtuous, earnest, and humble life as opposed to exuberant bacchanals of pagan religions.

Swinburne applies the quality of being pale both to Proserpine and Christ to imply that Christ will, in time, be dethroned and that people are perpetually in a state of searching. They tend to create new orders when the former fails to meet their demands. Swinburne's poem is a lament for "the decay of a past of beauty and passion in comparison to which the present seems barren … It is, indeed, probably the triumph of Christian virtue over pagan sensuality and aestheticism that causes the wasteland" (Dahl 345). Accordingly, the speaker hesitates whether the new merciful god will provide more pleasure for men:

> More than these wilt thou give, things fairer than all these things?
> Nay, for a little we live, and life hath mutable wings.
> A little while and we die; shall life not thrive as it may?
> For no man under the sky lives twice, outliving his day. (*PW* 36)

The speaker falls into despair with the realisation that life is finite. The poem denies infinity to its speaker as well as its gods, seeing that all must crumble, all must disappear:

> All ye as a wind shall go by, as a fire shall ye pass and be past;
> Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last.
> In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the changes of things,
> Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall forget you for kings. (*PW* 37)

This idea of death being superior to God is also apparent in "The Garden of Proserpine." Swinburne highlights the permanency of death and perceives it as the inevitable condition of everything. Fricke argues that the essential conflict in the poem is "between the spirit of life (pagan gods) and the spirit of death (the death-in-life of Christianity; the death as sleep of Proserpine)" (144). The same question arises in the dichotomy between fertility and sterility, between Proserpine and Venus as the mother of Rome:

> Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam,
> And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and mother of Rome.
> For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow; but ours,
> Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers, (*PW* 37)

Two figures are contrasted regarding their purity, sexuality and remembrance. The colourful, virile and fertile images surrounding Venus (Cytherian) highlights the death-like quality of Proserpine. Louis suggests that Proserpine's paleness "represents a rejection of the female body as a vessel of life" ("Proserpine and Pessimism" 316). At the end of the poem, however, Proserpine reigns supreme as the speaker professes a pagan belief and submits to Proserpine: "So long I endure, no longer; and laugh not again, neither weep. / For there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep" (*PW* 38). Swinburne illustrates the poem's promise at the closing that the young, compassionate Christian God will also fall prey to death.

"The Garden of Proserpine" uses the same discourse as its sister poem "Hymn." The poem depicts Time as a consuming power and Proserpine's garden as a desolate land. The sterility of the garden indicates the futility of life, as the speaker asserts: "But no such winds blow hither, /And no such things grow here" (*PW* 71). The condition of

sleep is portrayed through a plethora of words such as “poppies,” “deadly wine,” “slumber,” “soul belated,” “hell and heaven unmated,” and “Only the sleep eternal / In an eternal night” (*PW* 72). Swinburne vindicated Proserpine’s dethroning in the “Hymn,” arguing that Proserpine abides her time in “an eternal night.” The speaker posits Proserpine as supreme divinity:

> Though one were strong as seven,
> He too with death shall dwell,
> …………………………………….
> She waits for each and other,
> She waits for all men born;
> ……………………………………..
> And all dead years draw thither,
> And all disastrous things; (*PW* 71-72)

Employing the number seven once more, Swinburne depicts the symbolic system of religion as frail – any symbol of spiritual value in Christian belief becomes pointless in Proserpine’s wake. These lines assure that Proserpine will triumph over “all men born,” which must mean Proserpine will conquer the pale Galilean. The speaker further denies the audience the hope for an afterlife with the following lines: “That no life lives for ever; / That dead men rise up never;” (*PW* 72). Duffy suggests that Swinburne’s Proserpine evolves into “the supreme goddess because she represents the sleep of death; she affords not only an escape from the ennui of life but also timelessness, the antithesis of a mutable world where even the gods change” (237). Thus, the poem subverts the Christian idea of the afterlife by removing any chance of moving beyond the moment of death or avoiding the destruction of the self.

“Before A Crucifix” is the contemplation of the condition of believers as paralleled by the appearance of a crucifix. The poem opens with the depictions of debilitated surroundings and moves on to the exhausted women labourers. “Women with labour-loosened knees, / With gaunt backs bowed by servitude” (*PW* 342). The ghastly appearance of women is compared with the derelict crucifix, and the pain of the women is reflected in the haggard state of the crucifix:

> The suns have branded black, the rains

> Striped grey this piteous God of theirs;
> ………………………………………..
> Lean limbs that shew the labouring bones,
> And ghastly mouth that gapes and groans. (*PW* 342)

Louis defines this poem as Swinburne's attempt to eliminate the whole symbolic system of religion ("His Gods" 85). Therefore, the speaker "confronts in turn the icon, the unknown historical Jesus, the hypothetical deity who ascended into heaven … for in every shape Christ embodies the power and subtlety of the exploiter, or, at best, the impotence of the exploited" (Louis "His Gods" 91-92). In the third stanza, the speaker declares that he has "nor tongue nor knee" to pray in front of the crucifix due to the collapse of belief. The following stanzas illustrate how the poor carried the burden of faith with no reward in return in the following lines:

> Kneeling, these slaves of men should beat
> Bosoms too lean to suckle sons
> And fruitless as their orisons?
> ………………………………………
> Poor men's made poorer for thy sake,
> And women's withered out of sex?
> It was for this, that slaves should be,
> Thy word was passed to set men free? (*PW* 343)

Abandoning the subject pronoun, the speaker bursts into a monologue of vituperation that questions the message of the Christian faith. The poor state of women results in their inability to feed their babies, and their prayers prove futile. In their service to God, both men and women become deprived of humanity. The poverty of the public, oppression of the masses and the condition of the world displace Christ's word. Was it all for this, the speaker questions – did all the suffering generations of men endured and all the goodwill carried out for the sake of God culminate in that state of poverty? The speaker demands from Christ figure on the crucifix to:

> Look down, turn usward, bow thine head;
> O thou that wast of God forsaken,
> Look on thine household here, and see
> These that have not forsaken thee. (*PW* 343)

Louis explains the speaker's plight and the perversion of Christ's message by the church as follows: "As the dead Christ lay bound in linen bands, so the Church binds the People in the iron bands of Christian dogma" ("His Gods" 92). Therefore, the speaker

demands that Christ look at his own household, the Church, to see how they had become corrupt and gone astray from the path he laid forth. In the twelfth stanza, the speaker expresses his pessimism for the miracle of resurrection and asks: “And what man or what angel known / Shall roll back the sepulchral stone?” (*PW* 343). Turning to the Church’s mistreatment of the poor, the speaker argues that those who lack the financial riches have nowhere to be buried. The labouring believers lack the place to lay their dead and time to weep for their losses.

Each stanza of the poem elaborates on the corruption of the Church as an institution. The speaker’s plight turns into a petition to Christ on the crucifix. Criticising the churchmen, the speaker likens sacramental bread to “sponge full of poison,” wine to “bitter blood”, and Holy Communion to a “disanointed head” (*PW* 343). The speaker asks:

> Is there a gospel in the red
> Old witness of thy wide-mouthed wounds?
> From thy blind stricken tongueless head
> What desolate evangel sounds
> A hopeless note of hope deferred? (*PW* 343)

Swinburne implies that Christ and his teaching have no voice in the Church in the lines above. The saviour of man, he asserts, is being silenced by his own church. Still, the believers sustain their hopes that a divine power “Can loosen thee as Lazarus, / Bid thee rise up republican / And save thyself and all of us;” (*PW* 344). Swinburne’s demand that Christ be resurrected as a republican reflects his political aspirations of the late 1860s.

The physical condition of the cross mirrors the corrupt state of the churchmen. Swinburne attacks them on the grounds of their wealth, distance to the needy and the political power they hold. Accordingly, he likens the church to a rotten tree: “Consumed of rottenness and rust, / Worm-eaten of the worms of night, / Dead as their spirits who put trust” (*PW* 344). In subsequent stanzas, the speaker urges the masses to turn away from the established religion, which grew akin to “leprous likeness of a bride / Whose kissing lips through his lips grown / Leave their God rotten to the bone” (*PW* 344). The

speaker declares that Nazarene provides comfort and relief for no man. The speaker bids the crucifix answer, “If thou wast verily man's lover, / What did thy love or blood avail?” (*PW* 344). By addressing Christ as “O thou son of man,” Swinburne diminishes him to a mortal man. Because his mission to save humanity failed, the communion of Christ is corrupt. Thus, Swinburne urges him to cease to exist to instigate a new order.

Through these three poems, Swinburne proclaimed the disestablishment of the Church. He explained that the Church is no longer dedicated to the teachings of Christ, thereby positing himself against the institution, not the religion of Christianity. He criticises people who search for mercy and love in order of religion and calls for the removal of the church authority and revision of religion. However, Swinburne believes that religion must be replaced not with another faith but with an entirely different understanding of man and his potential.

2.1.3. Replacing Religion with The Divine Man

The poems in this group elevate man and woman’s status to divinity and seek to replace religious authority with Man. To achieve that, Swinburne expounded on creation myths and turned his attention to concepts of mortality. In “Genesis,” “Hymn of Man,” “Hertha,” and “Christmas Antiphones”, he attempted to reproduce religious myths of creation and reframe Man above any earthly institutions, respectively. *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), which included all poems in this group, was Swinburne’s solution to what should replace religion. The volume includes his most fervent republican verses. Paralleling the poet’s involvement in the republican political ideology, these poems depict authority as a demonic force and seek to dethrone all its constituents – kings, Pope, priests, prophets and all religious symbols (Louis “His Gods” 41). Swinburne concentrates on the perpetual cycle of birth and death in order to set men free from religion. Accordingly, he introduced the primordial concept of Time, paganistic gods and divine man as alternatives to existing centres of authority (Louis “His Gods” 41). As Thompson states, the “new creed is a pantheistic one in which man is idealized as the highest manifestation of nature. … man is the ultimate result of the creative evolutionary process” (107). “Hymn of Man” and “Hertha” are particularly crucial for

Swinburne as these two poems signify the transformation of Christ into a mortal man and rebirth of a new faith which is republican and pagan in nature. Therefore, the overall poetic diction in these poems moves from the instant of creation to the moment in which Man attains divinity through the means of rejecting monotheism.

Swinburne continues to subvert religious discourse to communicate his convictions properly, and "Genesis" is a befitting example of this strategy. Published in *Songs Before Sunrise*, the poem subverts the creation myth of Christianity and constitutes a parallel to the first chapters of both the Bible. As the Bible chapter recounts the story of how the Israelites were first blessed, Swinburne's "Genesis" recounts how the entirety of creation emerged from nothingness. The first four stanzas of the poem depict the formless void. Influenced from the idea of evolution and progression of the living, Swinburne attempts to replicate the creation myths of ancient literature. The poem opens with depictions of the shapeless space devoid of human existence:

> Before the blind first hour of time had birth,
> Before night knew the moonlight or the morn;
> Yea, before any world had any light,
> Or anything called God or man drew breath, (*PW* 354).

Swinburne's myth starts with the creation of elements and is followed by death and God. Swinburne placed death in the first order as he believed that even God was not free from death itself. His definition of death as "the shadow cast by life's wide wings" and of God as "the shade cast by the soul of man" create a power structure where life precedes death, and the human soul precedes God (*PW* 355). Swinburne's lines portray life as:

> The illimitable embrace and the amorous fight
> That of itself begets, bears, rears, and slays,
> The immortal war of mortal things that is
> Labour and life and growth and good and ill,
> The mild antiphonies that melt and kiss,
> The violent symphonies that meet and kill, (*PW* 355)

He conceptualises life as the unity of opposite forces such as "being many" and "one," "death" and "birth" and "barren water," and "many childed earth" (*PW* 355). His system

of creation has a cyclic nature – from order to disorder, it expands and collapses only to repeat itself. Being born out of this system, Swinburne's men have "sown the twin seeds of the strong twin powers; / The white seed of the fruitful helpful morn, / The black seed of the barren hurtful hours" (*PW* 355). Focusing on the duality of existence, Swinburne draws attention to the dialectic nature of human beings. All men have the same faculties and twin seeds of creations; "him whose lips the sweet fruit hath made red / In the end men loathe and make his name a rod" is turned into a figure of authority (*PW* 355). In his depiction of people who hold power and authority, Swinburne retrocedes to the image of the rod to signify discipline and oppression. On the other hand, "him whose mouth on the unsweet fruit hath fed / In the end men follow and know for very God" are hailed as spiritual leaders of their societies (*PW* 355). The red mouth of those who attain creates a vampiric image – authority draining the life force of the masses – and indicates the corrupting effect of power. The bitterness of the fruit symbolises the burden of responsibility for those who are hailed as leaders. The closing stanza of the poem reiterates the perpetual cyclic motion of human life and asserts that the condition of man will prevail even after death: "And as a man before was from his birth, / So shall a man be after among the dead" (*PW* 355).

"Hymn of Man" is one of the few poems directly connected with Swinburne's life. This poem is reflective of Swinburne's relationship with Giuseppe Mazzini and the Italian republican movement. The entirety of *Songs Before Sunrise* is dedicated to Mazzini; however, "Hymn of Man" is a particularly assertive poem as it can be discerned from the epithet "During the Session in Rome of the Ecumenical Council." Swinburne brought together his dislike of the Papacy and admiration of the Italian republican movement in this poem. The poem was composed with reference to the First Vatican Council of 1869. The council was congregated to discuss the contemporary political movements, their effects on the religious institutions and two dogmatic issues, namely papal infallibility and immaculate conception of Jesus Christ (Dvornik 97). The decision on infallibility risked an ideological conflict among Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants since such discussions would be problematic for the Church, so the proclamation of the proceedings was suppressed to prevent any mishaps (Dvornik 98). During the council, a war between France and Germany began and subsequent to the

French army leaving its post as the guard of the Vatican, the Italian army marched to Rome, annexing Rome as the new capital of the Italian Kingdom and together with the Catholic Pope as their prisoner (Dvornik 100). Commemorating the capture of Rome, this poem symbolises the republican dreams realised and man emancipated from the oppression of the Vatican.

"Hymn of Man" problematises the idea of the virgin birth and focuses on Jesus as a mortal man. Swinburne analyses the birth of Christ in parallel to the birth of the universe and questions the truth of the former. Christ's mortality as a man and the timeless nature of the universe is juxtaposed to highlight religion as a hollowed-out construct. From the beginning of the poem, Swinburne poses the question of what had been created first: "In the grey beginning of years, in the twilight of things that began, / The word of the earth in the ears of the world, was it God? was it man?" (*PW* 346). The relationship between the master and the subject is problematised in that way. Repetition of the words related to virginity in the following lines draw attention to the oxymoronic nature of virgin birth: "her eyes new-born of the night," "her maiden mouth," "her virgin feet," and "her virginal lids" – all these descriptions are matched with the idea of birth and immortality (*PW* 346). Converging on the cycle of life, the existence of man is portrayed as a condition between birth and death:

> Passions and pains without number, and life that runs and is lame,
> From slumber again to slumber, the same race set for the same,
> Where the runners outwear each other, but running with lampless hands
> No man takes light from his brother till blind at the goal he stands (*PW* 346).

Swinburne asserts that life is lame and constitutes only a passage from a state of sleep to yet another inactive state. Accordingly, life becomes a futile, hollow abstract rather than fleshed-out actions of good or evil. Swinburne sees no apparent meaning in this cycle and questions the order of creation in the following lines:

> In the fathomless years forgotten whereover the dead gods reign,
> Was it love, life, godhead, or fate? we say the spirit is one
> That moved on the dark to create out of darkness the stars and the sun.
> Before the growth was the grower, and the seed ere the plant was sown;

> But what was seed of the sower? and the grain of him, whence was it grown? (*PW* 347)

Louis argues that in the absence of religion and God, Swinburne "ascribe[s] life and vision to man alone" ("His Gods" 107). Swinburne presents godhead and man as equal and asserts that they are dependent on each other. Man is both the growth and the grower, as is the God, because these are the only comprehendible notions in "the waste of the dead void" (*PW* 347). This statement is further explained in the following lines:

> Thou and I and he are not gods made men for a span,
> But God, if a God there be, is the substance of men which is man.
> ……………………………………………………………………
> We men, the multiform features of man, whatsoever we be,
> Recreate him of whom we are creatures, and all we only are he. (*PW* 347)

Although God is manifested in numerous forms and religions, it is the same construction of the mortal man, Swinburne asserts. He posits that the condition of God's existence is contingent on humanity's search for meaning in life. Instead of God creating man in his image, men create God in their own image as a collective entity.

The first section of "Hymn" focuses on Christ as a mortal man and asserts that God is the creation of man, while the second section attempts to show how the Christian myth of creation made men subservient. Swinburne illustrates the temporal nature of God and religious dogmas as he asserts:

> O shamed and sorrowful God, whose force goes out at a blow!
> What world shall shake at his nod? at his coming what wilderness glow?
> What help in the work of his hands? what light in the track of his feet?
> His days are snowflakes or sands, with cold to consume him and heat.
> He is servant with Change for lord, and for wages he hath to his hire (*PW* 347-48)

The speaker compares God's existence with those of snowflakes and sand in order to undermine his power. God is subject to change just as men, so there is no distinction between them. The poem also envisions God "shamed" because he is transformed into a false idol as his "force goes out at a blow" of humanity. Subsequent to depicting God as mortal, Swinburne begins to inspect the whole design of creation from its inception at the garden to the supposed salvation through Christ: "Thou madest man in the garden;

thou temptedst man, and he fell; / Thou gavest him poison and pardon for blood and burnt-offering to sell. / Thou hast sealed thine elect to salvation, fast locked with faith for the key;" (*PW* 348). Swinburne argues that humanity's fall from God's grace was not the fault of Adam or Eve but a scheme of God to make humanity servants to his will. Hence, the merciful image of Christian God is put in question as well. Rather than God as the abstract totality of love, Swinburne describes God as "a snake's kiss, that leaves the soul rotten at root," "torture and terror and treason," "a shrine of the madness of man and his shame" (*PW* 348). The dark aspects of religion are thrust upon each other as the speaker announces God "hast hung in the midst for a sign of his worship the lamp of thy name," meaning that religion became a beacon of hope for humanity only in the darkness of its creation (*PW* 348).

The final section of the poem ends with humanity assuming mastery of all things. The distinctive poetic voice moves from questioning to an assertive tone as the poem progresses and culminates in "the prophetic denunciation" of the established religions (Louis "His Gods" 184). Swinburne discharges God as the eternal judge when the speaker asserts: "Thou art judged, O judge, and the sentence is gone forth against thee, O God. / Thy slave that slept is awake; thy slave but slept for a span; / Yea, man thy slave shall unmake thee, who made thee lord over the man" (*PW* 348). God and the Church as its image on earth are replaced with the man as the seat of judgement. And man as the slave for "a span," for a spell of time, is now conscious of his divinity; therefore, this divine man, the speaker advocates, topples God because "if higher than is heaven be the reach of the soul, shall not heaven bow down?" Louis comments that "the union of men in Man, must be realized but it can only be realized … [through] the ability to maintain the predominant status of - the spirit" ("His Gods" 192). As long as the masses do not fall prey to false promises of the religious authority and submit to another God, man remains the master of creation. Parallel to the Italian Kingdom, which asserted dominance on the very heart of the Catholic Church, Swinburne yearns for domination of man over the concept of religion. The fear of God's punishment, the spell of oppression is broken down in the current condition as scientific ideas and industrial developments demonstrated the actual capacity of mortal man – his power to curb down the nature, power to survive under the direst conditions and his inspiration to reach

beyond immediate physical limits. Subsequently, the speaker asks: “Who are ye that would bind him with curses and blind him with vapour of prayer? / Your might is as night that disperses when light is alive in the air” (*PW* 349).

At the close of the poem, Swinburne casts aside all the hesitation towards man’s place as the master and announces the death of God: “Is not this the great God of your sires, that with souls and with bodies was fed, / And the world was on flame with his fires? O fools, he was God, and is dead” (*PW* 349). As the products of mortal people, God too shall crumble into dust. Swinburne also gives voice to the efforts of the believers and how they hold on to their faiths in the following lines: “They cry out, thine elect, thine aspirants to heavenward, whose faith is as flame; / O thou the Lord God of our tyrants, they call thee, their God, by thy name” (*PW* 350). However, the passing of God has become inevitable as he is “smitten.” Swinburne wants to reproduce Rome’s fall to the Italians in his poem. As the Vatican could not withstand the Italian army, God is depicted as unable to re-assert his order unto the society. “… thy death is upon thee, O Lord. / And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds through the wind of her wings / Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things,” announces Swinburne (*PW* 350). God has mastery over the order of society, life and death at last – God and his hold on the masses dissipates back into “the waste of the dead void.”

Similar to “Hymn of Man,” “Hertha” announces the death of God and instates Hertha as an elemental god. Swinburne’s use of the archaic “hertha,” which means hearth in Anglo-Saxon language, signifies that monotheistic religion is a recent phenomenon that has no continuity in time: In that sense, Swinburne’s denouncement of Christianity becomes not a new condition but the restoration of a previous period. Moreover, in “Hymn,” man and God are depicted with masculine attributes, whereas “Hertha” puts forward the idea of feminine creative force. Throughout the poem, Swinburne’s repetition of seed, branch, bough, tree, soul, time, and force associates his goddess Hertha with fertility. Hertha, then, is a continuation of ancient goddesses of mythology who were also depicted with similar attributes. With the introduction of Hertha, Swinburne’s man becomes equal with the woman, and Hertha is defined as the divine

mother, mother of Man with no authority above her. Swinburne employs quintain with four short lines and the fifth longer line: The longer line comments on the ideas put forward in previous lines to complete the meaning of each stanza. Saville highlights the linguistic tension between the words of religious structures expressed in short lines and "a new, liberating formulation that performs its own message" on the closing lines of stanzas (*Victorian* 237). Swinburne uses short and subdued lines to contrast the oppressed state of mind under the authority of religion and longer lines that express similar concepts without any restrictions.

From the first stanza, the speaker of the poem identifies herself as Hertha. Using the first-person singular pronoun, Hertha asserts herself as preceding Gods: "Out of me the years roll; / Out of me God and man; / I am equal and whole" (*PW* 340). Swinburne places monotheistic gods under the authority of Hertha and conceptualises it as a man-made construct again. The second stanza shows Hertha as the eternal whole out of which gods, men and everything are born. This state of omnipresence is illustrated to a greater extent in the following stanza through linguistic devices when Hertha asserts: "Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird: before God was, I am. / Beside or above me / Naught is there to go" (*PW* 340). Swinburne limits God into the historical past while the existence of Hertha is expressed in the Present tense, thereby stretching her existence before and after the time of God. Moreover, existence beyond Hertha is depicted as impossible because nothing seems to fall outside of her existence. The longer lines of the following stanzas contemplate the relationship between the believers and Hertha and assert:

> The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the soul and the body that is.
> ………………………………………………………………………………
> I am thou, whom thou seekest to find him; find thou but thyself, thou art I.
> ………………………………………………………………………………
> The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower, the dust which is God. (*PW* 340)

Thompson states that Swinburne's goddess is created as "a symbol of the unity of Being;" therefore, she inhabits "all of the contrarieties within life" (119). By identifying as the subject and the object of the faith, Hertha creates her mythology in which men become a part of her existence rather than her subject. This concept of religion, as a

union instead of a hierarchical chain of relations, was what Swinburne thought faith should be. He believed faith should stand side by side with believers instead of constituting a precipitous connection.

Hertha self-identifies as a mother figure in the middle section of the poem as she inquires: "Hast thou known how I fashion'd thee, / Child, underground?" (*PW* 340). In a series of questions, she demands men to ponder the similarities between them and nature as they are both creations of a single mother. She invites all these "brethren" to question what or who might have the capacity to create and asserts: "Prophet nor poet / Nor tripod nor throne / Nor spirit nor flesh can make answer, but only thy mother alone" (*PW* 340). McGann and Dawson acknowledge Swinburne's strategy to create an analogy between the old creeds and this new mother cult. McGann states that "these distinctions establish originary Being as mortal rather than transcendental. 'Born, and not made' reinforces and extends these distinctions by itself and exposing language - the mother tongue" (*Swinburne* 292). Similarly, Dawson argues that the poem "endeavours to reclaim the earth from the failed guardianship of a male divinity" (46). Hertha abandons abstract notions of seeds, trees, boughs, branches and flowers for the sake of being a mother because it creates a dichotomy between herself and Christian God as a father. This concept allows the reader to perceive a biological connection with Hertha akin to Adam as the first human.

By means of instating herself as the mother of humanity, Hertha denies the possibility of another creation myth. She asserts that she is "Mother, not maker," and man is "Born, and not made" (*PW* 340). From the fourteenth to sixteenth stanzas, she accuses humanity of fashioning their gods: "Though her children forsake her, / Allured or afraid, / Praying prayers to the God of their fashion, she stirs not for all that have pray'd" (*PW* 340). Here, Swinburne sustains his own myth of creation and deifies Man as "the highest manifestation of nature … Here God represents the collective soul of man"; man and god, therefore, are one and the same (Thompson 106). However, men abandon their Mother God to worship the gods of their creations. They erect statues, laws and establishments unto themselves only to become slaves. Swinburne introduces rod as the

symbol of authority in the lines “A creed is a rod, /And a crown is of night;” (*PW* 341). Swinburne depicts religion as an insidious force over men, associating faith with punishment and crown with darkness. The crown is dark because it provides no comfort to people and proves to be a punishment in the end. Rod as a phallic image is reminiscent of monotheism's masculine authority, which Swinburne repeatedly uses in his poetry. Hertha urges humanity to disown these false gods so that they can turn inward and “grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as the light.” She reminds that man is a part of her and asserts:

> I am in thee to save thee,
> As my soul in thee saith;
> Give thou as I gave thee,
> Thy life-blood and breath,
> …………………………..
> The free life of thy living,
> Be the gift of it free;
> Not as servant to lord, nor as master to slave, shalt thou give thee to me. (*PW* 341)

Hertha distinguishes herself from other forms of faith, as not outside the human body but in its “life-blood and breath, / … / The free life of thy living” (*PW* 341). She demands a new form of compliance outside hierarchical relations: men to Hertha, not as servants, enslaved people or subjects but as equals. Perceiving man as “an agent of enlightenment,” Hertha promises that one “the morning of manhood is risen, and the shadowless soul is in sight,” when men will be free of all limitations of old creeds (McGann *Swinburne* 293). To ensure complete salvation, Hertha enumerates several promises; she ensures that “Stars caught in my branches /Make day of the dark,” and that “I bid you but be; / I have need not of prayer; / I have need of you free” (*PW* 340; 341). Accordingly, Swinburne illustrates that an actual deity has no need for prayer, any form of physical suffering, nor does it necessitate pain to dominate the masses with the premise of belated salvation. The immortal god, he argues, needs humanity to be free. The close of the poem builds on that premise and urges man to see how Christian “God trembles in heaven, and his angels are white with the terror of God. / … / And his hour taketh hold on him stricken, the last of his infinite year” (*PW* 342). The poem closes with this image of destruction, which aims to dethrone the established religion before it

can install a new order of faith, the main principle of which is “Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I” (*PW* 342).

“Christmas Antiphones” summarises the process of man’s rise from the subject of religion to being liberated from religion. Compared to other poems in the group and the volume, it has a more subdued voice in creating a new order of faith. The name antiphon, which is derived from Latin, means a short sentence recited before a psalm or chant. The form of the poem exhibits this quality as it consists of concise lines. In contrast to “Hymn” and “Hertha,” shorter lines signify the harmony and simplicity of the poem. The name also corresponds with the poem’s structure as Swinburne uses a liturgical verse to criticise religious practices. The songs of Yuletide are transformed into a pamphlet of atheism through Swinburne’s manipulation. Newton states that Swinburne benefitted from his information of the faith and its article, making use of verbal qualities of the Bible, the Anglican Prayer Book and the Anglican Catechism despite his antagonism towards the religion (“Development of Thought” 104). Indeed, while the previous poems are written from a static point of view that attacks religion from the outside, “Christmas Antiphones” starts from the inside of the church and moves outside gradually. The speaker starts inside the church as a believer and goes beyond the church as the poetic movement develops. This is, of course, not a departure from the church as a physical location of worship but a disavowal of the concept of established religion.

The poem has three parts, all symbolising the state of the speaker and the believers of the period. The first part, “In Church,” appears to concede the truth of Christ and Christian faith from the onset. The speaker addresses Christ as a believer, so this section is dominated by the vocative “Thou.” From the first stanza onwards, the speaker acknowledges the crucifixion of Christ as an act to save humanity, as it calls him out as “Saviour, at thy birth” (*PW* 357). The liturgical depiction of Christ is preserved as the speaker defines his faith as a shelter from hardships of life in the following lines: “In thy secret breast / Sheltering souls opprest / From the heat of life;” (*PW* 358). It is possible that Swinburne composed this first section of the poem to please his mother

and prepare his faithful readers for a shock (Louis "His Gods" 114-15). Inside the church, the concept of religion seems effective as the speaker prays to Christ. However, all within the church proves not to be perfect as the speaker starts questioning the reasons underlying the death of humanity's saviour and asks:

> Lord, what worth in earth
> Drew thee down to die?
> What therein was worth,
> Lord, thy death and birth? (*PW* 358)

The speaker explains the condition of the believers and searches for an authority figure who would continue Christ's mission of saving humanity but receives no answers. Notwithstanding, the faith of the speaker remains intact as the last lines of the section falls into a prayer-like song: Bid oppressions cease; / Bid the night be peace; /Bid the day be born" (*PW* 358).

In the second part of the poem, "Outside Church," the poetic movement shifts to the outside as the speaker focuses on the believers. Along with the change in addressing, being outside the church signifies the lessening effect of religion. The speaker shifts its addressing from "thou" to "we" as the lines are no longer directed at the crucifix. "We" is a collective subject of all believers and the oppressed masses. Believers are depicted as "weary," "blind," and having "hope of nought" (*PW* 358-59). The unanswered prayers of the first part illustrate the despair of people in the second part:

> We with strife of life
> Worn till all life cease,
> Want, a whetted knife,
> Sharpening strife on strife,
> How should we love peace? (*PW* 359)

The speaker contrasts the oppressed "we" with "Ye" of the following stanzas. Swinburne strives to create a dichotomy between churchgoers and the churchmen as he describes "Ye" as the wealthy benefactors of the church: "Ye whose meat is sweet / And your wine-cup red, /Us beneath your feet" (*PW* 359). The dark nights of the believers are juxtaposed with bright nights of churchmen, as is the poor state of people

who labour under hunger and sickness with the comfort and luxuries of the churchmen. Swinburne portrays how deep the gap between two parties of the church runs and questions God's judgment. The speaker comments on the oppressive might of the churchmen as the churchgoers ask:

> Hath your God no rod,
> That ye tread so light?
> Man on us as God,
> God as man hath trod,
> Trod us down with might" (*PW* 359)

Swinburne recites the image of the rod as the punishment of God and inquires whether it implies to all believers or only those who lacked the agency in their lives. Louis comments that it is in the second part, where Swinburne illustrates how "Church has exploited the sufferings of the historical Jesus, … so the Church binds the People in the iron bands of Christian dogma" ("His Gods" 168-69). The oppressed masses seem unable to feel the warming grace of Christ because they lack the material gains of the churchmen, and, in time, they began revolting against God: "We whose right to light / Heaven's high noon denies," (*PW* 359). At the end of this part, the churchgoers realise the hypocritic treatment of religion and turn away from religion altogether.

The third part of the poem is "Beyond Church," as the churchgoers renounced their faith. In the first two parts, the image of historical Jesus lurks between the lines as the lost saviour in the former and the enabler of the oppression in the latter. However, Christ disappears and is replaced with Man in the third part. Swinburne uses the same strategy he employed in "Hymn of Man" to mirror republican victory over religion in this poem as well. The oppressed and ignored masses revolt against the church, communicated through the change from vocative "We" to "Man." At this point in the poem, "The god is merely human morality; Man will save Man as God will not" (Louis "His Gods" 64). The merciful God of Christianity is made into a diabolical image, the embodiment of the rod of authority and is to be replaced with the liberated man in the third part. The first stanza demonstrates the frustration of the believers as they announce, "Watch for change, and weep / That no change is found;" (*PW* 360). The

change they could not find within the body of the church is located beyond the church. The following stanzas present the brotherhood of man as the new saviour of people:

> Man shall do for you,
> Men the sons of man,
> What no God would do
> ………………………..
> Brotherhood of good,
> Equal laws and rights, (*PW* 360)

Swinburne's speaker falls into a long monologue of the premises of this new faith as it recounts the concepts of liberty and common goals of men. The equal treatment of all humanity is also mentioned in the following lines: "For no sect elect / …. / Whom should man reject / From man's common board?" (*PW* 360). To the chagrin of his Christian readers, Swinburne starts a comparison with God and man as he praises the virtues of men as the polar opposite of follies of gods:

> All men shall have light.
> …………………………
> Ay, though blind were we,
> None shall choose but see
> When that day is born. (*PW* 361)

He promises that republican order and the brotherhood of men will not err, where the religions failed and positions men, once more, at the centre of the whole symbolic order.

2.2. REPRESENTATION OF GENDER ROLES IN SWINBURNE'S POETRY

One of the most repeated and central concepts in Swinburne's poetry is the image of the rod. It represents oppression, hierarchical structures, and submission to another person. Swinburne employs this symbol to criticise religion and the social order of the period. He also uses it to highlight intensive sensations and their effect on his creative faculties. However, Swinburne was not the originator of this concept; instead, he observed the various forms of punishment inflicted on the other, the deviant, the abnormal and combined them within a single, powerful image: the rod. Although it was secreted behind closed doors and private clubs, flagellation literature of the period reveals the inner workings and consequences of corporal discipline in effect and analyses the power

dynamics between the domineering and submissive parties. The birch and rod are clearly phallic symbols based on the idea of masculine superiority of the period. They are tools of domination against religious, social, cultural or sexual others, and Swinburne's *the Flogging Block* analyses this process while providing a superficial criticism of the public schooling system. Another strategy Swinburne used to illustrate social constructs was to focus on these concepts in his poem. Subdued image of women, sexuality as a flaw and heterosexual norms are examples of such contemporary constructs which Swinburne highlighted. In his poems, he transforms subdued Victorian women into strong characters who dominate their male counterparts in similar ways to the schoolmaster in *the Flogging Block*. He uses the Victorian aversion to the description of physical bodies and sexuality as the basis in many of his poems to firstly shock the readers and secondly to display the potency of his craftsman. He obeys his principle of aestheticism and seeks to express every aspect of human life within his art – the beautiful, the ugly and even the morbid.

2.2.1. Rod, Birch, and *The Flogging Block*

The birch or rod has been a part of the education system throughout history. The classic education system was based on the principle of disciplining the pupils, and the rod had always been an essential element of corporal punishment. In *Flagellation & the Flagellants: A History of the Rod*, William Cooper explains how the rod came down from kings and tyrants to the schoolteachers (2). Corporal punishment took the form of a whip, rod and birch in history. Since before the Roman Empire, the whip was used to punish the enslaved people, and this practice created its own body of literature. Artists and people who championed this practice were called *the Flagellants*, who spread across Europe and even to England. The practice was later adopted by sects and orders of Christian monks and nuns in monasteries where the severe corporal punishment was seen as a cathartic ordeal to purge the believers of their sins (Cooper 2-7). From the perspective of the Church, corporal punishment and physical suffering were advocated because they mirrored the suffering of Christ and other saints in history (Geltner 16). Therefore, they were a part of everyday rituals, especially in radical sects. Being birched or punished with the rod signified "the varieties of social otherness" in the society and marked "that society's normative boundaries" (Geltner 26). In the household or any unit

of society, corporal punishment was applied to subservient parties, whether novices, enslaved people, family members, or any other category where they were punishments “aimed at indexing internal deviants … [and] construing cultural and political deviants” (Geltner 41-42). The education system, which initially borrowed most of its methodologies and principles from religious teachings, subsequently adopted corporal punishment in the form of rod and birch. It was used as a tool of punishment and correction of mistakes. Although the rod constituted the subject of grave, sentimental, and satirical poems – or *whippiads*, *rodiads*, *birchiads* – such poems were deemed abnormal for “the general reader” (Cooper 15). Accordingly, poetry concerning rods and birches became the interest of gentlemen’s clubs and private circles.

In England, schoolboys of Eton, Harrow or other prestigious institutions were subject to the rod “not for any offence, or omission, or unwillingness or incapacity to learn, but upon the abstract theory that they ought to be flogged” (Cooper 427). Eton had a reputation of corporal discipline and even had its standard rod, which “consisted of three long birchen twigs (no branches);” every pupil was charged for their birching, which turned corporal punishment into its own economic system (Cooper 435). Cooper notes that “there was not the least disgrace attached to a flogging” at Eton as it was a test of courage for some pupils even though, by the time of public schools of the Victorian period, the practice was replaced by the rigid drills of current education theories (436, 444). When Swinburne first came to Eton, rod and birch must have started to be replaced by cane or fines. The Security from Violence Act of 1863 and ensuing bills of the parliament championed flogging against juvenile criminal offences while the practice was waning in the school system (Geltner 72). However, flogging or corporal punishment remained in practice until the end of the twentieth century, when it was legally banned in public schools.

It is not clear when or how Swinburne became interested and involved in the literature concerning flagellation. In his letters, he repeatedly asserts that he was flogged as a student at Eton and looks at those moments fondly as if to have enjoyed them. Indeed, he believed being flogged was a rite of passage, arguing that birching “had been the

hereditary apanage of the young aristocrat - the heirloom of patrician adolescence" (*The Swinburne Letters* 3:192). In one of his letters, Swinburne states as follows: "I can tell you it is still a matter of daily schoolboy experience. Birching is better than the cursed system of impositions - 'poenas' as the Eton phrase is – manlier and wholesomer" (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:291). Therefore, the poems in *the Flogging Block* are reportedly based on Swinburne's personal experiences, while its characters are parodies or obscure allusions to his friends and teachers from Eton. The manuscripts seem like a clear copy with a small number of corrections, but there is, of course, the possibility that Swinburne started writing these poems during or immediately after his Oxford days and kept them under revision for an extended period. Fuller suggests that Swinburne's motivations as "writ[ing] tongue-in-cheek … for occasional fun, words carrying plainly the opposite meaning to that intended" (268). Rooksby explains the matter from a similar perspective and states that "comedy was a way of controlling … anxiety and fear" for Swinburne (35). Parallel to his correspondence, he uses a mocking, light-hearted approach to a seemingly serious subject. His literary reputation was sheltered from harsher criticisms through removing any "unequivocally perverse" meanings in his poems, by arguing that such influences were based on literature rather than his or his acquaintances' experiences, or that they were written for the sole goal of shocking the readers (Praz 214). Subsequently, his involvement with sadist or flagellant poetry is often disregarded in assessing his oeuvre because he did not publish any poem on the subject matter, not under his name. For Swinburne, Sade represented the exact opposite of a Victorian author; he was the antithesis of the morality of the period. After Milnes introduced him to Sade for the first time in 1862, Swinburne wrote the following lines:

> Show me the point, the pleasure of all this ... *I do say that a schoolboy, set to write on his own stock of experience ... may make and has made more of a sharp short school flogging* of two or three dozen cuts than you of your enormous interminable inflictions … you book misses aim, with half of your materials another man would have built a better palace of sin … *You take yourself for a great pagan physiologist and philosopher – you are a Christian ascetic bent on earning the salvation of the soul through the mortification of the flesh. ... You worship the phallus as those ascetics worshipped the cross ...* (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:54-58, emphasis added)

In his lengthy analysis of Sade's urges and underlying motifs, Swinburne asserted that rather than being an inventive genius, Sade made use of a very Christian concept of

punishment, which was what Swinburne's use of rod symbolises in his poetry. His contempt of Sade's work and rebuttal of it being an exceptional study of flogging indicate that he has already begun his study on the subject by that time. His comments also illustrate that his relationship with Sade was unlike his admiration of Baudelaire. Swinburne sounds adamant in surpassing Sade in flagellant poetry because even as an Eton schoolboy, he believes that he can express this experience better than Sade. Concerning the obscenity of the subject, he compares Sade's work to religious literature and comments that "two writers whom I cannot refrain from quoting, God, and Sade. I am aware that they are both obscene and blasphemous" (*The Swinburne Letters* 1:195).

The general tone of criticism of flagellation literature is that one of the parties was corrupted or manipulated, and literary work is the outcome of that abusive relationship. However, this abnormal interest was a by-product of disciplinary practices and conventional methods which were being used throughout society. Because being physically punished had been the primary emotional reaction they were exposed to, Swinburne and his friends normalised and later fetishised birching. Fuller claims that Swinburne's poems are inaccessible to the public as they "have been classified as pornographic" by the British Museum and lists "Arthur's Flogging" and "Reginald's Flogging," and "A Boy's First Flogging at Birchminster" in *The Whippingham Papers* as Swinburne's works (256). Swinburne also allegedly collaborated with his publisher Hutton on *Flagellation* and *Romance of the Rod* (Lang xlviii). During his efforts to change publishers, Swinburne complained to Howell that "[Hutton] may have some papers relating to me in the mass of his collection ... I once gave him a list … [in which] I had explained the postures and actions of 'swishing' to be shown in detail" (*The Swinburne Letters* 2:227). He became specifically cautious on such matters after the rumours relating to his connection with Solomon in 1873 (Rooksby 205). His decision to keep his writings on flogging after his experience with Hutton and the scandal of Solomon implies that there were extraneous elements to his reasoning – among which could be the legislative efforts to limit flogging to minor criminals and the Whipping Act of 1861 (Pulham 148). The scandal and the prospect of becoming the subject of an official inquiry because of Hutton's publications must have frightened Swinburne more

than the critical uproar of *Poems and Ballads,* though not enough to destroy or discard the body of work he laboured on since his Eton days.

The Flogging Block opens up with an invocation of “red-cheek’d Muse” of the flogging block written by two fictional authors: Rufus Rodworthy (Algernon Clavering) and Barebum Birchingham (Bertram Bellingham) *(The Flogging* 13). Names of authors, and characters throughout the poem, are puns on birch, red hair, bareness and rod. Algernon Clavering is evidently a parody of Swinburne’s name. As for the surname Clavering, it is a wordplay of “cleaver”, which is a tool used by butchers to chop meat. Swinburne’s preference for this word implies that he has already endured such punishment and is manly enough to bear the markings. Swinburne uses the rod as the wand or staff to symbolise authority and power in the poem. The lines “Scholastic Dame, revered of Church & State / Whose Lords to be have writhed beneath the Birch,” address the rod as a female authority figure, arguing that its use is approved by the Church as a form of divine justice and by the state as a form of political authority *(The Flogging* 13).

Swinburne’s creative excitement was mirrored on his manuscripts *The Flogging Block* through textual alterations and over-repetition of certain words. Swinburne’s rhythm and focus on individual words intensify as the schoolmaster quickens his blows of the birch. Physical displeasure of the body and the movement of the birch are mirrored. Swinburne implies an intimate connection between the body and the birch, arguing that the birch was designed for that specific purpose and anatomical area rather than being a long, hard surface to deliver pain. Masculinity and manliness are foregrounded in terms of the words used, such as “brawny”, which means muscular and “stalwart”, which means physically strong *(The Flogging* 14). Swinburne’s emphasis on the physical strength of the punished children means that the birching is meant for curbing the boy’s characters more than physically dominating them: more physically stronger the boys, it becomes more crucial to subdue their characters so that their physical existence and urges do not become the dominant force in their life. The prologue also explains the primary function of the rod as a tool of teaching:

> Till Heart & Head the rhythmic Lesson learn
> From wounds that redden & from Stripes that burn,
> As Twig by Twig imprints the Crimson Sign in turn,
> Till, faint with Fear, bowed Head & trembling
> Heart Learn of the Bottom, of that Lowliest Part,
> The Lesson learnt & taught at. once with Shame & Smart, *(The Flogging* 14)

The lessons are imprinted on the bodies of the students as the scars are supposed to be reminders of what they learned. Although the epilogue claims "the beardless Poet" seemingly enjoy these strokes of the birch, the repetition and the rhythm demonstrates that the teacher's discipline physically exerts authority *(The Flogging* 13).

Swinburne's speaker in *the Flogging Block* resembles the speaker of dramatic monologues in that it is a third party distanced from the action as an observer. However, the speaker occasionally imparts sympathy towards the flogging pupil. For instance, in the following section of the prologue:

> Scenes once but too familiar seem to rise:
> Again I see & shudder at my Doom,
> The dark high Precinct of the Flogging-Room:
> The Block so familiar to my Knee,
> The Birch to none more cruel than to me;
> With Arm raised high I see my Master stand
> And grasp the brandished Rod with sinewy Hand; *(The Flogging* 15)

The "dark high precinct" emphasises the room used for the flogging, where the speaker remembers himself being punished and subsequently empathises with "the bare breached boy" *(The Flogging* 15). In the same section, the following lines reveal another autobiographical aspect of the poem:

> My Brother & my Cousin holding up my Shirt:
> I see them smile & leer upon other;
> Ah cruel Cousin! Ah the more cruel Brother!
> The piercing Pain my tender Bum endures
> Adds Pleasure to the Painlessness of yours *(The Flogging* 15)

This section is probably a reference to Swinburne's older cousin who studied at Eton during the same period. At Eton, flogging was sometimes called "fagging", and it imparted some authority to older students who were allowed to punish younger students

(Cassidy *Algernon* 27). It is possible that his older cousin witnessed Swinburne being flogged as he depicts himself as a regular recipient of the punishment in his letters. By doing so, the older students would assume the role of authority and avoid punishment for themselves. In a sense, they became an authority apparatus to avoid punishment and join in punishing others. Swinburne demonstrates the latter aspect in the following section:

> And while my Breech expects another Dozen
> I hear my Brother whisper to my Cousin —
> 'Ah! won't the Youngster's Bottom smart, by G— !
> Ah! won't it blush & redden from the Rod!
> ……………………………………………..
> I call your Brother's Flagellation Fun:
> I like to see the Birch-Twigs tickling Alg-rn-n.' *(The Flogging* 16)

While Algernon is being punished, his cousin and brother stand witness and seemingly enjoy his punishment. The stark contrast between these two students and the use of the first-person singular pronoun in preceding lines turn the scene into a political dichotomy: "I smart, I writhe, I groan, I moan, I sob, / I wince, I flinch, I howl, I roar with pain, / 'And weep the more because I weep in vain'" *(The Flogging* 16). From the perspective of this scene, it is comprehensible why Swinburne saw no connection between the birching and sexual gratification: for him, this punishment was undoubtedly a power play between the schoolmaster and his pupils.

The Victorians believed that corporal punishment was a form of submission to God as a religious authority or to the law as a secular authority. The proper reaction to physical hardship was silence and endurance, which imparted agency and masculine power to the sufferer: "[b]y eliciting silent self-control, flogging presents the schoolboy as an active participant in the event: he becomes the nascent masculine subject as he "does" rather than "suffers" (Rose 509). The physical wounds inflicted by the birch becomes a permanent testimony of their courage. In the structure of punishment, being flogged connotes mistake and error while avoiding even administering imparts a sense of righteousness (Vincent 280). The only way to learn from this punishment is by submitting to the will or rather the birch or the master, and the only agency the flogged

pupil has is an attempt to control the urge to show pain and displeasure. Swinburne lays bare this condition when the speaker asserts: “Each time the Twigs bend round across my Bum / Pain bids “Cry out,’ but Honour bids ‘Be dumb’” *(The Flogging* 17). Flogging is seen as a rite of passage into manhood and masculinity; therefore, it is inherently related to social constructs of masculinity. Algernon’s pain symbolises his innocence and childhood, while honour symbolises manhood becoming a more significant concept in his life. Assuming the proper reaction, he passes this trial of courage and moulds into contemporary masculinity. The hierarchical relations between the older and younger students are repeated through the concepts of major-minor, which also describes the positions in flagellant sexual relations.

The first eclogue of the volume is Algernon’s birching. While Swinburne alters his name in the prologue by removing the last two vowels, he shows no hesitation to spell out his name fully in eclogues. “Algernon’s Flogging” demonstrates how the birching is used to instigate order and discipline:

> I’ll do justice on Algernon’s naked posteriors.
> I’ll cut up his buttocks; I’ll tickle his hide;
> ……………………………………………
> [Reginald] There are just seven twigs, & each twig is in bud
> And I’ll bet you the very first cut will draw blood. *(The Flogging* 21)

Tickling a person’s hide is a way to subvert his will and curb him into submission. The master, accordingly, announces that he will insult the pride of Algernon. Moreover, Reginald’s assertion of seven twigs implies that other pupils perceive this punishment not only as being from the master but also from God. The number seven signifies the totality of perfection and completion in Judeo-Christian mythology, the seventh day of the week represents God’s day and churchgoing for the pious believers. Subsequently, Algernon’s punishment with a birch of seven twigs conceptualises this act as divine retribution. The master enlists other students to restrain Algernon: “Here, Edward, my boy, hold up Algernon’s shirt. / You and George must between you — make sure that he shan’t / Rub his bottom however it smarts — and he can’t” *(The Flogging* 22). He

restraints any means to alleviate his pupil's pain; for the master, this is about controlling and breaking down the pupil's will.

The reasons for Algernon's punishment conform to the idea as mentioned earlier of divine retribution as they are listed as "O, please sir — I'll never shirk school or miss church" and "Oh, I'll never be late when the chapel bell rings" *(The Flogging* 22). Accordingly, Algernon is being punished for being late to the Church and the chapel by the schoolmaster, who perceives his authority extending into the spiritual lives of his pupils. The master feels the need to assert his authority using flogging instead of more modern methods such as writing drills and a monetary fee. Other reasons for the punishment are revealed in the following lines:

> O, I'll never play truant to shoot or to fish
> …………………………………………….
> O, I'll never break bounds, sir, to hunt or to ride.
> But do, sir, for pity's sake, spare my backside! *(The Flogging* 23)

Algernon is being punished for avoiding activities aimed at building physical strength and agility. Moreover, these are predominantly considered manly, masculine activities, and they foreground a cult of masculinity. Algernon is being "scourged for" non-conformist behaviours. Algernon's eclogue also introduces a chorus whose function is to echo the state of helplessness on behalf of the pupil and invoke a sense of doom:

> Look at that! & that! & that!
> 'Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Spat! Spat! Spat!
> Look, he's wriggling, like a fish —
> Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! *(The Flogging* 24)

Onomatopoeic words are used throughout the poem; they create an audio-visual image of the action and aim to intensify the emotional expressions of the speaker. Swinburne employs these lines to build empathy between the subject of the punishment and the reader. The speaker and the master are conceived as unable to hold such emotional connection and are even adversely affected by such appeals: "No crying here! does it smart, my boy? / … / No crying, I say! I'll have no crying here, sir!" *(The Flogging* 26).

Similar to shirking school and physical activities, crying turns to effeminate behaviour and is therefore punishable.

As a result of intense punishment, Algernon undergoes a psychological breakdown and starts to perceive the birching rod as a distinct entity. Flogging is no longer executed by the master but by the Rod. Swinburne emulates rodiads and birchiads with that strategy. Algernon and the master's speeches are interrupted by the rod's whipping. After this psychological breakdown, Algernon ceases his appeals and starts making promises to the schoolmaster. He decides to submit to him, which was the desired outcome for the many Victorian parents – that their children should submit to the authority in the shape of the father in the household, priest in the Church, and the saints and Christ as the benefactors of all humanity. This aspect of education is also communicated by the master's various addresses to his pupils. He addresses his pupils such as "young dog," "young mule," "dunce,", "young button," "young whelp," "young rascal," "young rogue," "young villain," "the stubborn young mule," and "scapegrace" in the entirety of *The Flogging Block*. These expressions revolve around the youth and high-spirited nature of the schoolboys. As Mangan contends, this obsession with punishing the young "appeared, on occasion, to be opportunities for sadistic enjoyment … these pedagogues were sometimes imbued with motives other than those to which they gave public utterance" (36). As the discipline was perceived as an improvement by the families, so was the flogging despite the possibility of ulterior motives on behalf of the masters even when the masters regarded their pupils as nothing more than animals to be trained, broken down, and tamed.

In "Reginald's Flogging," Swinburne turns to the relationship among students. As mentioned before, older pupils were allowed to administer punishment to their minors, which was both an incentive to comply with the school's and the master's rules and an opportunity to avoid punishment. The master declares

> And the boy that hits hardest, & gives him most pain
> And makes him cry loudest for mercy in vain,
> And flogs him still harder while roaring for mercy

Shall get off his next flogging *(The Flogging* 40)

Two older pupils, George and Percy, join in seemingly for the sake of thrill, but it is a latent urge to avoid pain and discomfort. The master excites this anxiety of the pupils in the following lines:

And tonight or tomorrow will smart for it, God
Knows — smart for it soundly, when under the rod –
Unless in redemption, you see, of my pledge he
Can avoid it by laying the lash upon Redgie
More soundly than others *(The Flogging* 42)

The master's idea of seeking redemption with punishment and punishing others is a Christian idea; especially, self-punishment was seen as a sacrificial act by radical extremist sects. The difference between the severity of the punishment and the reason for it, "whispering in church," accentuates the arrogance of the schoolmaster *(The Flogging* 42). A similar extremity is depicted later in "Percy's Flogging" when Percy, who is older and more powerfully built than his peers, is punished. The master whips Percy "with all the strength of his arm" and "with all his might" because he perceives Percy as "the cock of the school" *(The Flogging* 65, 66). By breaking down him, the master aims to intimidate the entire body of students into submission. He asserts that "You young rascal! you ought to be whipped with a cat / Like the big boys in gaols: but I'll give your fill / Of this birch" *(The Flogging* 65). The cat is the punishment instrument, known as the cat o'nine tails, which originated in the Royal Army. The master believes that disobedient pupils should be treated in a fashion fit for those deemed un-human or subhuman.

In addition to avoiding school and Church, Swinburne lists failure in learning Latin as another reason to be flogged. In "Willie's Flogging" and "Charlie's Flogging," the master punishes students due to their inability to memorise Latin word inflexions. The master is depicted as beating the knowledge into the minds and upon bodies of the pupils:

What is 'maria'?

……………………………….
Upon my word!
Have you looked at this lesson? But no, if you had
You would be what you are not – an idiot, my lad *(The Flogging* 71)

Latin lessons were the cornerstone of classical scholar thought; therefore, it was of utmost importance that students know Latin well. The language and classic literature classes were distinctive features of the bourgeoisie class, and they separated Eton and other prestigious schools from emerging industrial schools. When the master relays the same punishment on Charlie, the students are portrayed as resigned to their conditions as Algernon tells Charlie: "And sooner or later you know it must come – / It was certain – the birch & the block & & your bum / Were made for each other. It's just hic, haec, hoc! *(The Flogging* 86). Swinburne addresses a wide range of reasons for the flogging, and it is after he exhausted the length and breadth of master's excuses, he reveals his aim in writing *the Flogging Block*:

Flagellation and Algernon (**Swish!**) must appear
Synonymous terms to the younger boys here:
When they hear but the word flagellation, I guess,
That word must remind them of Algernon. [Yes] *(The Flogging* 103)

The master's lines elucidate why he is so harsh on Algernon and the menacing influence of cautionary tales on a textual level – that the punishment should transform Algernon into the embodiment of wrongdoing. They also account for Swinburne's literary focus on such practises. Swinburne had been subjected to similar if not the same form punishment, and he desired to conceptualise flagellant literature in different terms than Sade and other poets had done so far. He was conscious of the sexual aspect of flogging from his exposure to related literature and through his acquaintances in the Hogarth Club. At the same time, Swinburne recognised this practice as the apparatus of class distinction and authority. As a poet, critic and individual who understood the arbitrariness of any form of authority, he must have felt responsible to express his stance on the matter. However, his own principles of Aestheticism prevented him from turning his poetry into the handmaid of ideology. Accordingly, he resorted to expressing his perspective on the subject matter in a heroic poem rather than a political pamphlet.

2.2.2. Women and Fleshed-Out Bodies

The critical reception of *Poems and Ballads* was determined by reviews of Robert Buchanan. Buchanan described the author of *Poems and Ballads* as follows:

> … like an unclean fiery imp from the pit. The vindictive and scornful apostle of a crushing iron-shod despair, or else he is the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs. … the absence of judgment and reason, the reckless contempt for anything like a balance, and the audacious counterfeiting of strong and noble passion (qtd. in Hyder *Critical Heritage* 39).

Buchanan's review was a part of the attack on the circle of PRB due to their sensual depictions. Under the name of Thomas Maitland, Robert Buchanan expressed a complete criticism of sensualism in his article "The Fleshly School of Poetry" in *the Contemporary Review* in October 1871 (Cassidy "Robert Buchanan" 73). Buchanan expanded his arguments into a book under the same title the following year, which itemised the components of the phenomenon in a more organised manner and defined it as "the cancer of all society … shooting its ulcerous roots deeper and deeper" (*Fleshly School* 1). His criticism was, in effect, against foreign influences perverting the artists and the readers rather than being limited to salacious depictions. He asserts that Swinburne and his like-minded friends imported morbid and immoral influences for the sake of innovation (*Fleshly School* 28). In the case of Swinburne's poetry, Buchanan suggests that it is only suitable for "abnormal types of diseased lust and lustful disease. … [just] for the sake of pointing an epigram and delighting the fool" (*Fleshly School* 19-20). Buchanan was the epitome of Victorian prudery and saw no reason to withhold his discomfort with Swinburne's women characters who "bite, scratch, scream, bubble, munch, sweat, writhe, twist, wriggle, foam, and in a general way slaver over their lovers" (*Fleshly School* 44). He projected his anxiety upon the readers and warned them about vampiric, leprous and masculine depictions of women. For Buchanan, Swinburne's characters were devoid of the foremost characteristics of femininity – a capacity to reproduce, willingness to be subdued and conformity.

The controversy resurfaced in 1875 when Swinburne published a tongue-in-cheek parody of Buchanan in *the Examiner*; Buchanan took legal action, as a result of which

the Examiner was fined for libel, thereby marking the end of the affair for Swinburne (Cassidy *Algernon* 142-45). Buchanan's reaction against PRB was in no way unique; the Victorian reader's sensibility was intolerant towards curiosity on sensuality and seemed unwilling to step outside the established values. Swinburne stood in opposition to this condition and problematised gender, class, and art by choosing lesbianism, hermaphroditism, necrophilia and sado-masochism as subject matters of his poetry. Swinburne became the recipient of "metaphors of contagion" as a result of his capacity to upset "bourgeois notions of respectable culture" (Seagroatt 180, 183). Morgan explains that, for the Victorians, sexuality and desire only resided in the male body and women were supposed to deny their urges and remain inert (206). Having a sexual drive or even realising the bodily pleasures of sex were considered masculine; accordingly, prostitution was immoral because it marked unfemininity. Swinburne threatened the "idealisation of woman's nature as spiritual and chaste" by creating an alternate "gynosocial or all-female world" where women could explore sexuality independent of male bodies (Morgan 206). Men were supposed to dominate and control while women were conceptualised as mechanical bodies of reproductive systems which would become "incapacitated by menstruation and pregnancy" (Steinbach 168).

Society was preoccupied with the utilitarian nature of the reproductive system of both men and women. Medical professionals of the period believed sexual energy was limited, and participating in masturbation, homosexuality, or even heterosexual intercourse, which was not directed towards reproduction, would "deplete" and "dilute" that energy (Stalker 75). Swinburne's characters in *Poems and Ballads* were immoral from that perspective because they depicted sexual acts outside the reproductive functions: his characters turned a socially sanctioned physical act into fantasies and pleasurable sensations. Accordingly, a common feature of Swinburne's poems is the barrenness of sexuality. Similar to his use of the rod, Swinburne praised or problematised this infertile condition of sexuality within and outside Victorian morality through exploring the association of pain and pleasure, homosexuality, androgyny and morbidity in love.

In “A Ballad of Life” and “A Ballad of Death,” Swinburne expresses the transient state of beauty between the freshness of life and the sterility of death. The speaker in “A Ballad of Life” describes the beauty of the lady as “fervent as a fiery moon/Made my blood burn and swoon/Like a flame rained upon” in the first stanza (*PW* 9). The vibrant colours emanating from her body makes the woman a dangerous object of speculation for the speaker and Swinburne. The speaker counts her characteristics starting with “charity” and “tenderness,” which conform to the Victorian ideal of women, and end with “pleasure” and “sin”; therefore, as descriptions in the line and the lines in the poem progress, the lady is depicted in a more sinister light (*PW* 9). She is accompanied by three men who symbolise lust, shame and fear and who are depicted as withering, covered in dust and “with hollow heavy face / … full of grey old miseries” (*PW* 9). Swinburne creates a contrast between the vibrant body of the lady and the barren abstract qualities of her three companions. The speaker believes that this woman “transfigureth / all sin and sorrow and death” because she uses “her sweet white sides/ And bosom carved to kiss” as an apparatus to purge him of sins (*PW* 10). Her sensational beauty remains conceptualised in Platonic ideals until the speaker reveals her identity as Lady Borgia. The speaker calls her forth as follows

> Borgia, thy gold hair’s colour burns in me,
> Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes;
> Therefore so many times as these roses be,
> Kiss me so many times. (*PW* 11)

The lady is supposedly Lucretia Borgia, famous for her beauty and was often portrayed as a femme fatale (Rooksby 30). As the lady’s identity is revealed, the poem’s tone shifts from the praise of beauty to a carnal desire for Lady Borgia when the speaker urges her to “kiss [him] so many times” (*PW* 10). Moreover, as Borgia was known to experience multiple miscarriages and infamous for questionable relationships of the members of her family, the speaker’s sexual desire becomes devoid of any reproductive outcome. Therefore, the speaker’s desire becomes futile for the Victorian audience and turns into a lascivious quest. The dichotomy between the freshness of her body and the decaying nature of her three companions also becomes embodied in her own body – she is lively, but her identity and historical circumstances of her life make her unfeminine. Her beauty is vibrant, but her body is an instrument of sterility because it is unable to

bear a child successfully. As Victorian sexuality is defined in terms of reproductive functionality, her sexuality is fruitless. Swinburne sustains this image of sterility in "A Ballad of Death" when the speaker realises that his lady is dead:

> My lady's likeness crowned and robed and dead,
> Sweet still, but now not red,
> Was the shut mouth whereby men lived and died,
> …………
> The body that was clothed with love of old. (*PW* 11)

The lines after his realisation depict the lament of the speaker. He depicts how death conquers every aspect of the lady and turns her body into the barren ground. He recollects this process as his "tears ran down / Even to the places where many kisses were, / Even where her parted breast-flowers have place", but nobody seems to share his grief (*PW* 11). Swinburne attempts to subvert "the juxtaposition of life/death, fertility/sterility" (Fricke 39). As contemporary morality sought beauty and desire only in a living and fertile boy, the speaker should renounce her desire for desire. However, even the dead body of Lady Borgia retains its allure, and accordingly, the speaker "Is become thrall to Death", still in pursuit of the object of his desire (*PW* 11).

"Laus Veneris" is one of the most studied poems of Swinburne. The poem recounts the German legend of Tannhauser and addresses a range of issues, including religion, destiny and conflict between the old and new belief systems. Regarding Swinburne's subversion of contemporary moral values, the poem's central theme is a comparison between a matriarchal divinity and patriarchal divinity. Similar to "Hertha" and Proserpine poem, Swinburne seeks to replace the father figure of the established religion with a divine woman. There are various versions of the legend in literature and art, and Richard Wagner's opera of the legend was premiered as recently as Swinburne could watch (Leith 69). The legend revolves around Tannhauser's submission to first Venus and later to Christ after becoming tormented by remorse. Swinburne compares the joy brought for by Venus's beauty with the sadness brought by Christ's faith:

> Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
> All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
>   Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,

> ……………………………………………
> But lo her wonderfully woven hair!
> And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss;
> But see now, Lord; her mouth is lovelier. (*PW* 12)

The greatness of Christ becomes overshadowed by Venus's beauty, and Tannhauser seems to regret his decision. Driven by his passion and desire, he submits to Venus: "With my love laid upon her garment-wise, / Feeling my love in all her limbs and hair" (*PW* 12). Tannhauser's emphasis on the limbs of Venus draws attention to her physical being and creates a contrast between her body and the ethereal existence of Christ as the Holy Spirit. However, Venus's passion is also depicted in terms of sterility as she is "Crowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire, / Love, wan as foam blown up the salt burnt sands" (*PW* 12). Swinburne choice of words in these and subsequent lines imply that the passion invoked by Venus "crushes, mutilates, and destroys" Tannhauser both physically and mentally (Baird 66). The divide between Eros and Thanatos disappears when the speaker states: "That death were not more pitiful than desire, / That these things were not one thing and the same!" (*PW* 13). Swinburne brings together pain and pleasure in Tannhauser's agony and equates the idea of love with death. Therefore, the possibility of Tannhauser finding salvation by giving in to the love of God becomes impossible. The speaker meditates on the finite nature of life when he seemingly loses his hope in this salvation: "A little space of time ere time expire, / A little day, a little way of breath" (*PW* 13).

Notwithstanding, Swinburne's sustains his comparison between Venus and Christ as Tannhauser continuously shifts his address from one to another. Tannhauser is thrust "Into the pit? yet had I a good trust / To save my soul before it slipped therein," where he sets upon a Dantesque journey (*PW* 14). As Thomas Steffler argues, "the prisoner of self-consuming lust" witnesses what the possible end his lust would bring (183). He comes across "great kings," "queens of fair green land," Helen of Troy and Semiramis (*PW* 15). He comes to understand that his sins are greater than any of those sinners because "For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight, / No blinkard heathen stumbling for scant light" (15). These scenes fall into stark contrast with Tannhauser's

depictions of the believers of Venus who “pluck sweet fruit of life and eat;” while Swinburne is tormented and “hungry days devour,/And in my mouth no fruit of theirs is sweet” (*PW* 13). In these scenes, “agony and ecstasy of eroticism is contrasted to the sterility of love of the Christ” (Thompson 87). If Tannhauser were controlled by Victorian morality, his choice would be Christ despite the purifying pyres of Purgatory. However, Swinburne depicts Tannhauser in conflict; his condition of indecision resolves at the end of the poem when the speaker announces:

> Ah love, there is no better life than this;
> To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
> ………………………………………….
> I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,
> I seal myself upon thee with my might,
> Abiding alway out of all men’s sight (*PW* 18-19)

Swinburne aims to affront his readers by depicting the Christian afterlife as a barren heaven. He thrusts his speaker into the fleshly limbs, fiery lips and golden hair of Venus when Tannhauser chooses the worship of beauty and lust over the sterile grace of Christian faith.

Swinburne deliberately depicted Love and Venus as corruptive and dangerous concepts even though such depictions of femme fatale in the shape of divinity had already existed in literature and art. His poetry succeeded in incensing the critics because rather than expressing his criticism in broad strokes of abstract representation, he particularised his *femme fatale*s. He transformed phantoms of morality into corporeal entities in sensual bodies of Aholibah, Faustine, Anactoria and his Sapphic characters. Swinburne conceptualises Aholibah as the primitive form of a woman and clothes her in “purple band,” “strange raiment,” “silk to wear on hands and feet,” “gold,” and “blue raiment” (*PW* 106-107). The speaker depicts her in royal colours and reveals her to be the mother of God as “His tabernacle being in thee” (*PW* 107). God’s tabernacle represents Christ in his mother womb; thereby, Aholibah is attributed with the highest religious honour only to contrast with her fall from grace. As time passes, she is corrupted by her desires: “And there was painting on thine eyes. / … / There came on thee the lust of these” (*PW* 107). Aholibah’s cardinal sin becomes her desire for paintings: “Thy mouth was leant

upon the wall / Against the painted mouth, thy chin / Touched the hair's painted curve and fall" (*PW* 107). As soon as she kisses the painting on the wall, all graces and gifts of God are taken away from her. Her golden hair turns into "fair coins" washed on the beach and "Then will one make thy body bare / To strip it of all gracious things" (*PW* 108). Her gifts from kings, nose, and ears are to be burned by fires until she becomes "old with soft adulteries" (*PW* 108). At the end of the poem, Aholibah becomes an effigy of divine punishment; the withering state of her body is the reflection of sexual perversion and blown away from existence.

Aholibah, as a corrupting woman, is historically limited in that she is developed and entirely dependent on the Christian belief system. She is as old as the Christian faith, which seems to be so short of a period for Swinburne that he brings into existence another femme fatale, Faustine, who is depicted as a constant in all human history. Concerning Faustine's condition, Swinburne states that "she may have passed with the same face which now comes before us dishonoured and discrowned. … [her story is] the transmigration of a single soul … clad always in the same type of fleshly beauty" (*Notes* 15). Swinburne defines Faustine as God's first loss against the devil. Her "naked new-born soul" is the prize of a dice game between God and the devil (*PW* 49). Although she is not innately devil, her blood and milk, two liquids essential for her own and children's lives, are mixed with poison. After God's graces were "battered out" of her body, Faustine loses her humanity, and her face resembles a shape that can only be called human in Hell (*PW* 49). Moreover, she defies the mortality of human beings and gets resurrected: "As if your fed sarcophagus / Spared flesh and skin, /You come back face to face with us" (*PW* 50). She is depicted as a vampiric and parasitic being as her body is revived with "the slain man's blood and breath" (*PW* 50). She moves through history because of the male bodies she corrupted and the sins she committed. In this section of the poem, the virility of Faustine ceases as she cannot satisfy her lust with the blood of men. Her "Red gold and black imperious hair" and "Twice crown" dissolve into a yearning for satisfaction, and the speaker reminisces on Faustine: "these are gone now: years entomb / The dust and din" (*PW* 50). Subsequently, "the first Faustine"s Bacchanal nature get disturbed by "Stray breaths of Sapphic song" (*PW* 50). In the body and corruption of her characters, Swinburne dissects hetero and homoeroticism side by

side. Faustine’s vampiric sexuality turns into “The shameless nameless loves that makes / Hell’s iron gin” (*PW* 50). She was vampiric because she drained men of their blood and sexual energies with no reproductive purpose. After her Sapphic corruption, her body becomes “void,” “dead,” “the straitened barren bed”:

> What sterile growths of sexless root
>   Or epicene?
> What flower of kisses without fruit
>   Of love, Faustine? (*PW* 51)

She even corrupts the phallic symbolism of rod as Swinburne switches to “Small serpents with soft stretching throats”, which implies impotence on behalf of her male lovers (Duff 222). Faustine “distorts ‘normal’ sexuality into something that is perverted and non-procreative” (Steffler 188). She represents the mechanical aspect of sexuality which holds no social ends and recognises no God. She is a thing that is made, a product of industrial ingenuity – “a thing that hinges hold, / A love-machine” (*PW* 51). Although her status as a femme fatale remains the same at the end of the poem, Faustine’s body becomes sterile due to her homosexuality. Her limbs and kisses are poison to all after she transcends the heterosexual normality of the Victorian period.

“Anactoria” was among the most criticised poems of *Poems and Ballads* because it openly challenged the Victorian conceptualisation of a woman’s virtue. In *Notes of Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne argued the subject as follows: “Virtue … have any dragon’s jaws been known to emit on occasion stronger and stranger sounds and odours. … [I] tried instead to reproduce in a diluted and dilated form the spirit of a poem which could not be reproduced in the body … I have rendered into English the very words of Sappho” (8;10). While Swinburne opted for addressing his woman characters in the poems so far mentioned above, he speaks as his woman character, Sappho, in “Anactoria.” The poem starts with an epithet from Sappho that translates as “you seduced me very nicely” (*PW* 31). Sappho was an ancient Greek lyrical poet famous for the subject matter of her poems and her island. She was from the island of Lesbos, renowned for the beauty of its women (Bennett 12). The words sapphic and lesbian, which have their roots in the poetry of Sappho, have a longer historical presence in

English literature in comparison to words such as gay or queer (Bennett 12). Sappho signifies how love seeks to achieve a sense of completeness through the images of male and female. She inhabits the positions of both sexes as she is the active agent and the recipient of desire. Swinburne suggests that an artist's gender is indeterminate and outside the binary opposition; therefore, the artist inhibits both gender and sexualities (Steele 4). He attempts to achieve that state by expressing sexual desire from a female speaker and employing Sappho "not to suppress it, but rather to explore it (Robson 55-56). In poetic tradition, Sappho always represented homosexual desire, but she was always in the position of distant speaker, whereas Swinburne enabled her to touch her lover, which was "a charged moment in Victorian art, a moment of embodied emotion, a significant gesture. … When Sappho touches and is touched— especially by a woman—the eruption of fleshly desire is, within Victorian cultural norms, deeply disturbing" (Goldhill 74). The first section of the poem makes use of this disturbing effect when Sappho describes how the bodies of two lovers intertwine and mingle:

> I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
> Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
> Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
> Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour. (*PW* 31)

The action of both bodies kindling and crushing on each other is a euphemism for homosexual intercourse or masturbation. These actions frustrate conventional functions of sexuality as they are removed from the propagation process. As Sappho sets on "To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet," her passion and lust for her lover are depicted in terms of pain and pleasure together (*PW* 32). Her quest to satiation compels her to "the orgasmic flux of desire into oblivion, nothingness and non-being" – from Eros to Thanatos (Cook "Content" 92). She experiences the intensity of her love in terms of sadistic pleasure:

> Intense device, and superflux of pain;
> Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
> Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
> Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
> Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill; (*PW* 32)

She describes her love "as fervent as fire" but "delicate as flowers" simultaneously. Sappho comes to be defined by her desires and loses her self-identity in the process (*PW* 32). For Sappho, the corporal unity of her body and her lover's body is insufficient to express her desire at once. Therefore, she turns every aspect of the body into an object of desire, and her lines become an itemisation of limbs and body parts: lips, eyes, tears, breast, mouth, tongue, bosom, face, feet and even veins. Her ultimate goal is the consummation of both bodies into orgasmic oblivion: "Thy body were abolished and consumed, / And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!" (*PW* 33). From that perspective, Sappho is controlled by Thanatos rather than Eros – her desire turns into exasperation and vengeance. She seeks to exert her power upon patriarchal God and "smite," "desecrate," and "mix his immortality with death," because her love is frustrated by the religious order and social conventions of God (*PW* 34). Sappho's desire turns into a desire for moving beyond the mortality of the flesh when she renounces the possibility of becoming one with her lover as a mortal human. Fricke argues that Sappho's final "merging with this elementary force of death and destruction" turns "Anactoria into "a poem of affirmation, synthesis, and order" (130). She perceives immortality in touch of a kiss, "tremor of all the sea" and "ebb and flow" of life (*PW* 34). In her eyes, all aspects of life become barren and meaningless, which in effect makes her sterile for Victorian readers. As she renounces heterosexual love, she turns into a barren garden even though her flowers burn ever brighter than any other. Sappho acquires immortality in turning herself into metaphor and vows that "my songs once heard in a strange place, / Cleave to men's lives, and waste the days thereof / With gladness and much sadness and long love" (*PW* 35).

"Sapphics", among many poems inspired by Sappho in *Poems and Ballads*, is about a vision the speaker, Sappho, receives from goddess Aphrodite. The speaker describes the goddess as "the white implacable Aphrodite / Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled" (*PW* 83). The adjective Swinburne employs all relate to a state of being free from any restrictions, and as such, the vision aims to engulf Sappho into the same conditions. Aphrodite looks "with necks reverted/Back to Lesbos", back to the birthplace of Sappho where "a clamour of singing women / Severed the twilight": the women of Lesbos were renowned for their beauties as companions of Sappho and

followers of Aphrodite in addition to being lesbians (*PW* 83). Their homosexuality gets distorted into a failed heterosexuality because although they can metaphorically inhabit both the feminine and masculine roles in sexual intercourse, their actions remain unfruitful. From the seventh to the ninth stanzas, Swinburne introduces "the Lesbian," the poet of Lesbos, as the tenth muse into the court of Apollo. Similar to Sappho's capacity to love being beyond all the men, the Lesbian "sang wonderful things they knew not … None endured the sound of her song for weeping" (*PW* 33). The crowns of other muses fade, and only that of the Lesbian remains. Through the visual descriptions of the Lesbian, Swinburne reclaims the superiority of Sappho as poetic inspiration. He placed Sappho "into the place normally reserved for immortal goddesses … caused such problems for Christian writers, who, despite the example of the Virgin, found it difficult to imagine woman except in connection with sin and deception" (Zonana 39; 46). Swinburne's emphasis on the muse's identity as being from Lesbos signifies his defiance to Judeo-Christian subversion of female divinities of antiquity. Swinburne tries to introduce an overtly-sexualised female muse into contemporary literature. His idea of poetic or religious divinity capsulate muses of all sexualities. However, the Lesbian turns away from Aphrodite and:

> Saw the Lesbians kissing across their smitten
> Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,
> Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen,
> Fairer than all men; (*PW* 33)

Denouncing Aphrodite, Sappho soars towards a scene of sexual ecstasy mingling with lips, fingers, kisses, whispers and songs. Sappho bursts into a song "made of perfect sound and exceeding passion", blasting the goddess and all the muses away from Lesbos. Sappho's powerful song both elevates her status as muse and turns her birthplace into barren land. Swinburne seeks to describe the conditions of his period through Lesbos: contemporary literature is sterile because it denies women the equal presence as men. He also portrays lesbians as the outcasts of society, "Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight" (*PW* 84). They are denied social recognition because they are beyond the comprehension of others as the Lesbian muse was superior in musical inspiration among the Muses.

In addition to homoeroticism, Swinburne explores androgyny and hermaphroditism. *Poems and Ballads*, from that perspective, is a study of the sexual spectrum inspired by classical and contemporary literature. In “Fragoletta,” the speaker perceives Love as androgynous: “Being sexless, wilt thou be / Maiden or boy?” (*PW* 41). The speaker is preoccupied with sexual identity, and Swinburne’s metaphors accumulate attributes of both sexes to create an ambiguous image. The “mysterious flower” of Love is depicted as double-sided while the eyes and lips of the speaker are engulfed in the fire of desire. However, the speaker’s physical descriptions such as “low bosom,” “strait soft flanks,” “virginal strange air”, and “baren bosom” imply innocence and physical youth (*PW* 41). The object of the speaker’s desire seems so young in terms of physical and emotional growth that the speaker’s kisses are met with coldness and simplicity. The contrast between the burning sensation of the speaker and the coldness of his object of desire suggests uncertainty as if the recipient of his desire has not yet decided whether to be a maiden or a boy. Swinburne equates the innocence of youth with an androgynous state that affords both sexes’ possibilities and none at the same time.

On the other hand, “Hermaphroditus” is a classic study of the union of both sexes. Swinburne has been impressed by the Sleeping Hermaphroditus sculpture in Louvre Museum. During his visit, he contemplated upon the sexless beauty of the figure. Regarding the beauty of androgynous representation of the human body, Swinburne asserts, “[t]he theory of God splitting in two the double archetype of man and woman … idea thus incarnate, literal or symbolic, is merely beautiful. … the divided beauty of separate woman and man —a thing inferior and imperfect” (*Notes* 18). The poem is addressed to the sleeping figure, and it urges the figure to “Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best” (*PW* 40). The speaker seems disturbed about the indeterminacy of sexuality even though he confesses that “whosoever hath seen thee, … / Two things turn all his life and blood to fire” (*PW* 40). He is frustrated because he is torn between despair and desire, while the sculpture has the capacity to contain both within. The second part of the poem compares hermaphroditism with heterosexual relations regarding reproduction (Steffler 208). Heterosexual love is “the fruitful feud” because it demarcates the conflict between men and women, while hermaphroditism is “the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss” (*PW* 40). The contrasts between feud/kiss and fruitful/sterile

show that the harmony of hermaphroditism is thwarted due to its sterile nature. The so-called natural state of Love is also problematised: “A pleasure house-house for all the loves his kin / But on the one side sat a man like death, /And on the other a woman sat like sin” (*PW* 40). The fruitful sexuality is depicted as a choice between death and sin; when the body incarnates Love, it either perishes and withers or gives in to lust and sins. It is an impossible state into which neither virility nor sterility can enter:

> To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
> The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?
> Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair,
> Fed thee on summers, watered thee with showers,
> Given all the gold that all the seasons wear
> To thee that art a thing of barren hours? (*PW* 40-41)

Hermaphroditic love is depicted as turning into itself and holding its reason to exist a secret as the speaker cannot perceive it from the viewpoint of conventional sexuality. In imitation of the sculpture’s condition, the speaker experiences in-betweenness: as he realises his incapacity to sympathise with Hermaphrodite, he realises “man has no choice. His own ambivalent-sexual nature has been determined by the gods” (Fricke 110). For the speaker, this state of mind is “So dreadful, so desirable, so dear” that he realises his binary nature, and unlike the sculpture, the speaker is not able to either contain fear and desire at the same time or inhabit death and sin of this pleasure-house like Hermaphrodite (*PW* 41).

“The Leper” is possibly the most outrageous poem in *Poems and Ballads* because of its subject matter. The poem portrays the relationship between a scribe and a lady of high status. All characters of the poem transgress the social boundaries and become outcasts of society. The scribe speaking through the dramatic speaker is infatuated with her: “For will to kiss between her brows, / I had no heart to sleep or eat” (*PW* 53). He depicts himself scorned by the object of his desire and God because he is aware of his transgression of social order and religious edicts. The lady is presented as unfaithful and adulterous with her affair with a knight. The speaker begrudgingly reminisces:

> That knight’s gold hair she chose to love,
> His mouth she had such will to kiss.

> ……………………………………..
> I brought him by a privy way
> Out at her lattice, and thereon
> What gracious words she found to say. (*PW* 54)

The lady receives the knight in secrecy to avoid scandal, and the scribe acts as an intermediary for his lady. Because this action is unknown to other people, she believes it is free of judgment: "Nor shall men burn me in the face / For my sweet fault that scandals them" (*PW* 54). The depiction of her body "sitting edgewise on her bed" implicates sexual intercourse and that the scribe was spying on his lady's bedroom (*PW* 54). She evades the possibility of scandal but faces a divine punishment due to adultery. Her supple and fleshly beauty falls into ruin with leprosy, which was believed to be a divine punishment for the sinners. The lady becomes an outcast due to leprosy and the insinuation of her disease. Her body becomes corrupt, infertile and degrading. She is shunned by society and her knight who flees before her:

> Yea, he inside whose grasp all night
> Her fervent body leapt or lay,
> Stained with sharp kisses red and white,
> Found her a plague to spurn away. (*PW* 54)

Swinburne demonstrates his skills to portray extremities of human experience in the space of three stanzas when the speaker imparts how his lady sighed under that knight "with short mad cries," how "Her fervent body leapt or lay, / Stained with sharp kisses red and white" and how the lady had to be hidden in "this wattled house" after everyone abandoned her (*PW* 54).

The scribe expresses his pleasure about these conditions as they avail him to touch, caress and kiss the lady. A condition of decay and desperation is reflected on "poor bread," "well-water," "grass with dropping seed" to signify the dying beauty of the lady (*PW* 54). The scribe lapses into a necrophiliac lust as he confesses:

> For joy to kiss between her brows
> Time upon time I was nigh dead.
> …………………………………
> I had such joy of kissing her,

I had small care to sleep or feed. (*PW* 54)

The decaying body of the lady, leprosy and the scribe's lust for a dead body transgresses all the social and religious codes and turn him into an outcast as well. His desire for the lady ensues despite the fact that she is infertile and practically dead. Accordingly, his desire subverts the boundaries of healthy sexuality for the Victorians. The lady begs him to leave her alone to die, but the scribe waits upon her even after six months of her death. His lust for the fragmented body in decay illustrates the morbidity of his passion and morbidity of bodily sensations (Praz 226). The state of the scribe seemingly proves correct the underlying fears of Swinburne's critics, that men will be deprived of their mental faculties in reverence of sensational acts. The scribe's thirst for sexual satisfaction is "a courtly romance turned sinister": he revels in pain instead of pleasure and finds comfort in a withering body of a woman (Condé 81). The poem, from that perspective, displays masochism and necrophilia since the scribe becomes leprous, and it also taunts the reader as to the identity of "the leper" (Condé 86). To the reader, Swinburne directs the question, "Is the unfaithful, adulterous lady or necrophiliac scribe the leper?". Despite his body failing because of leprosy, the speaker sounds content when he explains his current state as "Spoilt music with no perfect word" and finalises the poem with "some better knowledge" imparted by his improper action (*PW* 55).

Swinburne's poems mentioned above break down the body into limbs, lips, eyes, bosom, breast, feet, hair and so on. They draw attention to the human body as the sum of these fragments, which implies multiplicity. Similarly, Swinburne's understanding of human experience demarcates diversity of perspective, the difference in perception and the infinity of possible horizons. Where the Victorian prudery saw obscenity, Swinburne perceived difference; what the contemporary society deemed transgressive, Swinburne identified as intellectual liberty. What the Victorians saw as taboo, out of bounds and perverse, Swinburne attempted to portray as biological fragments of a whole human body which made up only the physical shapes and had nothing whatsoever with spiritual or mental essences of the individual.

2.2.3. Swinburne's Queens: Yseult and Iseult

Swinburne had always been fascinated by legends and grand historical narratives. He was impressed by the possibilities the Arthurian legend would provide for a contemporary poet, and the story of Tristram and Iseult particularly intrigued him. His involvement with the Arthurian poems resulted from the contemporary interest in the legend. Lord Tennyson, members of the PRB, and Arnold had published their versions of the legend. However, Swinburne was stirred the most by Tennyson's manipulation of the legend to promote the morality of the ruling class. Schierbeck thinks that Tennyson had interpreted the legend in accordance with the dominant ideology and even discarded the elements of the narrative that could upset the Victorian readers (15). Accordingly, Tennyson's idealisation of King Arthur as the perfect ruler in the image of Prince Albert compelled Swinburne to focus on other characters and aspects of the legend (Schierbeck 69). Instead of perfect and infallible knights, Swinburne depicted an unstable universe where every person could fall into moral corruption regardless of nobility or piety (Schierbeck 71). In order to remedy the harm Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* caused, Swinburne made use of different versions of the legend in French, Welsh and Medieval English and consolidated different versions of Tristram and Iseult's story (Lambdin and Lambdin 187). He centred his Arthurian poems around women characters and attempted to present a different perspective for the contemporary reader.

Queen Yseult was first published in 1858 as a single canto, and Swinburne later added five more cantos to the poem. It is based mainly on a French version by Francisque Michel, Walter Scott's edition of the story, and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Lambdin and Lambdin 187). The physical description, colours and general tone of the poem suggest that Swinburne's conception of the poem was shaped by principles of the PRB at that time. Swinburne adhered to Malory's version of the story but embellished the narration with the "active, aggressive, and erotic" personality of Yseult (Lambdin 64). Swinburne's depiction of the women in the story is similar to his treatment of Hertha, Faustine and other transgressive female figures in his poetry. There are three women central to the story: Tristram's mother, Blancheflour, Yseult of Cornwall and

Yseult of Brittany. Blancheflour is a woman with a strong character and musical voice, and the dominant colour attributed to her is white, the same as the meaning of her name in French. Her only transgression occurs when she announces that “I lady free / Took this man for lord of me” and that she will not let him “Not for joy nor for woe” (*Queen* 1). She embodies the characteristics of Yseult of Cornwall and Brittany; therefore, she is the primary point of reference when Tristram describes the beauty of other females. Yseult of Cornwall is a fleshly Swinburnean woman who desires, lusts and reverses sexual roles. She is described through her limbs, parts of her body, and agency in her affair with Tristram. After she presents Tristram with a drink to quench his thirst, they bend towards each other and:

> And he knew that she was fair,
> And he stooped and kissed her hair.
> And Queen Yseult, painèd sore
> For the love that him she bore,
> As she kissed him, trembled more. (*Queen* 2)

She elevates Tristram’s emotional love into a sensual act. Moreover, when she carries Tristram through the courtyard to avoid leaving two sets of footprints on the snow, her state of excitement is communicated through her bosom, throat and bitter kisses. The passivity of Tristram in that scene upsets the readers, who expect heroic deeds from the male characters (Lambdin and Lambdin 188). As she carries her lover, her fair body palpitates with blood, reflecting her desire and lust. Their “fierce” kisses are symbolised through “stains upon her red as blood” (*Queen* 3). Yseult’s hair also becomes a symbol of passion when it “flowed and glowed” on both their faces. It covers their faces like a garment, and its hue implies joy and bliss. The fleshly desire and strong urges of Yseult of Cornwall are portrayed in general terms, but her state as a femme fatale becomes apparent when compared to Yseult of Brittany. Yseult o Brittany is depicted as a young maiden bathed in white colours – her hands, her “courcet”, the pearls on her attire and her fairness. She represents the innocence of love. Tristram directs his affection to Yseult of Cornwall, yearning to look into her eyes, touch her hands, and kiss her mouth (*Queen* 4). On the other hand, Yseult of Brittany watches the object of her love from a distance, and this distance is preserved even on their bridal night:

> She lay out before him there,

> All her body white and bare
> …………………………….
> Purer than the naked snow,
> ……………………………..
> At her side in love he lay;
> Slept no child as pure as they. (*Queen* 5)

Her marriage becomes a futile act of love as her maidenhood remains intact, and her love is unrequited by Tristram. Swinburne creates a great chasm between these two Yseults. Fleshly, active and transgressive descriptions of Yseult of Cornwall are conceived to shock his readers, while the grace and innocence of Yseult of Brittany depict the sterility of idealised courtly love. He presents the reader with two extreme opposites, and the fact that Tristram remains faithful to Yseult of Cornwall implies that passion is actually an invigorating emotion and that it motivates and compels human life forward rather than the mere innocence of youth.

Although *Tristram of Lyonesse* and *Queen Yseult* are the product of the same craftsman, the differences in style, rhyme and narration show how Swinburne's poetic versatility grew in time. *Tristram of Lyonesse* is written with style free from the influence and artistic principles of the PRB. Swinburne uses longer and more intricate sentences in *Tristram of Lyonesse* – a stylistic feature he perfected in three volumes of *Poems and Ballads*. Instead of easily recited blistering lines of *Queen Yseult*, *Tristram of Lyonesse* uses dramatically structured lines more comparable to Swinburne's dramatic behemoth, *Bothwell*. Swinburne aims to prove "the vitality of passion" in *Tristram of Lyonesse* (O'Gorman xxx). The poem praises the love of Tristram and Iseult despite the surrounding conditions and manages to dispose of "the moralising and finger-pointing" with the introduction of fate as an agent (Loy 249). Loy comments that Swinburne's treatment of love rather than heroic figures "attempts to restore the emotional intensity of the original story which, Swinburne felt, had been lost in the versions by Arnold and Tennyson" (250). Swinburne references and alludes to Guenevere's involvement with Lancelot and her subsequent fate throughout the poem. By doing so, he foreshadows the fate of Tristram and Iseult and suggests that the power of passion reaches far and beyond simple corporal desire in the world of Arthurian legends.

In addition to being the physical embodiment of female sensuality, Swinburne frames Iseult of Cornwall into the mouthpiece of his persuasions. Iseult becomes the sceptical voice of the reason concerning judgement, social conditions, and equality of the sexes. In "The Sailing of the Swallow," Iseult sets out to measure the character of Tristram and confronts him with a set of questions. Concerning which woman has the highest praise in the court of Camelot, Iseult inquires:

> … for your praise endures,
> That with great deeds ye wring from mouths of men,
> But ours —for shame, where is it? Tell me then,
> Since woman may not wear a better here,
> Who of this praise hath most save Guenevere? (*PW* 676)

She tries to ascertain her fate in Camelot, but, more importantly, she surmises the unequal treatment of men and women in court. Iseult maintains that women are doomed to be the greater sinner, especially women of noble birth: "Doth the king too live so in sight of fear ? /They say sin touches not a man so near/As shame a woman" (*PW* 678). She calls into question concepts of justice and penance with her comments in the succeeding lines as well: "And these the noblest under God's glad sun/For sin they knew not he that knew shall slay, /And smite blind men for stumbling in fair day" (*PW* 678). Swinburne recognised the hypocritical approach to the fairer sex in his personal life. His life was shaped and guided by strong women, and he reflected this experience unto characters such as Iseult. By introducing these questions before Iseult arrives at the court, Swinburne depicts her as a disruptive force. Her dramatic function in Camelot is to disrupt the harmony of the court and usher the fate of the land. She is aware that she will always be the greater sinner as a woman. Her protests thwart herself from being restricted by society's order and constitute a preclusive justification of her future transgressions.

Swinburne depicts sexuality and innocence as two opposites in *Queen Yseult*, while the innocence of Iseult of Brittany does not hinder her from having an absorbing yearning for Tristram in *Tristram of Lyonesse*. Iseult of Cornwall is portrayed through descriptive qualities such as having "strange eyes," her "soul's great mystical red flower," "kindling

soul," and "amorous hands" before she presents her mother's draught to Tristram (*PW* 679-83). After the potion, their passion is actualised in numerous scenes. The scene which would offend the Victorian reader the most occurs when Iseult sends her maid to king Mark at the wedding night in "The Queen Pleasance". Iseult transgresses social and religious order as she denies her lawful husband her body as well as making the king commit adultery with Brangwain unknowingly. Iseult's comments relating the burden of sin falling on the woman seem ironic from the perspective of these actions. She pursues her love for Tristram after he snatches her away from the unchristened knight. The bower scene is dominated by Iseult's "fierce hands," "throbbing blossoms of her breast," and "ardent face" reasserts Iseult as a woman with carnal agency:

> And with strong trembling fingers she strained fast
> His head into her bosom; till at test.
> ……………………………………
> Each hung on each with panting lips, and felt
> Sense into sense and spirit in spirit melt. (*PW* 689)

The movement of both bodies demonstrates the passion and fleshly pleasure of the lovers (Thompson 163). Swinburne depicts the scene similar to his Sapphic poem, where the poetic focus is on the orgasmic rapture of lovers. Louis argues that Swinburne "present a vision of sexuality unique in Victorian literature" in "The Queen's Pleasance" ("Erotic" 657). Iseult and Tristram lay in amorous ecstasy as their bodies fluctuate and hunger for each other's flesh in the woods before Iseult bids Tristram leave. Iseult is depicted as an unselfish lover later in "Iseult in Tintagel" when she confesses that "beyond all born women is / And perfect my transgression" (*PW* 700). She acknowledges the grandeur of her transgression and prays to God that she is the only one punished for their sins:

> And let the sin in him that scarce was his
> Stand expiated with exile: and be this
> The price for him, the atonement this, that
> I With all the sin upon me live, and die
> With all thy wrath on me that most have sinned. (*PW* 703)

Iseult tries to redeem her lover from his sins and metaphorically becomes a saviour. She becomes a gender opposite of Christ, sacrificing herself for the sake of Tristram. Iseult

believes herself to be a greater sinner than all women; therefore, the act of self-sacrifice should prove her love for Tristram and the grandeur of her transgression for the reader.

Swinburne enriches the character and passion of Iseult of Brittany in *Tristram of Lyonesse*. She is no longer the maiden child of *Queen Yseult*. Her carnality and thirst for affection accompany her innocence and grace. In addition, she is on a par with Iseult of Cornwall in terms of her strength of passion. Tristram's faithfulness to Iseult of Cornwall frustrates her nuptial excitement and yearning for him. After the "unshepherded, uncompassed, unconfined" transgression of Tristram, Iseult of Brittany disposes of her hopes and subsequently get consumed by a state of vengefulness:

> Rose the slow cloud of envious will within
> …………………………………………….
> And eyes and heart made one saw surge and swell
> The fires of sunset like the fires of hell.
> As though God's wrath would burn up sin with shame,
> The incensed red gold of deepening heaven grew flame (*PW* 711)

In contrast with contemporary philosophy, Swinburne argues that Iseult's corporal desires do not corrupt her innocence; rather, the frustration of passion corrupts her. Because she could not consummate her marriage with Tristram, Iseult vows that "Wherein to triumph till that hour be past / But this mine hour I look for is thy last" (*PW* 714). Subsequently, the innocence of Iseult dissipates entirely in "The Sailing of the Swan." Standing beside the expiring body of Tristram, she discloses her suppressed resentment "Murmuring with sense distraught and spirit awake / Speech bitterer than the words thereof were sweet" (*PW* 725). Her transformation from a youthful, subdued Victorian woman to a transgressive woman is achieved by her final speeches, which leave Tristram "Burnt bitter like an aftertaste of sin" (*PW* 727). Tristram expresses remorse due to his mistreatment of Iseult and perceives his action as a sin. Swinburne turns the concept of Christian sin inside out: he portrays the adulterous affair with Iseult of Cornwall as joyous while having no corporal desire for Iseult of Brittany is presented as a sin. He reverses the moralistic world of Tennyson's *Idylls* and puts forth a world that is governed by passion. Iseult of Brittany fulfils her promise when she deceives

Tristram and smites his husband dead. However, she transfigures into a sinner because she breaks her promise to Tristram and stands between two lovers.

To summarise, Swinburne focused on three issues in terms of the subject matter of poetry in his efforts to challenge the Victorian poetic tradition: the lasting influence of the institutionalised religion despite the fact that the position of the Church has started to shift as a powerful social institution; the phenomenon of flogging as an apparatus of the education even though it was perceived as a deviant behaviour; and the employment of moral values to impose restrictive patterns on individuals and vilify the behaviours outside these pre-determined patterns. Swinburne frustrates the reading public's expectations of his age concerning his choice of subject matter. Whereas the dictum of the age demanded respect for religion, Swinburne sought to subvert the authority of religious institutions, confront the image of Christ and abolish the Biblical hierarchy of creation by portraying humans as divine. Starting from questioning religious institutions, he proceeded to deny institutionalised religion thematically, although not chronologically, in his poetry and eventually denied all religion categorically. From that perspective, Swinburne's poetry also reflects the conflict between the religious postulates of the period and the emerging scientific findings. Even in his poems that do not problematise the institutionalised religion, the speaker's hesitation and confusion are felt. Moreover, his poems which change from hesitation to the denial of religion draw attention to the ideological gap and contrasts between the Church and Jesus as the saviour figure. Swinburne, who targets institutionalised religion, especially the Catholic Church, portrays Christ as mortal rather than refusing the religion itself as a concept. Rather than undermining the prophetic image of Christ, this strategy postulate that all believers are equal to Christ in faith. Therefore, the churchmen, who exercise their religious authority on being the protectors of the Church of Christ, fail to retain their spiritual authority. Swinburne eventually argues that humans are immortal and equal in death. Swinburne's descriptions of death inevitably anticipate and echo the wasteland of his Proserpine poems. Accordingly, he criticises the Church's promise of happiness in the afterlife for those who could not find happiness in life. Swinburne's religious poems ultimately

aimed to subvert morality by repudiating the authority of religion since the moral values of the period were closely determined by this authority.

The poems in *The Flogging Block* illustrate how the phenomenon of punishment and installation of order through punishment, which is thematised in Swinburne's religious poems, are employed in educational institutions. Although the underlying influence in these poems seems to be Swinburne's participation in Hoggart Club and the writings of Sade, his emphasis on the concepts of power, control and hierarchy implies that he perceives flogging as a social phenomenon rather than a form of sexual subversion. Students who are trained to conform to gender roles determined by social and cultural expectations of the public should first accept the personal superiority of the school principal and then the superiority of the Church and political authority, which transforms the flogging into a hierarchical power struggle. Students who deviate from the behaviours accepted as normal become outcasts of society, and their liberties are infringed. Those who do not comply with social norms are punished, while those who follow the norms and rules are rewarded with enough authority to exert on their peers. As a result, a hierarchical structure emerges from the relationship between the students and the school principal. Swinburne criticises this arcane system, which he claims to have been exposed to, by focusing only on the act of flogging in *the Flogging Block*. By isolating the action from social, cultural and any other context, he expounds on flogging as the perpetuation of violence without any apparent end when considered from the perspective of the teacher-student relationship.

Concerning the depictions and treatment of sexuality and gender roles in his poetry, it is evident that Swinburne was opposed to prevalent beliefs and notions. Believing women to be reduced into the domestic sphere, Swinburne rendered women characters in his poetry to enable them to not to suppress their physical and sensual urges, oppose the socially imposed gender roles, and eventually elevate to a maternal god, in opposition to the patriarchy of Christianity. Swinburne believed Sappho to be one of the leading figures of classical literature and tried to imitate Sappho's poems, reviving her poetic voice in Victorian poetry. Furthermore, based on Sappho's poems and

works of classical art, Swinburne also dealt with homosexuality, androgyny and hermaphrodism. Swinburne discussed the these subjects in his poems despite the fact that Victorian morality defined sexuality as something to be experienced only for the purposes of reproduction within the sanctity of the family unit. Swinburne disliked how the contemporary revival of Arthurian legends manifested history in accordance with the current political ideology. Therefore, his Arthurian poems turned into an area of conflict in which he continued his criticism of the moralistic view of sexuality and sensual experiences of human life. In his Arthurian poems, Yseult indulges in bodily pleasures and deserts her husband for bodily pleasures, thereby destroying the family as the basic unit of society.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian period is not considered a part of the modern period only because it predated the atrocities and subsequent crises of the early twentieth century. In character and inspirations, however, it was already self-categorised as modern: the term modern is a Victorian term as evidenced by its widespread usage by the poets, novelists, and literary critics of the period. Similar to the period, Victorian poets occupy an ambiguous ground in literary history. They are sometimes studied as the precursors of modern poetry while being cast aside as the arbiters of moral values of a distant period at other times. Their literary influence endured constant re-evaluation so as to prove their worth to the reading public and each other. On that matter, Swinburne once wrote: "Whether the men of this time be men of a great age or a small is not a matter to be decided by their own assertion or denial" (*Under the Microscope* 18). Indeed, this assertion has been the case specifically for himself. As a poet and literary theorist, Swinburne's significance in the history of English literature remains an unresolved case. As a product of the historical period, Swinburne acknowledged that there was an intellectual distance between his understanding of what art should be and the expectations of the Victorians. He regarded that distance as the contemporary phenomenon of society in general and endeavoured to ameliorate it by means of his poetry.

From the early days of his life, Swinburne's education led him to attain a sense of dignity and purpose for himself. The first books Swinburne was introduced to were bowdlerised in order to shelter the young poet from improper influences. Such efforts to insulate fledgling minds from the inappropriate ideas and writings were resultant of moral expectations of the emerging middle-class. There was an organised effort to keep inappropriate aspects of life such as sexuality outside the subject matter of literature by means of censor, criticism and even parliamentary acts. The preoccupation with the idea of cleanliness as an extension of sexual piety and literature as a tool for purging such urges from the bodies, actions and minds of the public. At Eton and Oxford, Swinburne was able to access literature beyond the restrictions of his home education, and also witness the conflict within the English Church. After his realisation of the sectarian

schism in Christianity and subsequent repudiation of the established religion, Swinburne's only remaining belief and chief occupation became poetry as a transcendental force of humanity. He believed that poetry should encapsulate the whole of the human experience at all costs and aimed to tear down those arbitrary confines established by the moral authority of religion and society. Swinburne's involvement with the PRB and French literary movements was primarily connected to his efforts to break free from the established poetic conventions. He began to contemplate his own ideas and conviction for poetry which diverged from the high moral expectations of the period. He believed that instead of replacing religion and education as a medium of indoctrinating moral values, poetry had to be emancipated from all external demands so that it could claim to have a higher, elevated meaning. Accordingly, Swinburne explored what possible new venues the PRB, French influences or any other literary movement could provide. He brought together the fleshly depictions of the PRB and French liberalisation of the subject matter by his poetry, reviews and articles promoting the idea of *art for art's sake*. He aimed to enlarge the reach of art into human existence. Therefore, his impressions brought together various aspects of human life such as innocence, nostalgia, resistance, and sexuality and its role in society. Swinburne communicated his perception of these concepts as art in its purest form. His poetry aimed to beautify and elevate even the seemingly austere experiences into artistic statements.

Swinburne proved that poetry did not only hold power in the written form but also functioned as verbal artefacts. The experience of reading poetry, according to Swinbrurne, reveals the sensations through the difference in cadence, tone and form. His experimentations with various forms of verse and acoustic elements of poetry were in parallel to the overall atmosphere in contemporary literature. However, Swinburne did not experiment for the sake of experimentation. He did so for two main reasons: firstly, he recognised the idyllic as the dominant verse form and observed that it was "best for domestic and pastoral poetry. … not very fit for the sole sustenance of men" and asserted that verse forms prevalently used in the period had become associated with moral values of the period (*Notes* 23). Secondly, he sought to distinguish his poetry and voice from his peers through his choice of medium as well as the subject matter.

Swinburne addressed the innate and structural characteristics of poetry with a two-dimensional model of harmony. His model envisions the harmony as the unity of sound and emotions, of structure and ideas and of performance and intellectual exertion. Swinburne's harmony consists of external and internal music. The internal music corresponds to emotions and ideas being communicated to the reader. It reflects the impression of poetry onto the reader and seeks to create a process of thinking or feeling analogous to the poet. On the other hand, the external music corresponds to the acoustic unity of the poem. It reflects the intellectual or artistic process of poetic creation and emphasises the poet's emotions and experiences to be conveyed through art. Furthermore, external music incorporates two subsets of features: inner and outer forms. The outer form particularises the literary devices and verse forms Swinburne employs to create an order in his poems, while the inner form describes the abstract quality of the poem. The latter is ambiguous regarding its function as it is subjective in each poem.

Swinburne identifies this process of creating a harmonious artefact as the gathering form. Resembling the heaving movement of the waves, it is the process of impressing the poet's emotional or intellectual excitement upon the reader. The resulting effect of the gathering form is achieved through the totality of literary devices, images, sounds and expressions of a poem. It is an imprint of the poet's state of mind outside his individual existence; therefore, it signifies self-sufficiency as an essential quality of poetry. Swinburne's concepts of internal music and the inner form corresponded with the ideological and emotional force of the poem. The similarity between these two concepts and lack of any distinguishing feature or explanation on behalf of Swinburne show that he considered the mechanical features of poetry secondary to these aspects but failed to elaborate on the subject in his critical writings. He believed that the inner qualities controlled and shaped the form so that the entirety of the poem constituted an organic unity. Similar to the outcome of the gathering form, this unity is supposed to be an imprint of the emotional excitement of the moment of creation independent of the artist, thereby denying the poet's own authority on the poem.

As for the subject matter of poetry, Swinburne envisioned no limits. For him, poetry had to be comprehensive of all aspects of life – virtue, adventure and beauty together with taboo, morbidity, and obscurity. His poetry addressed an extensive array of emotions even though there were some prominent issues in his poetry, namely religion, sexuality, and gender roles. Swinburne observed the existence of censors in literature of his age, which was inhabited by patriotic, dutiful men and subservient, angelic women. He argued that the Victorians only approved literature that was fit for the nursery and that "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" (*Notes* 14, 21). From the beginning of his career as a poet, Swinburne thusly demanded a mature concept of poetry that could address the intricacies of adult life and inquire into profound subjects like death and the existential significance of human life.

Swinburne's poems on the subject matter of religion illustrated how the established religion embodied an authority over people. He aimed to show the hypocritic nature of religious institutions by depicting the differences between their teachings and their actions. For him, Christianity's promise of love and salvation was long forgotten and replaced with the materialistic interests of the churchmen. Swinburne's poems also resolved to find an alternative to religion by means of concentrating on the figure of Christ not as a saviour but as a mortal man and his divinity as a construct of authority. Accordingly, he depicted humanity as the master of his own fate: instead of the monotheistic concept of God, his poems fashioned elemental gods and sought divinity in the essence of people. The sole access to immortality, he maintained, was through independence in spiritual, social and intellectual aspects of life.

Most of Swinburne's poems included an element of sexuality either as the subject matter or as a decorative feature. Swinburne depicted her female characters as the stronger and fiercer sex who defy all social norms to achieve their desires and dominate their antagonists. Moreover, he created binary oppositions between Christ and depictions of goddesses in his poetry in order to highlight the futility of patriarchal religious constructs. His goddesses, depicted outside time and constrictions of morality,

triumph over patriarchal myths of creation. In addition to the relationships between the two sexes, he also paid attention to lesbianism as a contemporary phenomenon and recognised Sappho as a profound influence in her period and on his poetry. He explored the blurring distinctions between heterosexuality and homosexuality through the concepts of hermaphroditism, androgyny, and flogging. Through the symbolism of rod and birch, Swinburne ruminated on the dynamics of authority between the believers and the institutions of established religion and also the students and the teachers. Employing flogging as a means to subjugate the individual, Swinburne perceives sadism as an inherent aspect of Christian religious teachings as well as an integral part of the education. For that reason, Swinburne's flagellant poems should be studied as social commentary on the moral education of the period.

Another consequential group of Swinburnean poems is his Arthurian poems. Swinburne believed Tennyson's retelling of the legend was poetically impaired; as a result, he determined to publish his own retelling of the legend with all aspects of the story intact. Swinburne's treatment of the story seems no more muted than his other poems with regard to embellishments and depictions of female characters. He restored parts of the legend Tennyson, and many contemporary writers, deemed inappropriate and focused on the subject of love instead of heroic actions. Aiming at a truly Medieval poetic force, Swinburne distinguishes his poems from other Arthurian imitations of the period and demonstrates his knowledge of early English literature at the same time. Swinburne as a poet was almost completely removed from the minds of literary critics and poetry readers when he published his Arthurian poetry; therefore, his Arthurian poems excited little literary attention and criticism.

In the development of English Aestheticism of the Victorian period, there is a linear progression from Swinburne's understading of Aestheticism into Decadence. This progression can be investigated in prominent figures like Rossetti, Ruskin, and Pater and their relationships with Swinburne. Rossetti prompted Swinburne's endeavours to find the correct expressions in language and influenced Swinburne's depictions of physical beauty. Pater's famous "Conclusion" falls parallel to Swinburne's *Notes on*

Poems and Reviews regarding its yearning for a broader conception of life. All these figures had close private and professional ties with Swinburne. That is why Hall and Murray focus on Swinburne as "the chief theorist of decadent epideictic" (102). Theories and principles Swinburne expressed in his reviews and critical writings enabled Pater and Wilde's works in the succeeding decades. Swinburne laid the intellectual and critical foundations of Aestheticism upon which Wilde and others based their concepts and artefacts.

Concerning the differences between Aestheticism and Decadence, the former prioritised beauty in art and resorted to adverse subject matter only to challenge the conventions of the age while the latter focused on so-called immoral aspects of life as a new space of expression. This attitude is clearly explained in Swinburne's posthumously published poem "Poeta Loquitur":

> That such beyond question is mine.
> Some singers indulging in curses,
> Though sinful, have splendidly sinned:
> But my would-be maleficent verses
> Are nothing but wind. (*Major Poems* 422-423)

Swinburne's poet expresses his determination to measure his offensiveness, "his wind," only in proportion to the perceived reaction and asserts that he "prefer[s] to be well out of harm's way/ [when his opponent] Makes soap of the sea." Decadence, on the other hand, resolved to "shock" its reader through the means of subverting the moral values as exhibited in "sexual perversion, sadism, death [and]… bizarre images and striking paradoxes" (McMullen 279). In terms of subverting social and moral values, the Decadent movement was able to operate in a more tolerable literary atmosphere because Swinburne had borne the burden of challenging the established poetic tradition during his formative years. The younger poets of the Decadent movement had undoubtedly been nourished with sentiments and passions expressed in Swinburne's poems. The ecstasy exhibited in their lines were distant echoes and reverberations of their "libidinous laureate" (to borrow Mr John Morley's phrase) and the infamous volumes of *Poems and Ballads*.

Before Swinburne, the Victorians' critical approach to art was based on the social and moral values that produced the artefact. Swinburne challenged this tradition in the 1860s through his poetry, reviews and other writings, propagating a complete separation of art and extraneous conditions. He believed poetry should be appreciated according to its intrinsic quality instead of its relation to the religion, moral values, established literary traditions or attitude of the readers. Swinburne's efforts, nevertheless, proved insufficient to firmly establish and impose aesthetic as the criteria according to which the measure of art should be ascertained. Still, he illumined later generations of poets and literary enthusiasts and his efforts culminated in the Decadent movement. The literary criticism Swinburne's early writings prompted, resulted in a series of critical works focusing on the nature of the relationship between the morality of the age and art which enabled the Decadent movement. This body of critical works were composed by the proponents as well as the opponents of aestheticism - some of whom realised the necessity of re-evaluating their criticism and the merits of aestheticism. Swinburean aestheticism and the Decadent Movement foresaw autonomy in art and rejected didacticism and moral concerns and believed art and artist to be free from external influences and demands. Swinburne constructed his poetic career based on aesthetic principles and maintained his views for the remaining part of the century even though his poetic models and aesthetic ideas initially failed to inspire the following generations. They were, however, re-evaluated by the modernist poets in the following century. One of the reasons for Swinburne's critical invisibility in terms of the development of aestheticism is that he saw little distinction between his private and public writing. Swinburne explained and pondered on his ideas and views extensively in his private correspondences. He saw critical writings and essays as an extension of these correspondences and often expressed his view in a half-formulated style. His reasoning might have been clear and sound for himself, but they fell short of his actual expectations and lacked clarity on the paper without sufficient correction and commentary. He became consumed by his own efforts to explore new epideictic limits in poetry, which can be surmised from the intensity of craftsmanship in his publications towards the close of the century.

Even so, Swinburne kept his ‘faith’ in Aestheticism. It is evident that, his contribution lay not only in his interests in aestheticism. In his critical essays and studies, especially after he retreated from London, he paid more attention to the history of English liteature. He sought to revive Elizabethan drama and his writings concerning Shakespeare were commendable academic studies which were, unfortuantely, overshadowed by his shortcomings and early failures as a playwright. He approached the works of the Romantics from a fresh, contemporary point of view. His critical essay on William Blake shed light on Blake’s artistic interpretation of mythology and faith. Although his conception of Aestheticism reached critical acclaim only in the following century, Swinburne became a significant figure in his age for his efforts in writing against the current in the Victorian age. His studies of various forms of poetry such as roundels highlighted the innate musical qualities of poetry and helped popularise the form in his age. In an age characterised by mass production and industrial inventions, Swinburne sought beauty and harmony in their purest form: the aesthetic conception of poetry which is free from morals of its age and able to excite an expression upon the reader by its intrinsic qualities.

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